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## **Location, Movement and Memory:**

**An ethnographic study of the journeys of asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa into Europe and North East England.**

by

Julian Kotzé Wilson

Department of Anthropology

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy

May 2016



Cover photo: (detail from photo above)

Memorial to African refugees who drowned in the Mediterranean, made out of boat fragments by Elia Di Gioi. Cathedral of Noto, South Sicily.

The inscription quotes Pope Francis: “Chi piangerà per questi morti?” (Who will cry for these dead?)

## **Abstract**

**Wilson, Julian Kotzé, 'Location, Movement and Memory: an Ethnographic study of journeys of asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa into Europe and North East England.' (M.Phil. thesis: Durham University, Durham, 2016).**

This thesis consists of an ethnographic study of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in North East England from sub-Saharan Africa. The ethnography is created by focussing on the life stories of four individuals known to the author. The information gathered is the result of participant observation in the African community on Teesside over a period of ten years. The study is further developed by focussing on one informant in particular.

The author engages critically with Gregory Bateson's theory of double-bind and this becomes the grounded theory for the study. The author reflects on her own experience as a migrant from South Africa to the United Kingdom. This auto-ethnography explains some of the author's knowledge, experience and commitments and alerts the reader to possible hermeneutical bias. Further depth is added to the study by the author's report on her own journey (undertaken with the support of a Churchill Trust travelling scholarship) from the refugee camp in Kakuma (northern Kenya) to Cairo, Tripoli and Malta; and by her accounts of social events in the asylum seeker and refugee community on Teesside.

The author identifies a number of important factors in relation to sustaining personal identity in the face of traumatic experiences and forced relocation: memory, language, food, belief and hope. These factors are explored in the relevant literature. The implications of these factors for successful integration into the host community, and the tensions to which they give rise, are explored.

It is hoped that this study might help the local host community to better understand the experiences and priorities of asylum seekers and refugees arriving on Teesside and that it might also help to inform local government policy regarding how they are treated. This will become increasingly important as larger numbers of asylum seekers and refugees arrive. The study will need to be broadened to encourage the experiences of Syrian refugees (the largest group currently arriving in Teesside).

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## **Abbreviations**

ACANE	African Community Advice North East
ASA	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK
CAB	Citizen Advice Bureau
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DVD	Digital Video Disk
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MOC	Marsa Open Centre (Malta)
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGO	Non-Governmental organisation
NHS	National Health Service
PCT	Primary Care Trust
RAPT	Refugee Action Project in Teesside
SACA	Stockton African-Caribbean Association
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TOWC	Teesside One World Centre
TPA	Teesside Positive Action
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Accommodation.

## **Copyright notice**

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I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the travel award given to me which allowed me to follow the trajectory of the asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my husband Ashley Wilson, who encouraged me to get the writing done after a very difficult time. His presence in my life made all the difference.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Judy Kotzé, who passed away during the early stages of the research; and to my informant Osama Salih, who was, tragically, murdered in Malta.



# Part One:

## Introduction, Theory and Methods

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This is an ethnography that focuses on asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa that start their journey on the East Coast of Africa and includes a forward leap to their social immersion in a North Eastern part of England. The migratory route from East Africa and crossing of the Mediterranean Sea forms part of the trajectory and the locality of the group of asylum seekers and refugees is where the assimilation occurs in the North East (Teesside) of England. The fieldwork and information for the thesis was collected and gathered over more than a decade and in more than one site. The longest period of data collection is in Teesside in the North East of England. Asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa have been dispersed to Teesside since 2001 onwards. The research is basically centred on the community of asylum seekers and refugees that subsequently emerged out of the dispersal programme and settled in Teesside. The field work is used to gather information in the ethnographic manner by emergence into the community and doing long-term observations. The length of time, being over a decade, resulted in me becoming emerged in the group. Exploring the interactions in the social and cultural settings of the incoming group of diverse asylum seekers and refugees with the local host community was done through events and other social settings. The process of assimilation and/or the effort to blend in within the local socio-cultural practices and patterns are detailed in the life stories used in the thesis. In the last year of the fieldwork period I was awarded a travel grant by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to travel to the refugee camps in East Africa and follow the trajectory of the asylum seekers and refugees from the East of Africa through to Malta which is seen as the one of the entry portals into Europe by asylum seekers and refugees.

### **The rationale for the research**

Fundamentally the ethnography hopes to assist the new incoming group with the embedding process and the institutional services and local authorities to understand the assistance that is needed for the assimilation to take place. This means that institutions, statutory, and Community, Volunteer and Enterprise Sector needs to recognise the

group's social and cultural diversity as well as their contrasting cultural patterns to be able to provide for the new group that ultimately developed their own community in Teesside. To put this in a wider context, Adelman and Sorenson (1994, p. 232) have a section in their book *African Refugees* where they argue the "importance of research in this arena to benefit the refugee and the host". The information and input from the research would assist the local authority to understand the new incoming group and underpin the detail to be incorporated in policy making process to support the group in assimilating into the area. The dispersal policy brought the first group of asylum seekers who changed the demographic profile of the North East, particularly the Teesside area. The arrival of the first group happened to be mainly young men from Sub-Saharan Africa. The local authority had to provide housing, education and other logistical support in the integration the group into the local area.

The group of incoming people in Teesside resulted in not only the practical issues of the group being a diverse collection of people, for example the housing, education, but other basic support and services answering to the needs of the new group. It is hoped that this ethnographic account will bring forward the insight to the difficulties and an understanding of the very traumatic and difficult journey most of the asylum seekers and refugees have experienced. This insight will then in turn assist the local authority decision makers and commissioners in putting together a support framework within the provision that is required for the new community. The research focus is mainly on social and cultural perspective and concentrates on the life-stories and narratives of people in this description of asylum seeker, refugee and migrant. Including to what extent do they use the social events and other markers to maintain their own social construct, given that the incoming groups are from many different countries?

### **Starting points**

In her book *Human Cargo* (2005) Caroline Moorhead explains the dispersal policy responsible for the asylum seekers and refugees being in the North East of England.

In April 2001, 'interim dispersal measure' created under the 1999 Immigration Act were put into place to alleviate the pressures on London for accommodating asylum seekers. In theory, the Home Office, through the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), disperses people in 'clusters', sending Iraqis with Iraqis, Angolans with Angolans, to cities around the UK where there is housing available, either in council estates or with private contractors. In practice people are dispersed as they arrive, with no time to match them up with others from their countries. (2005, p. 138)

This was the starting point of this new group of people arriving where I became part of the community and worked amongst the asylum seekers and refugees. As a result of the dispersal policy Teesside is a place that was as far removed from their homes as can be, yet they persevered and tried to create a new life for themselves.

### **Brief historical overview of Teesside.**

This will include a look at the demographic history of the town for it will demonstrate the change when the asylum seekers and refugees began to be dispersed to Teesside.

This region, and its towns, grew out of the early days of steel, iron, ship building and railway industry in the early 1800. Initially, it was a small farmstead which was bought by an industrialist called Joseph Pease who developed and created the national railway industry, which transported coal, iron and steel, into a large flourishing business. The towns grew into a large industrial development over the next century, with “More and more blast furnaces were opened in the vicinity of Middlesbrough to meet this demand and by the end of the century Teesside was producing about a third of the nation's iron output.” (Simpson 2015)

The area then became known for its labour intensive work and all the issues that came with it. A large working class structure was established out of the industrial growth and the business centres that came with it. This includes the development of the towns (Middlesbrough, Stockton-On-Tees, Billingham, Redcar, Hartlepool and Marske) that made out the Teesside area. As shown on the map below:



Fig. 1.1 Map of Teesside

In the last few decades the Teesside area has had economic, political and social decline which became evident through the employment situation, when the industry started to go into degeneration. Large amounts of literature specify the social profile of Teesside and surrounding areas as an area with difficulties in unemployment and other issues associated with it including social cohesion. This is indicated in contemporary Teesside where the demographic picture is an indication of the modern representation of the area. These are mentioned in a report by Webster et al (2004) from the Social Futures Institute at Teesside University and the authors write:

Middlesbrough, like other industrial towns in the Tees Valley and elsewhere, has experienced cumulative and long-standing residential segregation and separation along social class lines. More recently, these patterns have acquired an ethnic dimension. The 2001 census records Middlesbrough's minority ethnic population as 6.3 per cent of the total population, compared with 4.4 per cent in 1991 (see table 3.1). This population is mostly of Pakistani origin.

**Table 3.1 Ethnic structure of Middlesbrough 1991 – 2001**

Resident population in ethnic groups:	1991		2001	
	No.	%	No.	%
White	134,652	95.6	126,359	93.7
Mixed	4,648	3.3	1,214	0.9
Asian or Asian British	563	0.4	6,203	4.6
Black or Black British	986	0.7	405	0.3
Chinese or Other	6,197	4.4	539	0.4
Total BME	12,394	9.2	8,361	6.3

(Webster et al, 2004)

In this report the indication was that the small amount of ethnic minorities was mostly from Pakistan with an even smaller amount of Black or Black British population in Middlesbrough and Teesside. The 2001 census of the town Stockton-On-Tees shows that there were no or hardly any Black African families living there. The next table shows a breakdown of population in the North East in the following statistical index from the 2001 Census:



Census 2001:

	Darlington	Hartlepool	Middlesbrough	Redcar & Cleveland	Stockton on Tees	North East	England
<b>Total Population</b>	97,838	88,611	134,855	139,132	178,408	2,515,442	49,138,831
<b>Resident population (%)</b>							
White	97.9	98.8	93.7	98.9	97.2	97.6	90.9
Mixed	0.6	0.4	0.9	0.3	0.6	0.5	1.3
Asian or Asian British	0.9	0.6	4.6	0.5	1.7	1.3	4.6
Indian	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.4	0.4	2.1
Pakistani	0.1	0.2	3.6	0.2	1.1	0.6	1.4
Bangladeshi	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.6
Other Asian	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.5
Black or Black British	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2	2.1
Caribbean	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.04	1.1
African	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.1	1.0
Other Black	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.02	0.2
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.9
<b>Total BME population as percentage of total</b>	2.1	1.2	6.3	1.1	2.8	2.4	9.1

This is to illustrate the low numbers of people from the Sub-Saharan Africa areas in the area before the Dispersal policy was introduced thereby demonstrating that the new incoming group of asylum seekers and refugees were sent to the area to live here moved into an area where the local population had very little knowledge of their background and social origins.

In June 2000 the plans for the implementation of the dispersal system under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 were published (The Audit Commission, *Another Country – Implementing Dispersal under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999* (London: The Audit Commission, June 2000) pp. 93-95 cited in Stevens 2004 (p. 251)) and, in the execution of it, asylum seekers were dispersed to the North East. The Home Office was then obliged to send the incoming asylum seekers to areas that indicated willingness (and the capacity) to accommodate them. In the North East, Teesside is one such area, thus reason for the influx of a different looking group of people, coming into Teesside. This thesis is an attempt to give more detail on the lives of the African refugee and hopefully it will bring some clarity about the difficulties that face the asylum seekers and refugees in the assimilation process.

### **Defining asylum seekers, refugees and migrants**

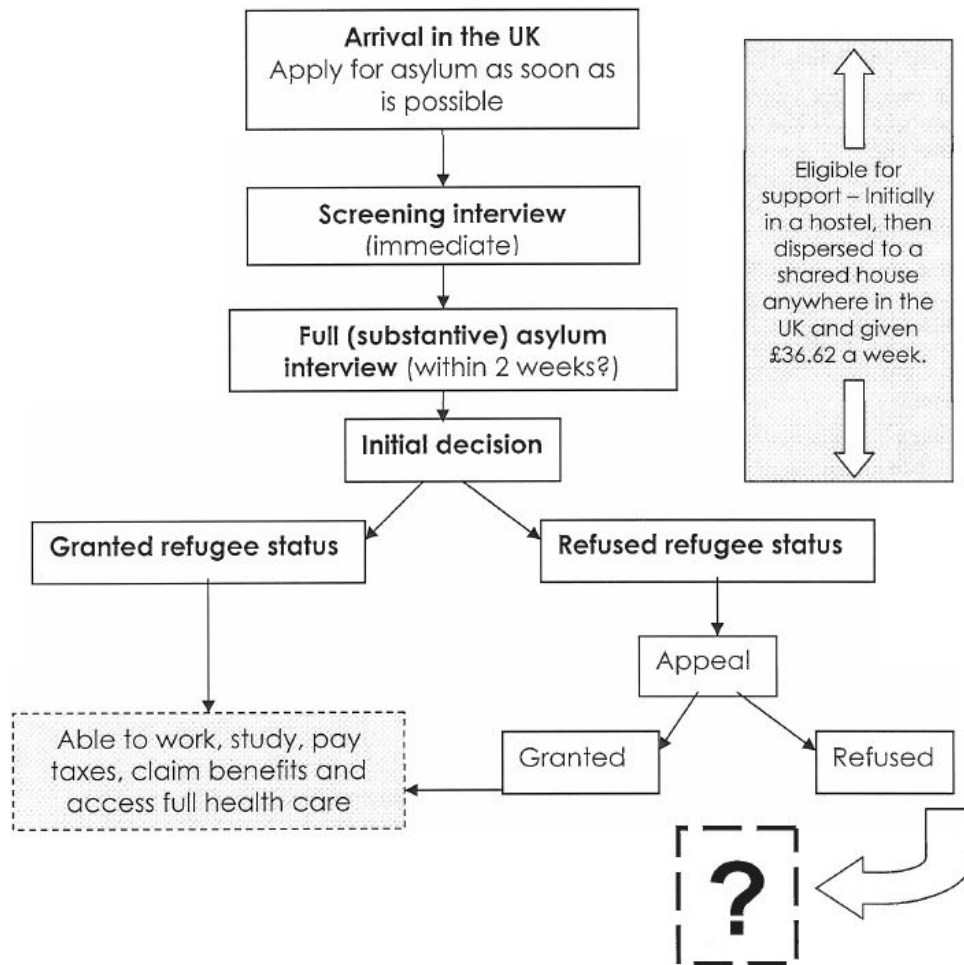
Paul Tabori in *The Anatomy of Exile* (1972, p. 23) writes in the first chapter where he is classifying definitions in semantic and legal categories that chronologically emigrant and émigré are pre-twentieth century. “Our own age has contributed refugee and displaced person and then uses the definition for refugee at the international level which is contained in the Statue of the office of the United States High Commissioner for refugees.” For the purpose of the research and this thesis the defining of the categories will focus on the modern and more contemporary categorisation of two groups. In his introduction of the book, *UK Asylum Law and Policy: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (2004) Stevens writes that

The term ‘refugee’ has been described as ‘a term of art’, that is, a term with a content verifiable according to principles of general law. In its modern and strictly legal sense, it owns its derivation to an international agreement: the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of refugees (‘The 1951 Convention’), and 1967 Protocol. It is declaratory by nature: a refugee does not become a refugee because of recognition, but is recognised because he or she is a refugee. Asylum seeker, by contrast, has no such foot hold in international law; yet it too, has become a term of art. To the layperson, there is very little to distinguish the asylum seeker from the refugee...For the asylum seeker, however, the difference is vast. Assumptions to refugee status brings with it recognition and acceptance; it assures protection; it guarantees specific rights. In the limbo status of the asylum seeker, little is certain; there are few rights and limited protection; and there is always the fear of return.

Here Stevens uses the UNHCR Handbook (2011, Para.28) to explain the criteria and the difference between the two categories of asylum seeker and refugee.

In short, in the UK, the asylum seeker is seeking refugee status through a legal procedure. The procedure is a complex and time consuming exercise, often confusing to the newly arrived asylum seeker. The request for asylum at the port of entry in the UK kick-starts the process. With the dispersal policy in place, due to the high influx of people and the southern part of the UK being squeezed to deliver services to the asylum seekers; the first of the new incoming group were sent to Teesside in April 2001. These were asylum seeking individuals that applied for refugee status. They were transported to the North East by the UK Border Agency on buses at night and arrived in darkness in Teesside. These individuals arrive from the different detention centres where the Home Office officials have done a screening interview with the asylum seekers. The dispersal, appeared to be random, and sometimes families were split and sent to different cities and towns. Therefore defining the person's status relies on where within the process the person is. The procedure is as follows (Asylum Support Partnership, 2015):

## UK Asylum process



The refugee status, when, and if, granted, gives the individual more possibilities and opportunities; the person then becomes a refugee and is no longer an asylum seeker. When the person is refused refugee status, a fresh claim can be put in and whole procedure starts again. This can be done three times, when fresh evidence comes to the fore to support a claim that will have a successful outcome for the applicant. The classification of the two possibilities are then either an asylum seeker, still seeking asylum and working your way through the system with the hope of being granted asylum and then becoming a refugee. When the refugee status is granted, the person is called a refugee with access to the statutory and local organisations that provides services to citizens of the UK.

In Malta, however, the language used to define the asylum seekers and refugees by the Maltese, local and legal institutions, are different and reflect the mind-set of the local people. The word, migrant is used as a one-size-fits all description, for the people that

arrived on the shores asking for asylum. This is reflected in the newspapers, articles and even the research publications when the asylum seeking and refugee community is investigated or written about. The local patois in English and Maltese use the word migrant all the time. In the international articles and documents referring to Malta the expression asylum seekers are used. The Maltese prime minister, Joseph Muscat and Neil Falzon, director of Aditus, a Maltese human rights group used this expression in a public address: “Migrants flee their home for different reasons...” (Grech, 2015). In the UNHCR managed Kakuma refugee camp the word ‘refugees’ was used for all the inhabitants of the camp, regardless of their status or their process in the application for seeking asylum. The UNHCR however is very clear on the definitions of a refugee. It is the following:

An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum and is **waiting for a decision** as to whether or not they are a refugee. In other words, in the UK an asylum seeker is someone who has asked the Government for refugee status and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application. (UNHCR 2015)

For the sake of avoiding confusion I shall simplify my expression when writing about the asylum seekers and refugees. I shall use the expression by way of explanation by either using the word, community, meaning the new incoming group of asylum seekers and refugees, or as written already, the clarification of “asylum seekers and refugees” as a collective for people that experienced fleeing from their country of origin in Sub-Saharan Africa, and seeking asylum at the borders of a county they deemed safe.

## **Methods used to collect information and data**

This thesis being ethnography it has a specific task and purpose, namely to produce the sum of the observations as a product that can be used to understand, in this case, the social and cultural issues about asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa coming into Europe and ultimately the North East of England. As Michael Carrithers (1992, p.180) clarifies;

“Ethnography is a style of pragmatic learning which is closely tied to particular people in particular places at particular times”.

As with an ethnography the expectation is that the student will use participant observation as the main method to collect information while observing interaction and/or using key informants to glean information. The participating and observation occurred and commenced when I met the first group of asylum seekers arriving in

Teesside in 2001. This group consisted mainly of people from Zimbabwe. As I spent some time in Zimbabwe doing voluntary development work in the western area of the country, I could easily connect with this group of families. I could share and compare images and stories from Bulawayo and the Hlekweni development Centre just outside Bulawayo. Friendships formed and all that goes with it, meals, invitations to events, celebrations and many conversations. More of the methods will be explained in the third Chapter. Added to this is the opportunity I had to do a trajectory field trip to East Africa and then follow the route to one of the European portals, Malta, as mentioned above. This enhanced the powerful layer that contributed to the field work done in Teesside (in reality it is home, for me now). The key informants are introduced in the Life stories chapter five where their narratives are told in their voice. In the following chapter it continues, but here the focus is on the daily lives and in the new host community, and the social milestones reached with my story woven together with some of the key informants. The relationship between me and them is still developing, as I have witnessed important social events in their lives. Moreover, I am seen as a fellow African, as it has been mentioned publicly and in, close circle in the asylum seeking and refugee community. Included is my own narrative, the researcher and postgraduate student, as a migrant coming from South Africa to live and work in the North East of England. Therefore to create a life for myself in a host community starts anew in a different culture and social setting. The difficulties and strange cultural issues that had to be overcome and understood for me to create a relationship with the host community, and find my social balance between being a person that was born in the southern part of Africa and now living, working in the North East The route that I was privileged to travel allowed me to observe and take in the scenes at the refugee camps. These were the arriving of asylum seekers at the camp, the settling in process with housing and food programs, and eventually moving on. The continuing of the journey allowed me to witness refugees that moved onto Cairo who made a life for themselves there. The end of the journey was in Malta, for many asylum seeker and refugees. I used an individual's life-story on chapter five to demonstrate the social and cultural experiences upon arrival in Malta and the life afterwards. This is often described as multi-sited and/or mobile ethnography. (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 7).

## **Problems**

Firstly, as explained the next step after working in the charity and becoming a familiar face in the refugee and asylum seeker community, I completed a Masters postgraduate degree, considering at how identity shifts takes place while trying integrating into Teesside (North East). As the asylum seeker and refugee community become a more complex and inter-mingled group of people, I decided to continue with a Doctorate. Then I selected and decided on, after discussion with several knowledgeable people in the community, that it would be useful and helpful to the community to expand the research into a broader understanding of the amalgamation process of the community into the local host community. A focus was decided upon and I put together a research proposal with questions that is hoping to investigate the social network of the asylum seeker and refugee community. I started the background reading and other preparations to complete the progression script. This included the designing of the research questions in the questionnaire to be used, and the consent letter. This was also part of the completing the ethics forms, and in preparation for the fieldwork. I completed the above mentioned preparations and wrote the progression script describing the methods and thematic expectations including a short literature review. I submitted the progression script and had the progression viva. The progression viva was done with very useful feedback from the academics on the progression viva panel. Unfortunately; shortly after the completed preparations, the group of people that gave consent to be used in the research, were deported back to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in one deportation exercise from the Home Office. All of this happened in the space of about 10 days. I was informed of this the day after the last person was deported when I tried to contact the main contact person for the group. This meant that I had to, quickly; find a new/different research focus and questions. I had several conversations with old friends from the community and thought about the focus of assimilation being the important issue and as the research process tends to take an organic course in some cases, it was not seen as a disaster. I wrote a new proposal which included collecting the narratives and incorporate the social events and a new set of research questions and queries, centred on the issues that might influence the assimilation of the community.

## **Ethnography sections**

The ethnography's main aim is to get an insider's perspective, and therefore my central aim is to do just that: 'to collect an insider's perspective and accounts of social interactions and relationships within the cultural outlook', according to O'Reilly (2009, p.110). Constructing the field and becoming part of the group and finding context was initially through my employment, then the participant observation for my Master's fieldwork. As my postgraduate studies for my MA came to fruition, this group of people stayed in my focus and kept my interest till now. I still feel as passionate about the investigation in the development of the assimilation into the host community as I was initially. The writing section of the research required me to think analytical of the practice of ethnography as well as my own role in the experience. As Karen O'Reilly (2009, p. 191) continues:

“We need to view the ‘intrusive self’ as a resource; ...to be able to locate ourselves in our studies honestly and openly in an admission that observations are filtered through our own experience, rather than seeking to provide the detached voice of authority”

As the reflexive time became part of my thinking about the research and the fieldwork it emerged as an auto-ethnography where I explain my voice and point of departure in the research. The research seeks to contribute to the asylum seeker and refugee question of integration, the original socio-cultural roots that lingers with the adoption of the host's cultural practices and patterns. The cultural patterns are demonstrated by the use of the life-stories and participant observation. Hastrup and Olwig (1997, p.3) writes “...to explore the siting of culture as a dynamic process of self-understanding among the people we study” In short I am hoping to bring to light an understanding and better perception of the cultural difference and the difficulties it can attain. The asylum seeker and refugee in Teesside have to deal with a traumatic past and make sense out of the future. Liisa Malkki writes in *Purity and Exile* (1995, p.105) recounting how the refugees (Hutus) in the camps understand that is where the history is. It is there to give meaning to and acting on the socio-political present in the refugee camp “Here, the past not only explained the aspects of the present; it contributed to structuring social action in the present”.

As a foundation for the ethnography, the life-stories are valuable data as it instils the representation of the rationale behind the flight, plight and arrival experiences. The trajectory from the Kakuma refugee camp is also folded into this section where it



consequently this depicts the 'movement' section of the ethnography. This then runs into the next part of the thesis where the assimilation is observed using the key informants and the events that are important to them. These are the birth of a daughter to one key informant, and the funeral of a refugee in Teesside. The birth signifies the new generation that is going to live in Teesside, and how her father, the refugee, has negotiated his position in the family. The funeral indicates that the body of an outsider and a refugee is buried here and not sent back to his country of origin as is the expectation from this community. The asylum seeking and refugee community is (up to this day) perplexed at the decision that was made to bury him in a local cemetery. The anticipated pattern from the community is that the body or the remains be sent back to, in this case, Zimbabwe, but he is now buried in a cemetery in Stockton-On-Tees where local inhabitants are buried. The funeral, itself was also a cultural conundrum as the two cultures, one from Zimbabwe and one from the North East of England had to be amalgamated, even though the religious denomination was catholic. The other two life-stories are about a refugee living in Malta and one that was still an asylum seeker at the time of interviewing him. The refugee in Malta, was trying to establish himself as a person that could be an example for his community from Sudan, and tried hard to be part of the Maltese community, yet, also worked hard to be seen as a person from Sudan, rather than just another refugee that came with a boat. Tanjong, from Cameroon and the last of the four life-stories, was and had been in a waiting mode for a long time (many years) and is still hopeful. He knows that his future is not in his country of origin.

The ethnographic section continues with the events where these social indicators would be celebrated and be celebration events for the whole community. Here the description is of a colourful festivity where the context is historical. This includes the Awards dinner and the Taste of Africa entertainment event. Here the asylum seeking and refugee community can display their costumes and traditional dress and other social pointers e.g. food. Moreover the events are a presentation of each group's social and cultural profiles. These can then be observed in public by all who attend the occasions, including people from the local host community and institutions working for and with the asylum seeking community.

### **Brief reflections on literature**

Thematic details and discourse will be focused on firstly defining the refugee, asylum seeker and other expressions categorising people fleeing to safety. Then using the many

written articles and published work I will attempt to explain the shape of the thematic outcome. As it is an ethnography the observations and field notes are the support of the thematic outcome. Added to that, the specific field of refugee studies has its own literature character and profile. One of the renowned anthropologists in this field is Liisa Malkki with her profound work *Purity and Exile* (1995). She published extensively in the ethnography of displacement including critical mapping of displacement. Liisa Malkki's (1995, p.508) work in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* is useful where she offers a critical mapping of displacement as an anthropological domain of knowledge. She starts with Clifford (1988) who claims that the common notions of culture is "toward rooting rather than travel"(Clifford 1988, p.338), but the loss is real with the life-stories used in the thesis, therefore when she uses Taylor and Nathan (1980, cited in Malkki, 1995, p.508) to support the statement of loss as follows: "Loss of patterns of conduct is intensified by the uncertainty of what kind of behaviour is acceptable or non-acceptable in their new environment". I have the impression that this loss is the beginning of the understanding of being an asylum seeker and refugee, and the life-stories show that. The social events are the platform where the identity is being re-confirmed and re-constructed in public, but the emerging cultural issues are the key to assimilation. If that can be recognised by the local community, it can assist in the understanding of who the new incoming group is. Ruben Anderson's ethnography (2014) is a powerful example of the difficulties experienced by the refugees and the limbo that ensues while waiting to get to the end of the journey. Sharam Khosravi (2011) explains about borders and being a refugee himself, but writes about the difficulties of trying to assimilate into a new and foreign culture. There is more literature supporting asylum seeking and refugee situations discussed throughout the thesis. Like those of Hanna Arentz, Michel Agier, and Pat Caplan.

### **Aims and Objectives of the research**

The aim of the thesis is to apply an epistemological perspective to produce a critical ethnography on how sub-Saharan African asylum seekers and refugees in the Teesside area make an effort at constructing a social framework which assists with the assimilation process, and ultimately acquisition of citizenship, whilst at the same time preserving links to their cultural roots and social identity.

The following is a short description of the explorations the ethnography focussed on:

- Life stories of four individuals with one individual journey to citizenship.
- Social references that validate the interplay between African “guest” and North East of England “host”; a burial and a birth
- The social maintenance of being and belonging demonstrated at public events.
- An ethnographical account of the journey experienced by several informants starting in a refugee camp in east Africa and ending in the island of Malta.

The rationale is that it will be useful to help raise awareness (especially amongst interested professionals and the research participants themselves) of the challenges and opportunities that their long-term presence in the area represents to the assimilation process of Africans into the North- East, especially Teesside. A subordinate objective is to contribute to the body of information that can assist planners and policy-makers, and health and other care professionals including NGO’s, in formulating strategies for the support of the sub-Saharan African asylum-seekers and refugees. A third more personal objective is to increase the scope of my on-going practical involvement with the African community in the Teesside area, giving a voice to the voiceless stranger.

These aims and objectives demand a close tracking of the cultural and identity shifts managed by asylum-seekers and refugees in their new environment, and a mapping of the symbolic social boundaries in which the community constructs and reconstructs itself in relation to the host society.

“Testing theory in the field, through research and intervention, improves understanding of the field situation, the cultural conditions to be modified or influenced, and human responses or both” (Trotter and Schensul, 1998, p. 696).

This is also supported by Barnard and Spenser; (1996, p. 193) who state that if the ethnographies can be seen as building blocks and testing grounds of anthropological theory, ethnographies and the ethnographic process from which they derive are also shaped and moulded by theory. This will demand that the field notes and gathered information be contextualised and sifted through and then translated into theoretical knowledge, although I have begun the research from a rudimentary and provisional theoretical base; demising from Gregory Bateson’s Double-Bind theory (1972, p. 206) “unresolvable sequences” and the understanding of behaviour patterns by the asylum seeker and refugee versus the local people. To demonstrate, I can use the construct of eye contact in greeting or any other social contact. For most people in the West; eye contact while conversing is seen as a way to express that truth and honesty (of character)

is being conveyed; while in most African countries; looking a person straight in the eyes while conversing is perceived as disrespectful. This places the person from an African country in a position where he/she finds it almost impossible to look a person in the eye when that person needs to be show respect; if it is a person of authority, even more so. A policeman would be a person to be treated with respect; therefore the person from an African country will avoid eye-contact with a policeman. This in turn will have the western thinking policeman thinking that the person from Africa is not honest and maybe hiding something.

Gregory Bateson's Double-bind theory has the components that will explicate the difficulties around being an asylum seeker and/or a refugee from sub-Saharan Africa into Europe and the north east of England. Here the grounded theory will show that the assimilation and integration has to incorporate the self of the refugee and what he/she brings with them from a social-cultural perspective. This includes the cultural memory or ingredients from the cultural and social origin of the refugee which in turn assist in the identity preservation, which in turn supports the dynamics of those who are doing the assimilation into the new host community. Rosinka (2011, p. 39) states that:

'Memory plays a triple role: it is identity-forming by maintaining the original identifications; it is therapeutic because it helps bear the hardships of transplantation into a foreign culture; and it is also community-forming, by creating a bond among those recollecting together.'

The applied indication and interaction of the asylum seeker and refugee is seen to have an impact on the social profile of the area they are dispersed to. Also the sociality that evolved after the incoming group of asylum seekers and refugees shifted into a different social landscape in Teesside.

### **Research focus/hypotheses**

In situations of displacement and crossing social boundaries which occur through either migration or seeking asylum and eventually becoming a refugee, there are changes and shifts that take place in the social-cultural arena of the migrants and of the hosts. The research ask to what extent do individuals, families and the community of asylum seekers and refugees from Africa modify, change, re-construct, accommodate and adjust to the new social and cultural environment, where they have landed? The description of ritual and practices around a burial and birth is an illustration of the above

exploration. Also, in using social events and other social reference points in the creation and maintaining of the social patterns, how do the asylum seekers and refugees preserve and represent their identities in the new social environment. Moreover, how does it oscillate between autochthony in relation to their own country of origin in Africa and becoming British? Magubane (2000, p151) indicated in his critical perspective on the revisited urban social anthropology (African) the importance of this kind of research:

‘The applied scientist seeks to create an accurate map of a small portion of reality as a background against which interpretations are presented...’

It is hypothesised that there may be different adaptations between those who have African spouses and those with English or other partners; or those who are mature or have children and are younger independent individuals. Added to that; it is also hypothesised that country, ethnic, tribal origin and first language (mother-tongue) may have an impact on the motivations behind preferences for social patterns and development of social behaviour. The issues (as established in the analysis of field notes) that have an influence in the emergence of the social patterns are the following: memory; language, food and religion/beliefs. These four issues are identified as the mainstay of the thesis’s thematic contents. Memory, the notion of remembering for the refugee and/or migrant, can be portable, compact and compressed in a single artefact, or maybe a photograph, book and other objects. It is possible that it can extend to a more abstract presentation within the [life] story of the asylum seeker, refugee and migrant. Contextualised examples will be discussed elsewhere. With language (the mother-tongue) there is also a strong element of memory. Here the possibility to talk with fellow compatriots in one’s ‘own’ language is precious and can assist with bridging the social difficulties, which can be traumatic in a new social environment. Music would fall in the same category as language and has an added role in being part of a symbolic exercise of coming together ‘with one’s own people’. The next issue, noted in the field notes, is food. From a social perspective food and music is often use commensally to bring people together and/or to establish a cultural presentation of a certain group of people. Food has often been used to understand individual cultures and societies are they are “situated in context of global flows and connections” as explained in chapter seven by Tierney (2012). The fourth and last element is the element of religion and belief. Here the idea of hope is brought to the foreground. Being hopeful is often expressed in the relaying of narratives and stories. Identifying memory, language, food

and beliefs as my main foci will assist in the presentation of the grounded theory and how the data collected showed these as very important to the asylum seeker and refugee. The above represent the nodal points of refugee social interactions. There will also be a section that will include the researcher, as a migrant herself, which may be useful in a comparative perspective to illuminate the depth of difficulties experienced by the people in the refugee communities.

## **Chapter Outlines**

After the introduction chapter where the background of the community of asylum seekers and refugees are explained, the historical input also assists in the explanation for the strangeness of the new group that arrived in Teesside. The Grounded theory that emerged out of the field notes are then presented in the second chapter and how it supports the findings. An underlying theme followed all the issues are the Double-bind theory that Gregory Bateson used in his “Steps to an Ecology of Mind” (1972). This underpins the responsibilities and outcome of the episodes and daily issues the asylum seeker and refugee grapple with, where they have to negotiate their way through sometime problematic situations. The life-stories indicate that it was, and in some cases still is, a difficult situation to be in. The Double-Bind theory is a good idiom to describe the situations where the ‘damned if you do and damned if you don’t’ scenario occurs regularly for the asylum seeker and refugee. This is followed by the chapter describing the methods used. Here the outline of the participant observation is given and the rationale (academic, theoretical and personal) is presented, followed by the aims and objectives. Following the methods chapter as part of the preparations, an auto-ethnographic section to justify the participant observation and the depth of the immersion into the community I studied. The chapter is there to explain my point of departure as a researcher and how I am led by my own life-story. The researcher in context is important, as the auto-ethnography chapter indicated the research conundrum I felt between being part of the community and the being the researcher.

The second part of the thesis is the ethnographic details and the life-stories used to reinforce and strengthen the thematic work of the thesis. It starts with the life-stories in chapter five where four individuals from four different countries tell their life-stories. Two of these stories are in the Teesside Archives and then continues with two stories of individuals who are in limbo. One person in Malta and one person in Newcastle

(England). The next chapter, Chapter Six is a continuation of one of the life-stories and more embedded in the local (home) ethnographic observations in Teesside. One individual is the main character here, for he became the primary informant to my research. Chapter Seven moves to the social observations made at public events organised and attended by the community and how these events bring out the thematic content of cultural identity. The last chapter in this section, namely chapter eight is represented as a report and gives descriptions of the field trip to East Africa and the route some asylum seekers and refugees take to safety and a new life in Europe. This trajectory from the refugee camp in the north west of Kenya to the island of Malta was short in time, but rich material and life-stories that were collected.

The third and last section of the thesis is the discourse and reflections on literature supporting the thematic outcomes of the ethnography. Memory is the first issue that is discussed followed by language and food. Here the remembering of the one's life story, the scenarios that made you an asylum seeker and how you coped with the difficulties and the way and how you recalled the narratives for different audiences is important for the asylum seekers and refugee's lives on a daily basis. 'The past had the power to shape the present' writes Mary Kelly and for the asylum seeker and refugee, the past histories and experiences is important. (Kelly, 1999, p. 229)

The issues that came to the fore are the classic cultural classifying of a group of people, but it has a stronger impact and influence as a result of the experience of becoming an asylum seeker or refugee. This also includes belief and risk taking. The next emerging materials are what came to the fore during the observations and field work and the themes repeatedly referred back to cultural practices like food and language (music). This is noted and observed from the refugee camp, to the cities in North Africa and then in Malta and the North East of England. Every place where I had the opportunity to observe and interview, a group of, for example Eritreans, are there are shops and opportunities to buy Eritrean food, and you are invited to have an Eritrean meal with the families. This commodity, the food, although transient carries more than just sustenance. It is a symbolic presentation of their (in this example, Eritrean) cultural practices. Language is vital, the mother-tongue, and then learning the host communities language which enable you to communicate. Moreover there is also belief that is present and obvious in the lives of the asylum seeker and refugee;

The next few issues are risk, hope and belief. To an extent these three issues fold into each other and underpin the abstract and philosophical issues on being an asylum seeker

and refugee. The exploring of these issues, are being done through the stories that were told to me in the field work. The last section explore the decisions made in the face of high risks and now it is carried and supported by hope and belief, where the asylum seeker and refugee use these notions to encourage them forward to the next arrival and journeys' end of a safe place to stay. Here the difficulty is that as a researcher I cannot put a quantitative perspective on the issues, but have to rely on the descriptions and stories told by the survivors. The descriptive approach can be used to explain the level of risk taken (a social perspective) and how the person also uses hope and belief to move forward towards the end destination. For how else does the person walking across the Sahara-desert, with very little food and water, manage to complete the journey?

## **Conclusion**

The push and pull factors of becoming an asylum seeker and refugee and how the stories gives the detail of their accounts of being and becoming asylum seekers and refugees. The ethnography is hoping to give an interpretation of the arrival and the process of assimilation with in the new community. Assimilation is important, to re-establish themselves in the new community. The life stories used to demonstrate the issues of the journey in becoming a British citizen and being an asylum seeker and refugee are from individuals who are and were very useful and good informants and friends in the long run. Further on, in the ethnography the two cultural reference points used in the thesis are a birth and burial that happened in the incoming community in the North East. The next socio-cultural platform used in the thesis are the public events where the group try to maintain their own cultural identity and try to communicate their own unique cultural practices in the public eye. It continues to enrich the depth of the asylum seeker and refugee experience by given a systematic account of the trajectory and route a person from East Africa may traveling in the quest for safety. This includes an ethnographical account of the journey experienced by several informants starting in a refugee camp in East Africa and ending in the island of Malta.

An auto-ethnography using the experiences of me (the researcher) being a migrant and also a researcher will be part of the thesis as a reflexive exercise to give the thesis a more creative contribution in presenting it as ethnography.



## Chapter Two

### Gregory Bateson's Double-Bind Theory

#### Introduction

The observations made in the fieldwork has a shown details of the relationships that are formed and function between the individuals, groups and the community from the asylum seeker and refugee communities. In forming the relationship, which can be with the host community, institutions and individuals there is an ever present indication of the dynamics that is marked by a problematic and sometimes difficult dynamics in trying to communicate. Here there are the new incoming group of people with their own, dissimilar cultural and social patterns, and the host community perplexed by the contrast of the patterns in relation with their behaviour practices. These are then defined by the interpersonal relationships, observed by me, in the community and the communication between the host and the in-coming group researched. From a theoretical perspective the supportive foundation for the research as noted in Chapter One can be qualified as Gregory Bateson's (1972) Double-bind theory. The term Double-bind was first described and used by Gregory Bateson (1956) and his colleagues to present a research paper in Behavioural Science. The concept of Double-bind as a theoretical model is originally devolved to in relation to support the work done by Bateson and colleagues on Schizophrenia. Bateson (1972) does however state that the double-bind can use to describe normal situations.

In our approach was assumed that Schizophrenia involves general principles which are important in all communication and therefore many informative similarities can be found in "normal" communication situations (p. 222).

The rationale behind the using the double-bind as the grounded theory stems from the observations made in the long term and short term field work that shows how the asylum seekers and refugees struggles deal with situations where their specific cultural practises is in juxtaposition to the local cultural performances. This can be templated on the assimilation difficulties for the new, incoming asylum seekers and refugees. Dina Khan (1998, p. 6) argues that:

...the double-bind is constitutive of relational systems other than those usually constructed as pathological, and that ontological security is taken to be a condition that is continually re-achieved and defended"

Fundamentally the asylum seeker and refugee is motivated to integrate in to the new environment, but often finds that it is difficult and the dilemma is that it is problematic to communicate messages to form social relationships. The principle challenge therefor is presented as a communication problem where messages can be distorted and misunderstood which in turn can lead to confusion. The demonstration of this unsolvable situation is the scenario mentioned in the introduction of the eye-contact where the social contact in the west assumes a direct eye contact, but some of the asylum seekers and refugees are from countries where the direct eye-contact is deemed rude. The conundrum is thus what do the asylum seeker and refugee do? Look someone in the eye (being disrespectful) or show respect by not making eye contact? This causes a situation that is difficult to the point of an indeterminable position for them within the social interaction of the sociality in the new social environment they are.

### **Defining the theory**

The double-bind is understood as a situation where intense stress is articulated in the communication effort and the confusion results in an indeterminable situation. Bateson (1972) defines it as follows: “unresolvable sequences of experiences” (p 206). The asylum seeker and refugee fleeing and migrating to safety is a classical situation where the person is expected to experience fear. This fear is part of the being of a person fleeing for their lives, this goes together with extreme stress. The stress and fear experienced by a person who is fleeing from conflict, war and traumatic situations would be a person receptive of experiencing a double-bind and have to negotiate this throughout. Khan (1998, p.8) argues her use of the double-bind theory in the way foreign wives adopt to their lives in Pakistan:

“The double-bind exists not only in cases of psychological disorder, but also in day-to-day interactions. Ontological insecurity exists whenever a person’s sense of self is questioned”

This places the person in a position where whatever they do “they cannot win” for any action will be questioned or not taken into account. The ‘dammed if I do, and dammed if I don’t’ creates a thought pattern that is difficult to negotiate and can be confusing and indeed cause confusion. Displacement and fleeing to from one country to another and more importantly, according to Khan (1998, p. 8) one culture to another is clearly a stressful situation where the double-bind can be part of the problem the new incoming community can experience.

## **Problematic communication**

For the asylum seeker and refugee this complication often starts at the point of classification of being an asylum seeker and refugee. Ontological insecurity because sense of self is questioned included the experiences that they went through for them to become asylum seekers. They have the reality of war, conflict as the reason for feeling, but this is not enough and is often not believed by authorities. The proof, sometimes evident on the bodies, of torture is often not believed by the authorities who have to make decisions on whether the person is allowed to become a refugee. The evidence they need to present can be problematic, for how does one gather the evidence when you scarcely have time to take necessities for the journey? Souter (2011, p.50) supported by Trueman (2009) and Cohen (2002) clarifies the difficulties of the situation;

“The Home Office disbelieve asylum seekers because of their inability to provide documentary evidence of persecution or inaccurate chronology of events down to the nearest day. These practices ignore not only the fact that many refugees are forced to flee without having time to gather written proof of their identity and situation, but many comes from cultures in which events are related in non-linear ways, and trauma can significantly hinder their ability both to recall their experiences accurately and to recount them coherently”.

Trueman (2009, p.33) explains how, not enough suffering is used for the refusals of asylum by the Home Office. The same study demonstrates the difficulty in presenting their cases where Trueman (ibid) demonstrates:

“‘But they did not kill you’ said an immigration officer to an applicant. It has been considered that you are not of interest to the authorities as they have had the opportunity to arrest, detain and kill you in the past but have not done so.’ If they had killed the applicant, he would deserve asylum, but then he obviously come not all the way to Europe to seek asylum”.

Therefore the applicant seeking asylum is in a position where it does not matter what information is presented it is not believed, there for a double-bind, for how can one communicate the evidence to the authorities in the quest for safety, if they read the evidence as they see fit, in a culture of disbelief. This occurs after a long and difficult, often unsafe and perilous journey felling to safety. The confrontation by so many issues relates to difficult situations which in turn can create the inherent conflict and dilemma of what to do to get the acceptance as a refugee. Their experience is that of loss of autonomy and they have very little control over the outcome of the application for refugee status.

The next layer of communicating where messages can get problematic and is with the social environment the asylum seeker and refugee lands in. Here they have to re-establish themselves in a social and cultural environment where they contrast is very real and often vast. Some asylum seekers cannot speak English, and that is a reality where misunderstandings regular occur. The assimilation process relay on language and other important communication systems embedded in culture for example, the way time and the daily routine is perceived by people from sub-Saharan Africa. From the field notes and outcome of the observations it became evident that asylum seekers and refugees struggle with conveying messages in the new social environment. To demonstrate this I shall use the daily routine of having meals. In the United Kingdom the practice is to have three meals starting with breakfast, then lunch and an evening meal, interspersed with time for tea or coffee. In central Africa the practise is to have two meals a day. The following was taken form a report by Healthwatch Newcastle and Regional Refugee Forum (2016, pp. 4-5) in support of the differences expressed above;

This means asylum seekers and refugees face challenges that are not shared by the non-refugee BME and white community. Even when issues are shared with the non-refugee BME and white community they are set in the very different context of the refugee and asylum seeker experiences. This means asylum seekers and refugees face challenges that are not shared by the non-refugee BME and white community. Even when issues are shared with the non-refugee BME and white community they are set in the very different context of the refugee and asylum seeker experiences.

Many members commented that they encountered barriers when using the interpreting service. Interpreters from the same culture can be a barrier in some cases, as can the use of male interpreters for female patients. Miscommunication due to differences in dialect was also raised as an issue.

“I speak English and went with my mother to her doctor’s appointment – the interpreter got the location of the pain all wrong just because of dialect.”

Participants also commented that in Africa people tended only to eat two meals per day and that while the word ‘exercise’ was unknown, people generally lived active lives with active jobs.

“We don’t eat as many meals [in Africa], only two meals for a man. There are too many meals here in the UK.”

Members spoke a lot about the causes of mental health problems for asylum seekers and refugees. Many people experience or witness progressive mental health deterioration after arrival in the UK. The stress of the asylum process itself was

mentioned frequently and the associated lack of right to work which isolates people from the wider community and undermines their sense of self-worth.

Members from African countries also highlighted that in Africa men have more power and status in their community and family. When they come to the UK this power is taken away which can lead to frustration, feeling undervalued and in some cases domestic abuse. More generally members spoke about people trying to change their culture which they found very stressful.

Above is from the report (2016) where the information is gathered at a day meeting with several focus groups from the asylum seeking and refugee community. It confirms how the new incoming group is struggling to re-establish their autonomy and social power. In the social arena there are many indicators to re-convey and adjust. The stress attached to this has an effect on how the communication is confused between the host and the new incoming group of asylum seeker and refugees. This continues throughout other scenarios where misunderstandings can be prevalent. This phenomenon is also present in the process of becoming British, but still being African (or the nationality where the asylum seekers comes from) where one has to re-negotiate social identities and shift the social and cultural boundaries to accommodate the inter-play and communication between the two groups. The integration takes place eventually, but with the caveat that the social markers are retained as a coping strategy with the confusion of dealing with a culture that is different from one's own culture.

## **Control**

The double-bind problem for the asylum seekers and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa is also folded into the structure of the local community on how socialisation takes place. In one of the life-stories Herbert from Zimbabwe mentions his daughters and the fear of how to bring them up in a different social environment from their country of origin. He struggles to negotiate between the local practices and the Zimbabwean practices. Hampshire, Porter, Muthali and Robson (2011, p. 129) explain:

“However, parental hyper-vigilance of the sort common in Western contexts would be impossible, given the restricted means available to most parents. Instead, especially in rural locations, vigilance is maintained through a collective effort of group and community surveillance, to which children are themselves recruited at an early age, in particular through adult strictures to travel in groups and a mobility discourse which emphasises the dangers prevalent beyond essential routes: supernatural threats may be invoked to ensure compliance.”

Here the parents have to re adjust their thinking and though processes not to come in conflict with their teenagers needs to fit with the local young people and school friends. Yet they have to establish, in this case, the Zimbabwean way of bringing up young girls, where an 'aunt' is appointed to give guidance on social matters to the young women, so that the daughters understand that they are from sub-Saharan Africa too.

Effects on the asylum seeker and refugee in this double-bind situation is the experiencing a state of constant frustration and despair. The waiting time in the legal process to become a refugee can be several years. In that time, the skills they bring with them can be lost or forgotten. The waiting also have an effect on their social status, for the status change to a lower position than before. The difficulties of assimilation, and being true to your cultural origins, has the effect of the person having to negotiate their social position all the time. The social status shift is another stress factor and the asylum seeker and refugee try to address this constantly. Often the negotiation of where the social status lies, is an act that happens in the public arena. Therefore trying to re-establish autonomy takes place in the public sphere where Osama explain to the government official his situation after her degrading remark. Or the public events, free for the local host, displays the vibrant differences of the new incoming community in the Middlesbrough town hall

### **Difficulties with the Batesonian Double-bind**

The social experience of the asylum seeker and refugee, although going through a difficult time and problematic social involvement as noted above, does not always fall into the double-bind classification. There are circumstances they experience where the double-bind is not applicable and other theoretical input maps onto the situation as an explanation. Here other theoretical support is used to explain situations and social behaviour. The Liminality theory derived by Turner, (1969, p 95) is an applied and good theoretical underpinning for some of the situations the asylum seeker and refugee find themselves in. Turner (1986, p.41) sums the liminal situation up as follows:

“The ‘limen’, or threshold, a term I borrowed from Van Gennep’s second of three stages in the rites of passage, is a no-man’s-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future as anticipated by the societies normative control of biological development. “

The waiting period the asylum seekers and refugees go through can be mapped on the liminal idea used by Turner (1969, p.95). There are several stations that demands a waiting act from the asylum seekers. When an asylum seeker gets a positive decision on their claim, they have 28 days before their status changes to that of a refugee. Then they have to move from their accommodation and wait (again) for the benefit process to kick in to receive Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). After that the next wait is the national Insurance Number (NI). The following is taken from a Refugee Council report (2014, p.13) written by Lisa Doyle.

“Home Office policy is that those who are in receipt of Asylum Support will cease to be entitled to accommodation and cash support 28 days after their notification of being granted refugee status i.e. the grace period. This represents a rapid change in circumstances and people who may not have been in the UK for very long, are unfamiliar with the systems, may not speak good English and will not have had access to employment and savings, have to very quickly obtain housing and a means to support and feed themselves and their families (where applicable). Interviewees expressed how they felt during the time just after they received positive news on their asylum claim:

Interviewer – “Is there anything you would like to tell me about your first month as a refugee?”

“People think only about our refugee case, after granted, they are left alone and they don’t know anything.” – Ahamed

“I mean...if they give you 28 days...you don’t know where you are going to go....what you are going to eat. A little bit confusing as well as chaotic.” – Manuel

“The 28 days is hard on refugees...all of a sudden in a country you don’t know and then it stops and you don’t know what you are going to do. It was such a surprise when I ended up without a bed to sleep in.” – Bibi “

Then there are asylum seekers who wait for many years to become a refugee even. I am aware of one individual that have been waiting for 12 years for his decision on his claim to become a refugee. Furthermore the asylum seekers and refugees have to continue living every day the best they can, day-by-day in the liminal no-man’s land described by Turner. (1969).

Therefore in conclusion I propose that the grounded theory of Batesonian double-bind (1972) underpins the overall thematic contents of the ethnography of asylum seeker and refugees arriving in the North East of England. The secondary theoretical frameworks

like Turner's liminality theory (1969) is valuable in the support one of the several complex and difficult situations the asylum seeker and refugee experience in the process of integration and trying to re-adjust to the new social environment.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The longest period of data collection is in Teesside in the North East of England where the group of asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa have been dispersed since 2001. The research is basically centred on this group, and the community that subsequently emerged out of the dispersal to Teesside. The field work gathers information in the ethnographic manner by seeing and doing long-term observations. This allowed me to immerse myself in the community. I was fortunate to be awarded a travel grant by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to travel to the refugee camps in East Africa and follow the trajectory of the asylum seekers and refugees from the East of Africa through to Malta.

The data gathered by me, in the locations visited, and observed from the groups constitutes a single project. For even when I travelled, the informants justified their identity under the heading of asylum seekers and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa. The locality explanation is more complex as the trajectory is included and the exploration. The informants of this ethnography are either settled in the North East and/or still in transit towards Europe. Ruben Anderson (2014) noted on the method section of his research as “an extended field site” (p. 285) and he explains that, “My extended field site approach takes this focus on agonistic social interfaces and repeats it across diverse locales” (p. 284). This fits the description I would describe this.

In time the ethnography is to provide an academic rationale which can, at the very least, support the other work and research done in the migratory populations with the specific remit of asylum seekers and refugees coming into Europe and be able to add more detail to the social material gathered. Therefore the expectation of this study, is to enhance and support other ethnographies produced in refugee studies, for example the work of Liisa Malkki, Ruben Anderson and others. There is also the possibility that the research can be useful locally in Teesside. The value of this knowledge and information could prove central to the support of the community by the professional institutions and the participants themselves in negotiating policies and assisting in the integration or co-existing with the local host community.

Data collection as an anthropologist is understood as "...situated, long-term empirical field research, is simultaneously a critical theoretical practice" (Cerwonka and Malkki. 2007). Here Malkki argues that ethnographic method is linked into the construction of theory while conducting the fieldwork. In the collection of information over a long term in due course I realised the themes that emerged out of the field notes taken during the observations. The approach is the participation and involvement in the group which turned into long-term observation. Eventually familiarity with the group, culture and community was the outcome and it assisted me in being able to observe without the people in the group, community and/or culture being influenced by me, the onlooker. It is a systematic approach which includes setting up the practical research components (letters of consent and ethical approval forms) as well as ethical considerations.

The ultimate goal of field research, however is not personal but rather scientific – to build a general, abstract understanding of social phenomena. Moreover, field researchers have developed special skills and techniques for observing, describing and understanding everyday life. (Singleton and Straits. 2005, p. 306).

This practice requires me to be able to become part of the group and have intense interaction with members of the community (Barfield (ed) 1997, p157). I also had an approach where I could become part of the group more rapidly than usual as I am South African and have been to recognisable places in African countries like Zimbabwe, Kenya and other sub-Saharan areas.

From a personal perspective I am motivated by the history and kinship links that prevails in this group through the hardship and long distances travelled to start anew in a strange place, for these associations and voices are not only important from a personal view, but to the wider social environment in the North East. The benefit of this knowledge can stimulate the development of policy to support the incoming population. This interest developed into a curiosity about narrative and how it links into memories and the telling of life stories. The connection with the community of people coming from sub-Saharan Africa was initially a strong emotional motivation for me, but as my experience and understanding grew, I began to understand the value of the research for the wider social environment and the usefulness it presents to institutions and other organisation working for and with asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. My hope is that it will be used in the local policy making process to support services for the asylum seekers and refugees.

## **Methods**

The methodology includes a variety of approaches covering classic methods within the anthropological and social science disciplines; namely participant observation, informal interviews, the writing down of field notes, collecting of life-stories, and ethnographical evidence obtained from participant observation. A combination of qualitative research methods, with participant observation as the core is used to collect narrative data. Discourse analysis is used in the interpretation of linguistic material, where appropriate. Tonkiss (2004, p. 373) states:

Discourse analysis involves a perspective on language that sees this not as reflecting reality in a transparent way, but as constructing and organising the terms in which we understand that social reality.

Therefore social connotations are formed, created and reproduced; and more importantly social identities are shaped and this in turn will produce social facts that are examined in the analysis of the collected data. Both theory and method contribute to the meaning and analytical depth of the research. Theory guides the focus; method extracts the data; interpretation gives it meaning and helps the researcher to communicate knowledge to a wider audience. This includes the public or an institution. Interviews, the taking down of life-stories, and some ethnographical evidence obtained from participant observation constitute the key sources. Detailed descriptions of the events; including public gatherings which celebrate the uniqueness of the sub-Saharan Africans in the North-east, and other social reference points like weddings, births and funerals in the community will be used to demonstrate the socio-cultural achievements of the community. These demonstrate the assimilation into the new community, or alternatively the retaining of the socio-cultural practices of original culture. Narratives will be collected in both ethnographic fields. As Marcus explains (2011, p.28) doing fieldwork understands the outcome thus interpreting the gathered information as such. “The key act is the commitment to develop ethnography from an embedded perspective which often entails fieldwork that begins at home.”

To conclude that the fieldwork for this thesis can be classified as an extended field site is due to the nature of the fieldwork locations. The field work was done as part of an extended exercise not only from a time perspective, but also several sites spread over a wide geographical area. Therefore the informants are observed and life stories and ethnographic material gathered following the route of people fleeing and observing

different places as well as the asylum seekers and refugees settled in the North East of England.

“The distinction between life-worlds of subjects and the system does not hold, and the point of ethnography within the purview of its always local, close-up perspective is to discover new paths of connection and association by which traditional ethnography concerns with agency, symbols, and everyday practices can continue to be expressed on a different configured spatial canvas”. (Marcus, 1998, p. 82)

The community and/or groups are the following; the community that have arrived here in the North east and have established themselves as a group in the Teesside area, and then the people in the refugee camps and cities on the route to Europe and/or other first world countries like Australia and America. These sites are places where refugees are who decided to make that specific city and its socio-cultural framework their home and are settled there.

It melds also the researcher as ethnographer with the researcher as migrant, and mirrors the duality of informants as refugees and “ethnographers” in the host society. This created an ever-changing relationship for me, researcher, and the field I have to observe: “...it offers a way to expose ‘multi layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (Reed-Danahay 2002, p. 423)”. Therein lies the conundrum for me, the researcher. I hope to present the data as an ethnography as per the research focus. There is a section trying to connect the personal, and the professional with the cultural issues. I will make an effort to separate the three issues, and at the same time, use the issues to position an authority in the thesis.

Lastly a reflexive implementation where I, researcher will contemplate the migrants’ experiences from a personal perspective is part of the work, for I am a migrant, although not a refugee, from a country in Africa (South Africa) and over the years confirmed a parallel journey with one of the main informants. The reflexive input, to a small extent, does alter the method framework as the personal becomes part of the presentation of the data used in the ethnography. The rationale is academically sound, as Marcus (1998, p. 17) states:

Reflexivity about a contending field of representations in or around a particular site of ethnographic work stimulates radical rethinking of research identities and relationships. The anthropologist becomes one kind of cultural producer among others, some of whom at least were traditionally identified as merely subjects or ‘informants’.

## Participant Observation:



Fig 3.1 Fieldwork in Teesside (2009) – with some informants

The life-stories of the four informants are prominent in the thesis (Chapter 5 and see appendix 1) and they are individuals who, with most social interaction, were either introduced to me or I met them in the daily run of my employment initially with the Charity. Later on, as I travelled to East Africa they were individuals that I came into contact with either through introduction or I met them where they resided, hang-out in, or worked. The four informants that became the basis of the chapter on life-stories came to the fore as the interaction and the socialisation increased and a social relationship was formed. This ultimately turned into a friendship. This in turn resulted in regular meetings which include invitations to meals and events in the new community. They became the principal individuals that I could contact for any assistance or information with regards to their community and/or groups that they are or were part of. Their own life-stories are significant to demonstrate the difficulties that asylum seekers and refugees encounter. The two personalities that I have known the longest are Herbert and Hilaire, both of whom I met shortly after their arrival in Teesside. Herbert is from Zimbabwe and became a stalwart as a volunteer at the charity I was employed by at that time. Hilaire, a Togolese, hung out in the hair salon where the new arrivals tended to go during the day. This salon is situated in the street where most of the young men were housed. Tanjong, a French speaking Cameroonian was part of the group that Hilaire socialised with in the salon and I got to know him better while working on the Life-stories project with Hilaire. The salon served as a social space for

the French speaking asylum seekers. Apart from doing the African braided hair service, it also offered a phone service to African countries; therefore it was frequented by most asylum seekers and refugees in that area. This was before mobile phones were affordable and skype services available. I was the manager of a charity that supported HIV positive people. This meant that I did a lot of work in the area and used to take leaflets on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and condoms to the hair salon to be available to the public on a weekly basis.

A couple years on after Herbert was given leave to remain in the UK and had moved to the refugee category, which meant that he could work, he found employment. He sent for his family. I assisted in the setting up his house in preparing for the arrival of his family. We were in daily contact with each other and I worked with him in an integration programme set up in Stockton-On-Tees. Together with Hilaire and eventually Tanjong the three of them gave me insight and access to the new incoming community in Teesside. We would meet at events, community and committee meetings and regular phone communication would happen. These individuals continued to be my main informants and door openers to the social and cultural happenings in the Teesside community. Through the many conversations, and working with them on projects and committees, they gave me the awareness and comprehension beyond the initial understanding to what is being pointed towards when an asylum seekers and refugee arrive and try to assimilate into a new and different community.

As an immigrant from sub-Saharan Africa into the area it turns out I have been to and visited the places they the informants are familiar with. This was useful when I had to go beyond the surface of meeting and greeting for this knowledge came into play. Maurice Bloch (2012, p. 193) writes:

However, when we want to begin to go beyond the surface phenomena and try to understand what is involved in the way of knowledge taken in from external stimuli is then transformed so that it can be used with fluency,..., especially participant observation, is excellent at making one aware of the presence of the implicit in the social and at making one realise how meaning cannot be separated from social interaction.

I could describe places and we could share details about people we knew. The knowledge would help with building a rapport with the informants, and helped me feeling part of the group. The connection was positive for we could compare observations and opinions on events, places and people much to the delight, and sometimes, entertainment of the informants.

With regards to the trajectory to Europe, initially I had no insight or any local knowledge about the route and difficulties that are part of the travelling experience for the asylum seeker. The individual who assisted me in this was Osama, a Sudanese refugee who resided in Malta. We met when I was invited to the house for a meal where he and three other Sudanese reside. He was clearly an individual that a lot of people in the community interacted with. He was forthcoming, friendly and willing to be my host. He spent hours talking and explaining to me about being a migrant (the word used in Malta) and working in Malta. His selection to be an informant was a natural shift as he had insight in science and the discipline of doing research being a student in medicine. He introduced me to many migrants after disclosing his story. Even though the time spent with him was much shorter than the Teesside field work. We stayed in contact through Facebook after I left Malta.

### **Doing the participant observation in the local and extended field**

This method is clearly of a qualitative nature and both collects and interprets the social material collected in community fieldwork. It produces detailed accounts of how a community functions. It involves a long-term involvement with the community that is being investigated, including its day to day activities as well as the more subtle and intricate practices of the group. The recorded information is analysed to 'make sense' of the practices which identify this particular group as both similar and different to other groups. A picture of the how the community functions is the result, an interpretation and analysis of the social and cultural coherence of the group by the researcher. In essence the researcher has to spend time with the group/community that is being studied, and hopefully she becomes more accessible to the inside of the community therefore the group and its intricacies will become understandable to the outsider. What starts out as an etic exercise becomes an emic one, and the researcher becomes a voice for the community in question. Historically participant observation is recognised as a tool developed and used by the functionalists, but it is now widely used by other approaches and disciplines too. It is an important research tool as stated by Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland (Bernard 1998, p. 264):

...irrespective of degree of involvement or of participation, the practice of participant observation provides two main advantages to research. First it enhances the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork. Second, it enhances the quality of the interpretation of the data. Participant observation is thus both a data collection and an analytic tool.

A more systematic understanding of the observed culture will emerge which, in turn will be reflected in the ethnography. The initial contact and establishing a rapport and trust with the community is paramount, and this includes acquiring a basic knowledge of everyday customs.

Participant observation is an active and sympathetic engagement with a "stranger" community, although this is not always the case as researchers also do 'anthropology at home'. This means a community or group of people that is unfamiliar and foreign to you as an ethnographer. Moreover the engagement and involvement which includes interaction should be seen as long term. Meaning that the observer needs to be incorporated into the community and the groups that constitute it, to the extent that the observer is a natural part of the groups and can observe the interface of not only the day to day activities, but also be so familiar with these activities that being part of them would be not only natural, but also useful for collecting data. When the researcher is no longer recognised as a strange by the host community, she has successfully integrated. The accounts and data collected produce not only descriptive, but interpretative information too. The richness of these depends in part on the degree to which the ethnographer has become successfully embedded in the target community, often a function of time, but also of other factors for example; language. I am familiar with some Southern African languages (and other cultural issues like food and customs) which assist me in the 'hanging out' in the home site of the North East of England.

There is also the extended field site where the times spent with some of the communities, groups and individuals are substantially shorter. This was done during the nine week field-trip traveling the route of the asylum seeker and refugee from east African refugee camps to an entry point into Europe. Fieldwork in divided locations, although unequal in time spent, provided multiple perspectives on the same community, through the narratives and perspectives of diverse individuals and the various communities encountered in East Africa. With the home community the interaction, observation and amalgamation with the groups and community by me, has been happening for more than a decade. This resulted in me becoming a part of the community to such an extent that I have been accommodated as an individual at the 'inside' of the group after several years. This has been observed in committee meetings and other events. From the settled community there are three individuals already introduced of which one Hilaire, that I observed and befriended over a period of about twelve years; from arrival into Teesside as an asylum seeker till he became a British



Citizen. These involvements reflecting also the broader UK position on migrants, based on extensive knowledge of their arrival, but not the journey as I initially only observed the incoming community and eventually connected with my informants. Bourdieu (2001) said in the Huxley Memorial lecture which he delivered in 2002; participant observation undertakes and explores not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself. It aims at objectivizing the subjective relation to the object which, far from leading to a relativistic and more-or-less anti-scientific subjectivism, is one of the conditions of genuine scientific objectivity. Bourdieu's point embraces both the dilemma of the fieldworker and of the home citizen. In the social sciences, scientific objectivity meets the subjective perspectives of participants, and produces a new amalgam of understanding. In the current case this is achieved through the lens of the informants, the events that the community organised and other gatherings where being a refugee and asylum seeker is the focal point. Hilaire and I would work together on many projects and we would talk and discuss current issues as they occurred. Mostly at his place of work where I would be at least once a week if not more or in the eating area of Queen's campus in Stockton-On-Tees where we would have a meal together and discuss the issues like problems he has with his extended family in West Africa. When his father, in Togo, passed away he came to me and we managed to get him to the funeral. As a reciprocity mechanism he gave me the DVD's which was taken by his family of the funeral and we watched it together in his house. His family (wife and small son) were also watching with us. At one stage, the coffin with his father was lifted in the air and the coffin bearers danced in a circle with the coffin, singing all the time. Hilaire's wife (she is English) became upset and had to leave the room. She perceived this act as disrespectful saying: "What if they drop him! I cannot watch this." We continued conversations and meetings at events and he asked me to assist in some of the work and employment he did.

The community in Teesside was initially a small group, but soon (in about five years) expanded into a larger community as the asylum seekers were dispersed on a weekly basis from the south of England. The demographic profile of the incoming individuals was mostly young males. These young men were being housed together in what was described locally as 'rough' areas. The areas with a higher crime rate, difficult social behaviour and housing that the local inhabitants discarded. The demographics soon showed young single mothers and their children joining the dispersal programme. The

charity firstly assisted with the sharing and passing of information about HIV, but then became a centre where people from this newly arrived community would volunteer. Thus there were two strands of connections with the community which I made initial contact with; the service user and the volunteer. Eventually this became a closer relationship with both groups and the other members of the new community.

The involvement and integration into the group/charity or association was such that the aim is to serve only the new African community, for instance the Stockton African Caribbean Association (SACA) on which I served from the very start. Herbert and some of his friends, including me, were the initiators in starting this association. The aim of SACA is to give social support and assist with social difficulties of integration and assist the wider community to understand and support the incorporated newcomers in the profile of the local social and demographic landscape. The meetings occurred on a weekly basis and eventually the interactions I got enmeshed in evolved to such an extent that I am invited to weddings and other significant celebratory events and social reference points. This was extended to individuals' homes for meals and social visits and other social interactions e.g. going to the cinema. My relationships with individuals and the group evolved rapidly as stated previously, and led to me being perceived as a safe confidante. For two years I was also part of an African drumming group and attended practices once a week. I also introduced other individuals to the group. I have been asked to represent the community on several public platforms which have included public debates, and (an important event in the calendar) the Black History Dinner Gala. This event represents the Black community in Teesside as a whole and is seen as the pinnacle and the highlight of the annual social calendar for this community. This event is an opportunity to demonstrate the social and public interaction in pointing to the research foci for the anthropology at home section. This includes the preparations for the event and other issues around the event. Through these involvements, the day-to-day activities of individuals come to my notice, as they are regularly discussed in the weekly drumming and/or monthly meetings of the charities. I am phoned on a regular basis to be informed of any broader developments that take place, in the associations, the committees and the community; and also regarding local or personal crises. And, on occasions where personal issues, are the reason for the phone call. Herbert phoned when he failed his driving test for the second time. He did not want his wife to know, but needed to tell me, the friend he could share his disappointment with and to get the sympathy he wanted.

Externally, I am also known to the other charities that serve the asylum-seeking/refugee community, and they are interested in and supportive of my research, which some of them see as a potential tool for assisting fund-raising, planning and policy making. Some members of local authorities and the Primary Care Trusts are aware of my long-term engagement with the asylum seeker and refugee community; the proposed research and are positive about its possible contribution. These are the employees that are responsible for the community from the policy making level, health, education and community development including the care element for the community.

Through the dynamics of "hanging out", with and the writing up the observed actions by the community, it is hoped to achieve a dynamic understanding of the networked connections of community, institutions and agencies. What might be the reverse side is the creation of a unique asylum seeking and refugee subculture which is distinct both from the 'home' communities, and culture of the migrants, and also separate from the 'host' community possibly a hybrid of "Home and Host" but with additional features. The ethnographic exploration where observing, living and working amongst the community for more than a decade has many benefits within the context of attending to establish oneself in the community. Ultimately being part of the events like Black History month, the awards dinners, judging the winners of the awards, serving on the same associations of and charities as a volunteer, and the travelling experiences in doing the trajectory from east Africa, gave me a role as a member of the community, and a unique platform for reporting on it.

Ultimately the research has a high element of reflexive analysis of the asylum seeker and refugee community with specific topics (Memory and narratives, Language, Food, Belief, risk etc.). Content analysis and thematic analysis will then be utilized to present the outcome of the research. Participant observation requires a particular approach to recording observations (in field notes) and what information is gained through participation is critical to social scientific analysis. (Bernard. ed, 1998) As it is qualitative in nature, it is presented as an active and highly descriptive practice. It involves long-term involvement with the community. But being a white South African has some issues attached to it; I have been the centre of debate between individuals for a while, but the majority feels that I am 'African' for my ancestors have been in Africa for over 350 years.

"...as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of (the people being studied) their culture" (Dewalt, 1998, p. 260). 'Hanging out' is the expression used (ibid)

and it is not just sitting around waiting, but active work that needs attentive energy and prompt work e.g. writing up the observations made of the everyday life and more. In its practice, participant observation requires two layers of action. There is; the day to day activities, and then the more symbolic notions of the group. A section of the community tends to be very fluid, in that some are forcibly removed, or have gone into hiding or have moved here to be closer to the family members. This fluidity creates "fission and fusion" within community alliances and this has been monitored by my continued involvement with the groups 'doing' field work and carrying out participant observation as before.

Doing the fieldwork in the east Africa refugee camp, Cairo and Malta was different due to the shorter time available, but the experience I obtained doing the participant observation for a long period in Teesside came into play and assisted me in being able to gather as much information as possible in a short time.

### **The researcher in context**

The driver behind the initial research focus is the employment in Teesside. This placed me in a position where epistemologically, I have the potential to be part of the community (working for and also with them) and be one of the migrants from Africa. My involvements in the community and the connections, although initially through employment, were seamless for there no real difficulties in becoming part of the community. When I shifted into the new role of researcher, the conversations and discussions with the informants and participants became more detailed, but not problematic. I am familiar with the social reference points that were important, like languages, food, music and other cultural practise therefore could without problems or any hindrances continue to communicate with the community. For me there were three points of departure or roles to assure the connection within the community. The three possibilities or roles (employee, student investigating an ethnography and member of the community) had the potential of creating a blurring of boundaries, moreover the possibility of some confusion at times. The interaction of the three different roles, sometimes, produced perspectives which influenced data the researcher became aware of at the time. The reflexive practise of creating an auto-ethnography, which initially was a personal journal during the fieldwork on the trajectory from East Africa, was a very useful tool to understand the complexities presented in the fieldwork and the understanding of social issues. Thus the trajectory can be relayed as; initial contact

through employment, and then the move into being a postgraduate student and therefore being a student doing the research in this asylum seeker and refugee community. The employment at the charity became the point of departure for me, as I was trying to locate and follow the community. More official information was needed as per the number of asylum seekers and refugees arriving; this proved to be difficult, but a way to get the detail was noticed and taken up as described below.

To be able to establish the demographics of the community and moreover the pattern and number of people settling in Teesside, was difficult. This is due to the fact that the local authority and the official institutions that serve the asylum seeker and refugee community from sub-Saharan Africa, do not have any sort of structure in their programs that are able to give the quantitative detail about the incoming community. There is one official portal where some information of this manner can be obtained and that is via the National Health Service (NHS). Upon arrival people are registered at their local medical surgeries in the NHS. This means that to locate new arrivals; one can go through the local surgery register and assess the number of new registrations. Most of the new arrivals registered at the Arrival Medical Centre (Stockton-on-Tees and Thornaby) that was set up by the then Primary Care Trusts (North and South) to deal specifically with asylum seekers and refugees coming into the Teesside area. I am familiar with the Arrival Medical Centre.

A third source of information is the network of gatekeepers and community leaders (often elders). As mentioned above there are several institutions where a working relationship is established. This created the position where communication with groups of asylum seekers and refugees is relatively uncomplicated and information and data can be obtained. I was also perceived and appreciated as a local adviser to the gatekeepers. There were occasions where she was requested specifically assist with decision making processes and actions to speak for the community. Throughout all the above connections, meetings, events and contact with the African community I took field notes. These were considered at a later stage to assist with the analysis in meetings and other events (e.g. weekly drumming group).

One occasion occurred which demonstrated the experience in the observation and participation as to how far I was received into the community. As member of the Stockton African and Caribbean Association (SACA) where I was voted into the role of vice-chair and responsible for health problems in the community, I was asked to meet up with the GP at the Arrival Surgery. This request came after an occasion where the

football team of the asylum seekers and refugee community was given football shirts with the message on the back of the shirt which suggest that all people from the community should have a HIV test. It was felt that this was too public and might give the wrong impression about people from the community. It was understood that the idea came from the Arrival surgery. I had to represent the Sub-Saharan Black African refugee and asylum seekers community on this occasion (see Appendix 2). This gave me the profile of member of the community, health advisor and gate keeper for the community. Moreover and overall, this indicated that I was part of the composition of a multi-layered and multifaceted community. Connections are established and created including the interpersonal connections, working from the ego i.e. the person placed in the start or centre of a specific network pattern. Including how these action sets and personal interaction between groups and individuals can affect the nature of the large-scale systems in which they are embedded. The lines of connection may proceed in one direction and may also carry on in the reverse. The concept of "community" and its specific cultural benchmarks and references need to be demonstrated. Cultural specifics which may be particular to the asylum seeker and refugee community have been investigated through the observations and examined. The researcher in context is a socially layered performance which can slot in the three sections that are mentioned.

I was fortunate to be able to visit refugee camps in East Africa and travel the trajectory from the eastern side of sub-Saharan Africa though to a destination that was, and still is, a primary entry locus into Europe; as described by many of the asylum seekers and refugees who settled in Teesside. The travelling and problems attached to the moving from point to point from the Kakuma Refugee camp can be described as a similar experience to the some of the stories narrated by the refugees that are living in the Teesside area. I travelled alone and had to rely on many strangers to be able to negotiate the journey. At Kakuma Refugee camp the meetings, with refugees, were very short, but the long time spent listening to many refugee narratives honed me in taking in as much as possible from the conversations about the life in the camp. The next stop was Cairo where the refugees were embedded into the city, but still managed by the UN refugee Council. The central point of gathering is All Saints church in the centre of Cairo. After the short visit and a few intense interviews with the workforce at the church, I left for the airport to travel to Tripoli, the next destination. There I got detained for I refused to pay a bribe to the officials that thought my e-visa was not legal. When I eventually was allowed to leave the airport (I missed my flight) I went back to the refugee centre. This

was serendipitous, as now I had more time to have long conversations and informative interactions with the workers and refugees to follow up the intense interviews I conducted before. This was done between queuing at embassies (UK and Libya); to confirm my e-visa with the Egyptian officials. This is where I became a quasi-refugee, albeit a person relying on border officials and the public power play (by the men in the position to let me, an unaccompanied woman, move to the next destination) that was part of the cultural practices in these countries. Contextually, I had to be submissive and stay 'in line' like the refugees around me to get the permission to move on, which included waiting at the back of the waiting area in the Libyan embassy reserved for women. I was tended to last (at the end of the working day) and the first query was: Your husband? He was not with me (obviously) or any other male member of my family, for that matter. So, I had to endure the refusals by an all-male staff and come back the next day, and the next day till I was tended to. That took three days of arriving very early and eventually leaving last. Eventually I was able to get service from the officials and the mistake acknowledged (the visa was legitimate) and I could book my flight to Tripoli. The assistance from the UK embassy was just as vague. As a woman, in the field, it was a predictable experience but, it did not ease the frustration. The only official woman I dealt with in this escapade was at the travel agency in Cairo where I had to re-book my flight to Tripoli. The service and interaction was that of professional efficiency and she assisted and completed my request within the hour of arrival and explaining my plight. Yet, I cannot base any analysis on the short and once-only encounters with authority in Cairo. Relating the experience to refugees I spoke to in Malta, we could draw similarities on; the waiting, a daily practise, returning to the queue the next day, being spoken to in demeaning ways by officials. The travel experience, as relayed above, in East Africa and the journey to the north, was the connection I had with the migrants in Malta and in context of participant observation it slotted in exclusively for the conversations and comparisons that we could draw was comparable and it connected me with the community. This connection was recognised by the individuals that were seen as leaders and strong characters and I shared meals with them, had coffee with them, smoked shisha-pipes with them and they relayed to me their traveling endurances on the journey to Europe. Thus the shared meals turned out to be, not only the relaying of similar narratives, but a deeper connection where the frustration has been understood in its possibilities and experiences by me.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Much discourse on ethics commonly argues that the basis for the relationship created by the researcher and participants is centred and understood by the main characters on the foundation of confidence which is: “where ever possible should be characterised by trust and integrity” (Ali and Kelly, 2005 Chapter 10, P. 110). This on the other hand has the possibility that the trust gained will be abused and the researched group/community being placed in a vulnerable position. Avoiding this demands that ethics is built into the plan of research at its beginning, and that honesty remains at the centre of enquiry:

It requires that a moral account remain faithful to (resemble) the principles and concepts that provided the sorting point for that account. In selecting data and constructing a theory, the final product should resemble the principles and concepts that it explicates. (Beauchamp and Childress 1994, p. 25).

As a social scientist the moral obligations of faithfulness to the research agreement, pointed out above, are expected to be followed by the researcher and be monitored by supervisors and institutions. The idea is that I, as the researcher represents the institution and the work, and this is synonymous with the public view and profile of the scientific world. (ASA code of conduct gives clear guidance on behaviour expected from researchers). Thus the responsibility is twofold; that to the community and that to the discipline and the institutions they represent. “As members of a discipline committed to the pursuit of knowledge and the public disclosure of findings, they should strive to maintain integrity in the conduct of anthropological research.” (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, 1999). Overall, ethics is a term used for a set of practises created by professionals to understand and examine issues in such a way that it gives responsibility to the researcher in several arenas. This includes informed consent and confidentiality. Added to that is the safety element for which the code of conduct clearly emphasises to do no damage.

“Responsible conduct necessitates that the researcher be well-informed about possible wider political, cultural, economic, religious and social context of the work in order to ensure that the research will not put collaborators, research subjects, students or assistants at risk that they do not have the information to assess” (ASA Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Research, Adopted June 23, 2005).



Thus the focus is also on the methodology to ensure that the gathering of data is done in a frank and open way which should reflect the ethical commitment of the researcher. This brings the debate back to responsibility. The anthropologist/researcher has the duty to gather data, analyse the information guided by the relevant theory and write it up, but always under the guidance of agreed ethical criteria. Not only in doing the research, but also in the communication of the findings, ethical criteria must be observed.

### **Informed consent**

Informed consent was a real logistical problem. This community has the tendency to be very fluid, transient and stable at the same time. New comers arrive and some of them stay, but some move on, either forced (often overnight) or to settle closer to family in another area. There may be individuals who are 'in hiding' to avoid the forced removal. The many associations formed to support and represent the sections in the community may provide a channel for acquiring informed (collective) consent. Included in these are also the charities and NGO's that are set up to anticipate issues and provide support for the asylum seekers and refugees. Information regarding the research can be explained in meetings and dialogue and feedback can take place then. As I am known to many individuals the opportunity to investigate the issues, if they feel it necessary, will be there for them to do so either in a public forum at one of the many meetings of the associations or, in a more private situation. On another level the access to the community is through the gatekeepers and community leaders (often elders). I serve on some of the associations at the management level and with some of them as evaluator. This put me in the position where I can communicate with groups of asylum seekers and refugees to obtain consent. Baggini and Fosl (2007, p. 117) writes that at the "heart of this doctrine is the notion of autonomy") I shall take care will be taken to either minute the decision taken in the meetings and if needed the forms to be read and signed by the individuals in the community.

To incorporate confidentially a strategy would be to anonymise, using codes or another way of keeping the identities of the individuals anonymous. Some individuals, after discussion with them had no issues with being identified where others preferred to be given a different name. The Teesside archives have some of the life-stories on disk as part of their achieved content and stored there. This means the life-stories are freely available to the public to peruse.

## **Confidentiality**

Culture, being the research focus, the researcher must be able through communication and the theory that guides the research, gather data and present the findings in an honest and open way. The understanding of the cultural information (emic and/or etic) needs to be developed and decoded by the researcher as the findings. Lyon (2005) suggests that: “culture is not an information encoding system per se, but is rather a set of information processing systems”. He argues that the processing of the information has rules governing how the content (cultural information) should be processed. This will have an impact on how the researcher presents the findings, as he/she will have an input (his/her own understanding of findings) and the community may have their understanding of the process, for it may be a different “processing system”. This may lead to several meanings and perceptions of one habit or cultural item. The argument is that these points of view all have an influence on the ethics of social research, and is part of the ethical responsibility the researcher is to manage in this course of action. The understanding of confidentiality between researcher and informants from the community needs to be negotiated to make sure that the researcher is acting within the boundaries agreed on. The ethical structure and research aims of a project of enquiry are thus inextricably linked.

## **Harm**

Anthropologist have a responsibility to anticipate problems and insofar as possible to resolve them without harming the research participants or the scholarly community (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, 1999)

In this instance the possibilities can be obscure in that the asylum seeking and refugee is functioning very well in his/her social environment, but perhaps reminded in an interview of e.g. the flight from country of origin or loved ones left behind, it may trigger an emotional action which may have an effect on the mental health of the individual. In the past this was part of the understanding in interviews that if anything comes up that the asylum seeker or refugee feels uncomfortable about then we will stop and they have the choice to not continue. It happened in only one occasion where the individual requested not to talk about certain issues. In the scholarly community the issues can be dealt with in discussions and with the assistance of the supervisors.

## Chapter Four

### Negotiating the boundary between auto-ethnography and ethnography

#### Introduction

Perhaps it is the many years I have known the people who were and are my informants, and eventually friends, that resulted in me not feeling like I am the researcher and should therefore actively be observing all the time trying to spot the quirky or obscure patterns, and of course the mundane daily routine of the cultural content, that may emerge which would then be used in the research. The obvious (and sometimes enthusiastic) student was at play here; thus for several years I was just there, sometimes apparent and visible, sometimes needed, and then the other times where I was in the background and almost covert. A backward glance to what was the daily routine incorporating the fieldwork, notes and conversations made me aware that the experiences I underwent, were not only as a researcher, but a person coming from southern Africa was not only responsive, but it assists in giving me a space not only to observe from a social perspective, but to experience the action of integration into a society. Annette Liebing (2007, p.140) in “The Shadow side of Fieldwork” explains her experience of something similar as follows:

“I was unable on several occasions to feel or see “the hidden side of the moon”. On a personal level this might have no implications. With respect to ethnographic data, this kind of “blindness”, however evokes a major conundrum in science: the fact that truth claims are anchored in worldviews, paradigms, or moodiness. The corollary of this conundrum is the question of how any data, once having becoming a scientific text..., has its layers of the taken-for-granted uncovered”

As a background to me as an individual, I offer the following relevant narrative for it plays out as one of the layers of the ethnography.

I am South African and have worked in several African countries during the 1990's (Zimbabwe, Kenya, Namibia), and have travelled in Botswana. I arrived in the U.K in 1997. I came with the opportunity of employment, and was the warden of the Quaker Meeting House in Darlington. The first six years I did the job of being a warden, and very quickly started serving on several of the committees locally (Charity) and within

the Quakers (serving for Friends) some of whom supported and dealt with asylum seekers from Africa. After a year I became the Business Manager (while still responsible for the wardenship at the Quaker Meeting House) of a local charity supporting people who are HIV positive, called Teesside Positive Action (TPA). There, it became clear that the majority of new clients were African, and I began to do a lot of 'out of hours work' as the Asylum Seeker and Refugee sub-Saharan African community became aware of my background. My informal clients included individuals who were not HIV positive, but just needed to someone to talk to, or some advice on local issues. This advice could be trivial (e.g. information on the bus services to the hospital or to how to use an international phone card), and/or significant (e.g. dealing with NHS bureaucracy).

After four years, I decided for a variety of reasons to leave the charity and move on to a new career opportunity. I kept contact with most people I had met, and was asked to join some of the associations set up by the asylum seeker and refugee African community. I am Health Liaison Officer for the Stockton African-Caribbean Community Association (SACA), which meets once a month, one of the five founder members of Black Concern (a research group investigating education issues affecting African children), and am one of the four management trustees of the Karibu Project to produce and place the life stories of asylum seekers and refugees from Africa in the local archives in Middlesbrough. I am constantly asked for advice and feel I am part of the community. In time I also got the opportunity to travel the trajectory of refugees and asylum seekers.

At the onset of the postgraduate research I applied to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for a travel fund, and was successful. Moreover I could now include the trajectory of the informants as an anthropologist as I could experience the environment the informants hail from. This enabled me to travel to Kakuma refugee camp, which is a place where several of the refugees in Teesside started their journey to Europe and ultimately the north of the UK. This was planned with the trajectory in mind, so from Kakuma I travelled to Cairo, Tripoli and the entry point into Europe, Malta. Even though it is designed to be a short trip, I still could collect several narratives investigate the physical and geographical environment and could get 'the feel for' the refugee camps and other social environments e.g. cities in countries on-route, where asylum seekers and refugees are to be found. I returned to the UK, my 'new' home where I settled as an immigrant from Africa myself many years ago.

## **Arrival**

Using the reflexivity approach as a way of trying to get to grips with the relationship the ethnographer has with not only the informants, but the whole spectrum of the social – cultural interaction and people in the community and often the wider society. This, it can be argued, is investigating the social profile of the community from a distance which is further than the actual social interactions and observing the group being studied. Moreover it is still a useful method to investigate the ethnographer and the community and include a comparative and layered dimension.

Reflexivity is a means to understand and refurbish the tools you will use. (Bourdieu cited in Marcus 1998, P101).

Thus, with this in mind I hope to be able to draw a comparison between me, the migrant and the refugee; both coming from a sub-Saharan social arena. In contrast to asylum-seekers, I, through the Quakers and the wardenship, had comfortable and secure accommodation, employment and a footing to start a new life in a foreign country. Therefore it placed me in a relatively secure position; for not only was the Quaker community a familiar space for me to operate in socially, it also gave me some economic security. Perhaps the familiarity was set in the Quaker ethos (religiously) as well as in the practices, sometimes classified as a lifestyle. I was also accompanied by my (then) husband, which gave me a social position and a cultural point of departure in the community. I could qualify my identity as a married woman and this was useful for the social contacts needed to function, not only in the community, but the local society too. I am white and have Dutch origins which influenced my reception in the community I moved into. It was however difficult to leave my family and my ailing elderly parents behind. Granted, I did not flee for my life, I was not persecuted for my religious belief, or political stance or even jailed and escaped from torture like so many of the refugees have done. I did however struggle with the cultural differences in the new setting and/or country I settled in. The local interplay with language in the local dialect, the different greeting ways and many more small issues with a cultural description created the difficulties for me. These were often subtle and low key; to the extent if an outsider was looking in it would not have been noticed. It was very clear to me that I am not English. There was the English language which, even though my second language, I was competent in. Language per se was not an issue for me, in comparison with many asylum seekers and refugees from French speaking areas in

West Africa who had to learn English from scratch. The English I grew up with is classified as South African English. To illustrate; South African description of directions, 'at the robot you turn left' versus the English directions, 'at the traffic light you turn left'. This meant I would perceive not only the directional instructions as explained, in the wrong manner, but also the social settings would be difficult to interpret; in conjunction with what is meant by the local person communicating with me and therefore made mistakes (sometime comical in its outcome) in answering and or responding to a request and/or conversation. I would then be reprimanded by my then husband who afterwards would explain this issue and/or content of the communication. Not only were words different, but even the way of using language to communicate was different. My home culture is very much a storytelling culture whilst in England language is used in a more direct, rational and instrumental way.

Everyday actions were also difficult and often could be described as an odyssey; shopping took a long time, for the range of choice was overwhelming, and I had to wade through all of the choices to purchase the items needed. Moreover it was not the basic tasks like shopping but, many more routine activities and other social interactions were perplexing and often overwhelming. Telephone etiquette is an example of a routine conundrum for me; as the greetings and initial asking after the caller's health and their family member's health, as expected by me was not even practised with phone calls; the caller would start with the reason for calling and straight away go into the information exchange and/or discussion needed to complete the conversation. This experience would have the result that I perceive the English way as deeply rude and offensive. The result was that I ended up very upset after several such phone calls. I would question my decision to move countries for I was under the impression that it would not be this distressing for me to slot into the English community in the North East. After all, I read and enjoyed all the James Herriot books! The small Quaker community assisted all the time, through many conversations and explanations, and with time I came to terms with the way English people, moreover people from the North East interact on a social and cultural way. For the asylum seeker and/or refugee from Sub-Saharan Africa, in my fieldwork it came to light that their experience with regards to the North East (Teesside) has sometime completely different experience than what I had, but there were similarities too, in a cultural level. Therefore in an all over experience my understanding of the arrival and then trying to slot into the local community and the larger society is mainly different from the asylum seeker and/or

refugee, with some pockets of similar experiences which will be pointed out later in the chapter.

Perhaps the challenge here, is understanding the voice of an immigrant who settles in the UK and then for the immigrant to find out how to establish her authority in the community and/or society where the settlement happens. Moreover the crossing of the social boundaries, is where the intensity of this experience lies. Therefore it is not only moving to another country, crossing the border of the country to enter, but the all-pervading experience of assimilating into a new society. This is a realistic expectation of the ethnographer and researcher to focus the experience of crossing the social and cultural boundaries while still maintaining the origin of her own point of departure in the socio-cultural engaging which started within a safe and supported community, namely the Quakers. Therefore in contrast, the voice of the refugee or perhaps the more intense voice of the asylum seeker in this thesis and ethnographic analysis cannot fully be reflected by the researcher's narrative, but there are some social themes that overlap in comparing my experiences with the asylum seeker and refugee, which hopefully will become clear.

I became conscious of the many reasons and therefore the brutal reality why people flee and become refugees seeking asylum, while collecting the many narratives in the fieldwork. The knowledge and the range of reasons for the fleeing and becoming an asylum-seeker is vast and wide ranging. The collecting of the narratives, participant observation, and ethnographical data collection occurred in Teesside (local) and while travelling the trajectory via the east African refugee camp trail. Hence the outcome of my field work was eventually seen as and therefore became classified as a multi-sited and extended ethnography. The asylum seeker and refugee purely (and sometimes merely) had their religious beliefs as the abstract context where the idea of hope and belief propelled them forward. The relaying of the difficulty in joining with the ritual practices often was dangerous and maybe the urgency of the plight did not give them the luxury of dwelling into the philosophical side of happenings. In my case The Friends<sup>(1)</sup> also buffered me from any 'culture shock' I might have experienced on arrival, as I was immediately engrossed in my role as warden which took up a lot of my time and the Quaker community soften the culture shock. Although the culture differences were there, they were subtle and sometimes obscure and therefore not

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<sup>1</sup> Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is the full title of the organisation, but commonly known as the Friends. We use the word in context of the community in that The Friend (written with higher case) would be understood as a member of the Society.

visible, audible or concrete, but the assistance and buffeting from the shock by The Friends made the integration easier and smoother for me. There was however something that did not feel balanced for me; the community that I initially functioned in had no black African members. It was something that I did not know tha

### **Becoming (part of the community)**

The challenge here is from an epistemological perspective: I have experienced the dynamics of arriving in a strange country, where I joined a group and had to secure my place and position with the social structure of the group. I know how it feels to move from a familiar home, family and society to another country where everything is strange and unfamiliar and where I had to re-create my identity and adjust to a different culture. I started to compare myself and my experiences with that of the people that arrived as asylum seeker and refugees. This manifests itself in the field notes, and the conversations with the informants. Moreover it showed in the ethnography.

Ethnography is not simply the description of manners and customs or the elucidation of social and cultural regularities. It is inherently comparative insofar as the ethnographer treats the social and the cultural world he/she is investigating in as distinct from his/her own, and as such at least in its classical and modernist versions, it has a critically creative epistemological effect, if not explicit aim. It calls to attention the limits of one's own social and cultural outlook. (Crapazano 1990, p.305)

As for the limitations of the cultural outlook and how to interpret happenings and interactions, the researcher could from an epistemological view be aware of the issues around moving into a strange country with its different cultural settings. In doing the fieldwork, and then creating the ethnography as a result of the research several issues emerged for me, as the person investing the incoming community. Initially the difficulty arose in trying to establish the cultural distinctions within the new community. It then shifted to the African-ness queries from, and for, the researcher. As the emerging into the group of asylum seekers and refugees became a reality, the thinking around the metaphysics of becoming part of the community came to the fore. The issue for me, as a researcher in the fieldwork stage, was that it was paradoxical at first... as I am a white person (from Africa), but was born and raised in Africa, more exact, in Southern Africa. The paradox image might not be appropriate, but it was an issue for me initially until the community itself gave the approval that assimilation has taken place for me and for them. This again, firstly, secures the observations as a comparative exercise for the



ethnographer. With the first year of arrival I started employment, and it is in the job that the relating observations and comparing started to emerge. This was followed by the knowledge that was gained, and then an understanding, that emerged in the studies undertaken after employment in anthropology.

I experienced a specific emotional feeling when I first saw a black African person walking in the shopping-centre in Teesside. To describe the feeling is difficult for it was a very visceral feeling for me; I had a sensation of ease and comfortableness in that my visual intake of people walking in town had similarities of being 'home'. It felt familiar, and not the same as when I observed the, mostly white, social landscape that I encountered every day when I was walking in the shopping-centers and streets. Whereas before, the picture presented was only local (white and very few Asian-looking) people, it now had black Africans among them. Ergo the starting point of the realisation of the change in the social landscape for me, was that I could sense the difference in the generic social landscape between the before and after of the arrival of the sub-Saharan African people. I felt comfortable and definitely more 'at home'. The knowledge and the feeling of contentment was a positive experience for me.

This seems to place me in a position where I can state that I am an 'insider', and there have been many instances confirming this.<sup>2</sup> There are occasions when I have been introduced, and asked to contribute to debates on the plight of Africans in the Teesside area. As is the African custom, I would request permission from the respected elder/leader to continue, and I would be encouraged to do so. 'For you are African'. In one case, at a SACA meeting, the chairman grabbed my arm and exclaimed, shaking it: "We need to tell Stockton people that **this** is African". The point he was making was, that though my skin is white, and everybody else around the table was black<sup>3</sup>, my beliefs and attitudes, as a member of a minority community who settled in Africa and were oppressed by the British, were 'African'. I was sitting next to him, wearing my usual African jewellery of copper and beaded bangles. I have sometimes attempted to open discussion about this in the context of my own 'identity' as a white South African, with a strong and conservative Boer, Afrikaans background and upbringing, which places me in the role of the oppressor, historically and politically in South Africa. But,

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<sup>2</sup> A research assistant in the Anthropology Dept from the Yeditipe University in Istanbul, Umut L. Kazankaya, came forward with the quote: '*An insider on the periphery of the community*'. This seems to encapsulate the situation I am in.

<sup>3</sup> 'Black' as understood in an African context, and not as in a European context, where the term refers to those of Asian and mixed race as well.

time and time again, I have been assured by significant individuals in the community that I 'am part of them and their community'. Is this merely because I was needed as a 'bridge' between the two groups, the asylum seekers and the refugees and the host society? Only on one occasion with one African individual, was I identified as 'a colonial impostor who invaded the continent'. He was very quickly told that I am African for: 'her ancestors have been there (in Africa) for about three hundred years and she speak African languages.' He continued the debate with me, on this issue, until an occasion rose where I could assist in playing a very supportive role in his life. Afterwards I was invited to his African wedding as one of the few white individuals present. To support my place in the 'insider' role I can quote another situation where I was directly told that I am African. I did a ten month project for the Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) in Stockton where an integration project had to be created between the asylum seeker, refugee and local groups. One of the events was a 'diversity celebration day' at the local theatre. There I was introduced to an African from Newcastle by a Togolese. I greeted him in the African manner I know. He laughed while saying: "Yes, this is a true African<sup>4</sup> Woman".

One problem [etic] in focusing the research entails selecting a perspective for grounding both data collection and an eventual interpretation. This is not so much to do with the relativistic basis of any findings, as a concern that the initial perspective taken combines an appropriate degree of emic and etic assumptions and understanding. Unlike Locke's definition of human cognition, for Gardner (1987) anthropological enquiry does not begin with a blank slate. Even as an African I had my own identity and social perspectives to incorporate in my observations and perhaps the analytical process. The concrete issue is this: being a member of the diaspora African community in the North-East of England, who has been engaged both personally and professionally in its activities and relationships within the Tees Valley area for a number of years, it is difficult for me to be sufficiently detached from its cultural processes to "see" the patterns within them. To employ Bourdieu's term, their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990. p52) is also mine to a considerable extent; especially when sharing in aspects of the life of the community, my behaviour and thoughts become governed by it. Out of long experience, I can predict, it seems to me, the relationship processes that will unfold in any given situation, and already have an implicit cognitive map in my head that guides my inferences. While this enhances empathy, it dilutes detachment, and both are required in

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<sup>4</sup> The expression or classification of 'African' can from the Togolese person, therefore it is his voice and expression I use.

equal measures for appropriate and successful ethnographic reporting. Overcoming the problem by using reflexive analysis to make explicit my implicit understanding, at this stage seems inadequate. I would bring too many taken- for- granted assumptions to the task. Therein lays the conundrum.

At the same time, as a member of other communities also, my subjectivity participates in some of the stereotyping of black “African attitudes”. A concrete example: when working with SACA as its only white board member, my instinctive reaction to the frequent organisational muddles that to me appear to impede business is that “Oh, African men in authority are always like this, lazy and arrogant, and I will have to live with that” (with some exceptions of course). Though this is a feeling shared (often non-verbally) with some of the Black African women present, it is discomforting, and leads to a feeling of discomfort with the proposed research. Do I pre-empt the dilemma and prevent a problem with proactive work; or leave things and just observe?

One solution to the degree of emotional involvement with the participant-informants, who will be collaborating, in the proposed research is to build in a significant element of reflexive analysis right from the start, albeit the logistics of this will require further examination: another is to widen the scope of the enquiry while retaining a focus on social identity in marginal and transitional states of cultural being. There are a number of possibilities in practice.

Participant observation is highly descriptive in its application using the notes, interviews (formal, informal, structured and unstructured), pictures and/or any other agreed method. Being from Africa places me even further into the social structural fold. It does however hold the question of delivering the ethnographic data needed for the decided research focus. Being this far embedded has a difficulty in that one cannot observe with the eye of the ‘outsider’ which often detects more detail (needed for meta-analysis). And how does this impact on the honest and truthful recount of the ethnographer’s writing? The question of bias should also be considered in this equation. Perhaps detachment can occur in the writing, using the lens of theory to analyse events (including my own attitudes) and present written work that is highly reflexive and a useful ethnography.

“...our ability to understand what we see if we are not of that culture, and the ethics of presenting such understandings as fact. They assert that the self of the ethnographer should be decentered in terms of the authority of voice, but at the same time should be in front and centre in the text so that the reader is

constantly aware of how biased, incomplete, and selective are the materials being presented.” (Wolf,1992. p130).

This refers back to how far am I "inside" the community as described above. In meetings, social events, and the drumming group there are indicators from the asylum seeker and refugee group that I am part of the community (this is indicated by e.g. communication where text messages are sent with African phrases and greetings and then the actual message in English). Although it was not all inclusive for there was an occasion where it was noted at a meeting of SACA (where at the time I was the vice-chair) to me that "how can you be African? You are not black", and a few minutes later I am nudged by another refugee from Zimbabwe, and told in such a manner that made it clear that I will understand what is meant: "Ha! How does she know? She is not African" indicating to a local English individual. Does this demonstrate to me that I am a member of the community, or am I to position myself outside that particular group? Where do I place myself then in this context from a subjective point of view? A colleague noted to me that; I am definitely part of the group (inside) but on the periphery of the community.

### **Settling in - assimilation**

Within the daily routine, and the employment opportunity to become part of the university life, the performance of strengthening friendships and connections continued more or less the same with the reinforcing of a friendship with an informant, Hillaire. We shared many important events and moments together; and some these are classified as cultural reference points in the life story of a person. To give an idea about the importance of these social and cultural flashpoints to both of us there are samples of events for instance: He insisted on accompanying me with drumming music into the Quaker Meeting House on my wedding day and continued with the recognition of the important day by performing a 'praise song' (spontaneous and impromptu) at the wedding reception. I was the person that accompanied him to the court hearing that gave him indefinite leave to remain in the UK. He phoned me when his son was born and we worked together on several projects in the North East, mostly in schools. When I was awarded the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Scholarship money he was very excited for me. I discussed with him the issues that might turn up on the journey and what to be aware of in the cultural sense. When his father passed away, I assisted him to go back to Togo to attend the funeral; he in turn gave me a DVD with

the funeral events on it. We both started the process to become British together. We did the exam and applied for a British passport at more or less the same time. He was a month ahead of me in the application process and so on. In Chapter Five his life-story is relayed and in chapter six there is a more in-depth recount of the ethnographic on the interaction between Hilaire and me.

I had some inner doubts and queries about applying for British citizenship. Memories of my mother and grandmother telling me stories, and family narratives of the trauma and sadness that was created by the English during the Anglo-Boer war seems to create a collective memory which affects my feelings; as if I was betraying my country, my blood and ancestors. What would my maternal grandmother say? She was a big influence in my life. As a child, I lived for the time I could sit next to the cooking range in the evenings, listening to her stories and spending time with her and my grandfather. This includes grandmother and me baking bread and making cakes in the selfsame cooking range. Many of her stories centered on the Anglo-Boer war and how her family survived the war. Here I am about to become part of the nation that was responsible for sad and traumatic experiences her family had to endure. This included the ancestors on my father's side too. Now, I am about to embark on becoming British. I will carry a British passport and be a citizen of the United Kingdom. I did however started the preparation for the process, studied the required literature, and had conversations with other people that did the exam. The questions asked in the test and the process has me baffled, but I duly got the books, studied them and enrolled to do the exam. This however was not the difficult part for me; as explained, it was the emotional betrayal that was manifesting in the memories of my maternal grandmother that was worrying me. In trying to deal with this I compared notes with Hilaire, an informant, and we both felt that it was a difficult thing to do; not the actual exam and preparing for the process, but the emotional turmoil that we experienced which centered on our past and the people that are important to us. Both became citizens to make it easier for us and our partners to deal with legal and travelling issues, but we did not want to be seen as disloyal our families in Africa. Again the duality of how we deal with issues on a daily basis in our lives; like the responsibilities towards kin came to the foreground versus the identity created by the kin and the people that surrounded us when we grew up. Anne Whitehead (2009, p126) uses Halbwachs' theme of how we consider our world in childhood and adulthood as being part of a group and not solitary. She states that from the earliest age: "we carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons and are always

enclosed into this group...the group in Halbwachs' understanding, provides the individual with a framework into which her memories are woven".

The betwixt-and-between feeling became more prominent for me during the time I did this naturalizing process, the reading and preparing for the exam. I spoke often and regularly with people like Hilaire and other African refugees who was going through the same exercise. The observation from my side was that there was a similarity in the emotions than I experienced, and the people I spoke to. They all commented on the difficulty of changing their social standing from the perspective of where they are from, to the idea of becoming British. Agreement on the duality of the process was also evident. We had a twofold role to play; one for our loved ones here in the UK and one for the family and kin back home. The times we went home to our country of origin was to attend social event like funerals. Again Hillaire and I had a similar experience in that we both went back to attend the funerals of our parents. We used our British passports to travel to Togo and South Africa, demonstrating the double lives we play out in our new home.

### **Going back to Africa, the refugee trajectory**

In going back and travelling the trajectory of the journey there are many issues that can be highlighted. I visited the refugee camps in East Africa to get an idea of the environment the refugees come from. The main goal was to visit, albeit briefly, and collect the journey-narratives from the refugees that I am able to communicate with. The agreement with the funder was that a trajectory of the possible route by refugees would be followed. The areas decided on, indicated a broad stroke of the trajectory of refugees travelling out of the sub-Saharan Africa areas on the Eastern side of Africa, towards the Mediterranean coast and into Europe. All the logistics were arranged and I set off in doing the journey of the refugees I have got to know in the North East of UK, in reverse. However I am doing what the many refugees in Teesside did; clarify a point of departure, connecting the arrival points and seeking symbolism in the going to somewhere, for the journey to make sense.

I had to wait and sit around in airports, reception areas and even experienced being detained. Therefore my experiences would become a narrative akin to that of my informants too; to be relayed to an audience and do a storyteller's performance of remodeling the story to the relevance and the kind of audience in attendance. In

comparison, I did not have to endure a long-lasting and brutal conflict and other traumatic events which resulted in me making the decision to flee for my life. The decision to make this part of my field work would give me as an ethnographer the experience of being a listener to the narratives that describe the journeys and at the end of the trip, I would be able to tell my story too. In contrast my objective is not to reach a safe place to live, but to experience the environment. Therefore initially or perhaps ultimately, I shall be the outsider during the trip, I will have to move from one place and/or accommodation to the other, negotiate the next part; arrive to start the process all over again. This traveling idea is almost in contrast to the refugee's experience; therefore, can it be seen as a similar experience? Thus the question of comparing the two episodes would not be a useful thing to do. Ethnographical, a sort of evaluation that can be done in that a narrative can be relayed out of the travelling (as with the refugees) but ultimately a reconciliation of the experiences would be futile. "There is no master narrative that can reconcile the tragic and the comic plots of global history" (Clifford, 1988, p. 15). I am not the person who fears for my family's and my own lives, have witnessed severe traumatic events and have walked across the desert, worked as a laborer for several years to hand over all the savings I could accumulate to a trafficker, which then resulted in me traveling in an unseaworthy vessel to, perhaps, Malta. Where, I then have to endure appalling racism and other socially humiliating events and social interaction.

### **Preparation:**

When I recall the feelings at the start of the journey to East Africa, there was a lot of excitement, but as I experienced the difficulties of trying to get access (a letter of permission from the authorities in Nairobi to visit Kakuma refugee camp) to the places I need to go to; I got more and more frustrated and troubled. The next destination was the only thing I focused on and perhaps that is what propelled me forward to reach the goal of finishing the journey. Here I am reminded of the theoretical input of agency where Paul Kockelman (2007, p. 375) where agency is defined and categorized by him and the final category is "...agency is understood as a kind of mediating rationality. This last sense of agency is the most interesting and is basically a restatement of the classical tradition: we make ourselves, but under conditions of our own choosing".

Almost a decade of observation, immersion and accompaniment has been completed. The site of fieldwork would now shift to several sites and the 'field' would take on a different image. George Marcus (1998) observed the movement in Anthropology that

came to the fore and notes that the multi-sited research has an 'entirely new set of problems' (p. 3) and ultimately has to be approached from a different perspective as the boundaries has basically disappeared. Using this opportunity became personal; for the framework the image used was the multi-sited ethnography, but the reflexivity that emerged became a strong driving tool to collecting the narratives and comparing them to the self. Ruben Anderson (2014, p285) describes the field site as 'extended', which may be more suited in this context. Moreover the idea of the journey is a narrative in itself and the observations are part of the experience and remembering the detail as the data collected. The question if the ethnographer is complicit in the sense of becomes part of a community and therefor immersing herself is precarious in this scenario. A negative answer gives the impression that the immersing did not occur, but the observations that are collected give a 'dimension of understanding fieldwork with an independent means' according to Marcus (1998, p. 193). The debate around the issue of this (reflexivity) being a ethnographic tool is ongoing, but for the purpose of this section of the chapter, the reflexivity dimension will be assumed as a kind of inter-subjectivity between the role of the researcher and traveling with a purpose.

#### **With strangers:**

The image of duality as a migrant versus the refugee prevails. Pierre Bourdieu in *The Logic of Practice* (1990, p.21) writes in an explanation of the difficulties around objectivity (as a research tool), that '...by objectifying the objectivity that runs through the supposed site of subjectivity, such as social categories of thought, perception and appreciation [the ethnographer's stand...?] which are the unthought-of principle of all representation of the objective world. ...' Therefor the journal and field notes are a useful research tool and will be seen as that in this context. The indication of reflexivity is indeed also taken up as a tool to interpret the gathered data and seen as part of the analysis for the purpose of the thesis. The arrival in the airport in Nairobi had a feeling of loneliness that is akin to being on your own, in strange place and not knowing anybody and trying to find a place to stay. I was picked up and taken to a pre-arranged accommodation, where nothing was open and functioning until breakfast time; I had to wait several hours before I could settle in a room. The exhaustion of traveling, waiting at airports and the anxiety of leaving loved ones, home and familiar surroundings was evident and the feeling that a long sleep was needed, but this could not be done as the search for the official permission and transport to the refugee camp was pressing, due to the time constraints. The tension in trying to find transport, a relatively reliable driver,



and try making an effort to understand the cultural patterns in the business interaction of negotiating a driver for the week; was just as difficult as it could be for a person leaving their home, trying to find safety and being alone in the world. Sharam Khosravi (2011) gives a poignant description of leaving his family (pp. 22-23) and the emotional turmoil it creates “That morning was, for others, just like any other morning. For me, the sorrow as excruciating after two decades, memory of that morning still evokes enormous pain”.

In acquiring the necessary permission to go to the refugee camp in the North West of Kenya I could arrange travelling to the camp, Kakuma; and again I had to rely on strangers. Not only stranger in the sense of not knowing the person, but it also included the language, the social and cultural environment. I was lucky in that I was assisted by people that ‘knew people in Kenya’ and arrangements sort of rolled on from there and the next person could put me in contact with an individual that ‘knew the right people’ in the next stage of travelling. This movement forward, using the social contact at that time, as the reference point; can refer me to the next stage of the journey and/or to the next group or individual. Thus, I travelled to the destinations guided by strangers who introduced me to more strangers, but they all assisted in the moving forward to the end destination turned out to be a common feature in the narratives of the refugees that I got to know as my informants. It (again) assisted with moving forward to the next destination, even though it might be difficult and frustrating. From an ethnographic perspective, it had me observing with a different eye for I had a short period to gather information and take in the social environment. I had to be focused and sure about what I wanted out of the exercise. This sharpened the observation to a narrow theme namely collecting the narratives. That is how eventually, after the waiting and going back to the office to get official permission; I got to the refugee camp. Even here, I was handed to two strangers who took me around the camp for the day making sure I got what I requested. I was taken to observe the processes starting with the arrival. Then housing, which also had its own chronicle of firsts, namely, the tent and eventually a bricks and mortar house in the camp. Food distribution was next and then education and medical clinics. I was introduced to people with whom I could have brief conversations with; some in English and translation was provided when needed. I was taken to the various sections in the camp that was created and inhabited by national groups; e.g., I was treated to a meal in a hotel in the Eritrean section. This area was enclosed and at night the entrance (a large gate manned by an Eritrean) was closed. This, the refugees explained, was to protect them from rival national groups e.g. the neighboring Somalis

and the local Turkana. Throughout the tour of the camp, stopping often to be shown something, talk to refugees, or some event described and explained, I could detect a large settled habitation with many sections (even suburbs as in a large town or city) each with its own distinctive profile. This included a business area/section in the camp and the inevitable pockets of shops and other businesses. Similar to the corner-shop in the UK with the daily necessities on the shelves, therefore the urban presentation is a reality in this refugee camp. Ruth Russell (2003. p839) wrote in her field notes describing the first two nights Kakuma refugee-camp: "Sleep came the first night as we listened to the quiet singing and chanting of nearby Turkana gathered around a warming campfire. The next night, a Friday, we had trouble going to sleep as we endured the electronic sounds of rock music blasting out of a "night club" set up for young people of the area in a hut across the road." (Hospitality was clearly something that has been part of the camp workers' remit. I arrived with a stranger (a driver arranged for me by the informal driver in Nairobi) and was handed over to a stranger, the manager of a charity operating in the camp who in turn handed me over to the next set of strangers (a driver and guide in the camp) which had been responsible for showing me the camp and how it operates.

In Cairo, initially the experience was different. I had to rely on the usual tourist package. Once I have settled in the hotel and found my way around the transport possibilities. I did my visit to the All Saint's refugee Centre. There I met and talked to refugees and workers including the pastor/vicar of the church. The Refugee Centre is based on the church premises. My travelling timetable was limited and I had to leave for Libya after a few days. At the airport I was detained for the officials decided that the e-visa for Libya was not satisfactory. I was told to wait and numerous attempts were made to make me understand that a bribe/money would get me on my way. I was conscious that I was responsible to the funder and refused. I missed my plane, and in theory was stranded in a place where there was no social support that I could fall back on. I made my way back to the All Saints Refugee Centre, the only familiar place I knew in the city. There when I got out of the taxi, the refugee on security and guard duty at the church gates recognized me, and after I explained my situation, he organized accommodation at the Church. The relief was overwhelming. I spent the next week waiting in queues, at the embassies (UK and Libya) where I eventually got the necessary stamp in my passport. I was assisted by a complete stranger in the street in front of the Libyan embassy. He translated the English into Arabic in the passport, which meant I can leave and get to Libya.

At the accommodation, I got to know people better; for there were daily conversations with refugees and workers. Here the possibility of being moved forward with the support of strangers occurred in clandestine ways, like the man in the street that wrote the translated Arabic for me, which meant I could get to Tripoli.

An entry in the personal diary I kept during fieldwork:

“I kept introducing myself to people over and over. I get some good interviews from the interaction, and sometimes it does not work. My sister in a communication to South Africa, asked once if this is tiring (skype)... No, not really, just lonely in a way as I have to move to the next place in a short space of time: just enough time to recognize faces and be greeted regularly, but not enough time to get deeper involved into people’s lives...” (date of entry: 8 July 2010).

The week extra gave me the opportunity to get to know more refugees and listen to their stories. I became a familiar face in the little open, public space in front of the Church. One of the events that took place at that time was a wedding. Both the bride and groom were Sudanese and the wedding guests were mostly from the refugee community. I was told to join the celebrations, even when I explained that I was not invited and I had no connections with the family etc. The answer came back from Pastor Emmanuelle who was sitting the group of people and me: “Hah... this is an African wedding, you are invited.” Eventually after negotiating many queues and institutions (without a male family member or husband doing the arrangements) I manage to get the necessary documents and tickets and could fly to Tripoli. This placed me in a position where I can add rich detail to my own narrative as a traveller doing the trajectory of some refugees. I was detained at the airport. This incident alone is one section in my narrative that can be comparable with the refugees that I have had contact with over the years.

In Tripoli, a good friend from Durham University collected me. It was good to see the familiar faces of his family, especially the children. In Durham, I met the family regularly in a formal and informal setting, and became friends with his wife. Thus, I was not passed on to him and his family by strangers, but was met by him (a friend) at the airport in Tripoli. Due to the time constraints and the protective behaviour by the family, I could not really venture out to meet many refugees, but was taken by him to a Coptic Church just outside the city. I got some information from the people that were available, and could go to a service the following day (Sunday). There a young woman (Maria) who could speak English escorted me. She assisted and translated necessary information to me. I had to leave my shoes outside the door, with all the many pairs of

shoes that belonged to the churchgoers. This is a Coptic service and attended by the Sudanese, Somalia, and Eritrean people in Tripoli. By attending the service, I could, at least, feel that I was observing a sort of snapshot of the lives of the refugees. Being a stranger made me stand out in the service. I was treated as a guest; for example, I was pushed to the front of the church to be the first to receive the communion. To be able to do that, I had to step over the few prostrated women in the front to the church. It made me feel as if I was the guest visiting the church, and not a stranger in this case.

I was frustrated; the shortened time possibilities in Tripoli, and my host and his family, although trying hard to understand my quest, insisted on taking me to as many tourist sites and meeting the extended family as part of their show of hospitality. This took up most of my time in Tripoli; this was where I was supposed to observe, witness the preparation towards Europe and if possible collect more narratives with regards to the journey towards Europe and safety. As the next place was Malta, and I was going to be relying on my own exploring and not be a guest of a person and/or a family that was arranged beforehand. I was hoping that it will give me with better opportunities to collect stories and understand the movement and motivation of the refugee and asylum seeker as the transnational community trying to get to safety.

The island of Malta has its own distinctive approach to incomers. It is a very small island and with the island of Lampedusa (part of the Sicilian islands), is seen as the central Mediterranean landing place for asylum seekers and refugees coming into Europe via boats from North Africa. Here the social situation is highly political and difficult for the refugees (or migrants as they are known) in Malta. Arriving in Malta I experienced a different emotion than before. I knew that I was in Europe and somehow more relaxed for I could speak English to the locals. I could rely on myself to get information and get around on the public transport, in relative safety. I could even arrange a meeting (coffee) with one of my lecturers in Valetta, the capital of Malta. That occurred the day after I arrived in Malta. The interesting thing that happened to me was, that I automatically wanted to cover my head with a headscarf when I saw him approaching me. For several weeks, I had been wearing a headscarf that covered my hair whenever I went out in public. This became important after I was accosted in Cairo and my hair was touched and stroked by a strange man in public while passing me. I lifted the scarf I was wearing around my neck onto my head and folded the ends around my face. With the lecturer approaching, I realized that I have seen him many times before in Durham, without covering my hair and I let the scarf fall back onto my

shoulders. Covering my head was not necessary but it still felt awkward to me. The past six weeks I covered my hair when going into the streets and any time I talked to a man. It took a few minutes of conversation with him to not have the urge to cover my hair.

I managed to arrange meetings with refugee/migrant centre workers and other people that are involved with this issue. Here I had to resort to the 'who knows who' scenario again. Connections and friends assisted in me gaining entrance to most centres housing the migrants. The friends were people I assisted in the UK (Durham) when they needed a guide. Reciprocity came to a full circle with them, helping me; with introductions to people that, I can interview. This included the possibility of showing me around the migrant centres throughout Malta. This in turn brings me back to the awareness of being in transit with a purpose and going forward to the next point with the assistance of outsiders and strangers. I was shown several refugee centres and camps; and interviews were set up with workers, refugees and officials. All the visits and interviews were much easier than the African experience; I felt at ease in the European setting and the language was not an issue either which had me more relaxed. Even when taken into a refugee centre, offered a meal and to share a shisha pipe with a group of men, mostly Muslim, was a relaxed experience. I collected rich and descriptive narratives of the journey to Europe from their (mostly) east African countries, and could ask questions which were answered with sincerity. Most conversations were long (many hours spent talking) and became an exchange of stories with the sub-Saharan asylum seekers and refugees, when it became known that I am South African.

## **Conclusion**

Lisa Dikomitis (2004, p. 8) writes eloquently about being an anthropologist of the border and dual and cross cultural issues and where to place herself:

As long as I do research on Cyprus I will always position myself somewhere in-between, as ethnography itself is an in-between. My field journal reflects vividly my fear of falling into the margins of one extreme, becoming a complete insider, or a complete outsider. Quite often I feel like Janus, a person with two 'identities'. I struggle not quite knowing who they want me to be today, let alone that I know who I am today: A Cypriot girl or a European anthropologist, or something in-between.

For now, in Malta the ethnographic observation, hereby the auto-ethnographic perspective, is that the movement would be less layered, perhaps taken more time to get to when I needed to be and/or not be able to go to places that were extremely useful for the collecting of specific data. This might be problematic as this can become a kind of self-quest and there is the danger that the analysis and the reflexivity can become muddled. Care needs to be taken not to move the content away from the core of the ethnography; the movement of the refuges on the one side and then the ethnographer on the other. The two demands need to be distanced from each other as two different presentations of ethnography; one with a reflexive perspective and the other focusing on research questions and observations that can be analysed. The one is explored with objectivity and other dynamics folded into the acts for the researcher has to be immersed into the field of research albeit the community where as the auto-ethnographical perspective is more an observation of oneself in the field. “In this move to shift the personal to the distanced “social”, a multi-sited canvas or space of ethnographic research emerges almost naturally”, according to Marcus (1989, p. 15).



# Part Two:

## Ethnography

## **Chapter Five**

### **Life-stories**

Although the demarcations between types of oral data are not always clear, a life-history is generally distinguishable from other kinds of oral documentation as “an extensive record of a person’s life told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography. (Langness, 1965 cited by Susan Geiger (1986, p. 336))

#### **Introduction**

Four life-stories of the main informants will be presented in this section. These individuals have been generous with their stories, to not only me, but also willing to share the stories with institutions like Teesside Archives in Middlesbrough. Some life-stories were collected, processed and stored by the Teesside Archives (see Appendix 3). The four main informants in the field with whom I co-operated, have diverse stories as they are from West Africa, Sudan (Nilo-Saharan) and Central Africa that represent sub-Saharan Africa. These stories demonstrate the complications and anxieties the asylum seeker has to endure which does not stop when they become refugees. Modern Africa has currently fifty-three countries. Each country has its complicated, problematic and often violent history, blended inevitably with a European colonial past. Historically, at the end of the nineteenth century, Europe staked claims to practically the entire continent. The European authorities ‘drew lines’ when creating new nations for them to rule, which resulted in the division of thousands of tribes, chiefdoms and ethnolinguistic groups. Moreover, the local population had to adopt the European ways of which country colonised them, and being ruled by that country’s administrators. Halfway through the twentieth century many countries, which fought constantly for independence, achieved independence from their colonial European country. The aftermath, often riddled with political conflict and other hardships that had to be endured. The informants are people who were involved and/or caught up in these political problems of their countries that resulted in them becoming asylum seekers. The first two life-stories are available in the Middlesbrough Archives and the last two individuals in this chapter are two informants whose life-stories are powerful testimonies demonstrating the experiences asylum seekers and refugees endure.



## **Zimbabwe: Herbert Dirahu**

Zimbabwe, formerly known as Southern Rhodesia and then Rhodesia, was ruled by Great Britain till 1980, when it gained independence. Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister and subsequently continued being Prime Minister, consolidating his power in December 1987. He was declared Executive President by parliament, combining the roles of head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, with powers to dissolve parliament. His ruthless approach resulted in ethnic cleansing of the Ndebele supporters, his rivals at the time. He has continued to rule in a ruthless and brutal manner until the present day. (Meredith, 2006).

### **Herbert's story**

Herbert is from the Shona tribe, which comes from in the northern regions of Zimbabwe. He grew up in the rural countryside where life was hard. He lived with his grandparents who were subsistence farmers. He started his schooling there, but also had to do his share of the work on the farm. He had to help with ploughing (with oxen), planting, weeding, harvesting and herding the cattle and goats. They lived on what was harvested. For secondary school he moved to Bulawayo where his father got a job and the family (nine in total) lived in a very rough area in one room. He completed secondary school with difficulty and went on to train as a teacher. He met his wife, Sisa, while teaching. To be able to marry her, he had to negotiate a good 'lobola' (bride-price). After the wedding, Sisa and he settled in Bulawayo, where he got a job as a history teacher in a large local school. Sisa was also teaching until their first child, a girl, was born. He became the Head of Department in the Secondary School where he was teaching. One day in the staff room, he made some remarks about the historical 'rightful owners' of the land, meaning the San tribe. This was noted and subsequently he was warned that his life was in danger. Sisa was pregnant at the time with their second child. The decision to leave for the UK was not made lightly. He is the eldest child who has the responsibility to support the rest of the family in need and is responsible to his parents and grandparents for care. However, the decision was made. He managed to get hold of a plane ticket with the help of a friend and on the arranged morning, he took his school bag, which only contained the usual books, teaching aids and sandwiches for his lunch. He knew he was being watched and if stopped, they (the political authorities) would only find the usual day-to-day school things on him. He had his passport with him too. He said good-bye to Sisa – as per usual – and pretended to go to school. He escaped his

'watchers', got to the airport, boarded a plane and flew to the UK. Upon arrival he asked for asylum at the airport and was duly taken to the detention centre. There he was given his asylum documents and a lawyer was appointed to represent his asylum case. He does not remember much of this time for it was all intensely strange to him. Shortly afterwards he was dispersed to the North East where he was given accommodation in a house which he shared with other men from Africa (North, West and East Africa). He immediately investigated the possibility of voluntary work and started doing this in several organisations. One of the organisations was the charity I managed. As I know Bulawayo as a city, we got chatting and reminisced about the area and familiar places. He duly went through the court procedures and was given indefinite leave to remain. This gave him refugee status which allowed him to work at that time. He started work and has moved to his third job in almost five years – each time a promotion. He also completed his MA in Youth Studies at Teesside University. As soon as he could, he sent for Sisa (a few months after he got refugee status and found employment) and the two little girls. The youngest was just a baby when she arrived. The above is from his Life-story in the archives. His life continued in Teesside.

He was interviewed by the BBC (Radio 4) as an asylum seeker to highlight the plight of Zimbabweans to the British public. At that time, no Zimbabweans were sent back and their cases were fast-tracked by the courts, due to the media coverage of Robert Mugabe's brutal political regime and behaviour. He is considered an elder in the local black community and has initiated the group called Stockton African Caribbean Association (SACA) which has been very active in promoting and taking up black and refugee issues in the Teesside area, mostly Stockton-On-Tees. SACA arranged a conference (May 2005) where local authorities and schools could attend to hear and discuss the issues around asylum seekers and refugees. He has assisted in many local community issues which range from neighbour disputes, bullying of black asylum seeking and refugee children in the local schools and supporting people from the asylum seeking and refugee community who are picked up by the police. He initiated a research group to investigate the performance and attainment of black children in local schools.

He continued with his observations: "They (local institutes and health authorities) come with their questions e.g. have the research/project been beneficial to you? (The Black community)... and all that. But they come with **their questions**; they do not ask us what **we** would like to be investigated..." (1 April 2005). This is his narrative from the

archives in Middlesbrough in a shortened form, but his life continues in Teesside up until the present day.

He became very active in the community and became a respected voice for the Zimbabwean community and asylum seeking and refugee people in Teesside. He also had to assist in a situation where the local asylum seeker and refugee medical general practice, called Arrival Surgery, had to be approached to smooth over some cultural misunderstandings between the young GP and the Sub-Saharan asylum seeker and refugee community. The asylum seeker and refugee football team was given some T-shirts with this message on: 'Get tested' – referring to HIV, donated by the Arrival Surgery. This angered the incoming people from Sub-Saharan Africa for they thought that this pointed accusing fingers to them, bringing the virus to the area even though there are British people in the North East who are HIV positive and became positive before the asylum seekers arrived. The issue was put before the SACA committee and I was asked by Herbert to facilitate between the Arrival Surgery and the football team. When asked why they were angry the explanation was given that: "no one asked us, this is just given to us". The GP was approached and the explanation was given that the community feels uncomfortable about not being involved with the message on the shirts. He apologised and asked if they would be able to wear the T-shirts at a match. They agreed.

In a conversation I had with Herbert he insisted that they (the asylum seekers and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa) have to integrate with the local host community for: "...it is the way we can survive in this country, for is so different from where we are from."

He explained a situation on arrival in the U.K. "It was in my mind all the time...What is going to happen to me? And it took over...the stress was very high..., (sighs) it (my safety, my family and the future) was in my mind all the time". He was placed in the North East in a house he shared with other men from Africa. "I lived with people in the same predicament so...he thought a few seconds, it becomes a shared problem. The men coped with their stresses by socialising and drinking, I coped with Bible studies. There were two Jehovah Witness people who came to the door and we talked. I ended up having meals with them at the church and this was my decoy." He mentions that his church (Seventh Day Adventist Church) was not very active in assisting the asylum seekers and refugees. He did not feel that he made close friends with the men in his

house for they had different ways of coping and ‘lifestyle’ as he calls it. He used the members of the church and the voluntary work he did, for human interaction. He explained the volunteering helps to cope with the ‘loneliness and missing my family, my wife and kids – specially my wife, and then the extended family, for remember (a pause)...I am the first born (eldest) grandson’. He also frequented Apollinaire’s hairdressing and barber shop where a lot of men from the asylum seeker and refugee community tended to gather.

He clarified that his grandfathers played a big role in shaping him: “They were a big influence and closely shaped my life and world view. My maternal grandfather told me lots of stories and my paternal grandfather through his behaviour, for he was a hard worker, a farmer. I thought about them a lot when I was waiting<sup>1</sup>. After all, I am from the Shona tribe. He repeated this with stronger body language by lifting his right hand and index finger pointing and bringing it down and nodding as he said it again. I am Shona ...jhaa. It is a mistake to lose my culture<sup>2</sup>. I will always be a Shona, but flexibility is necessary. I will insist on lobola<sup>3</sup> for my daughters, even if it is just a symbolic gesture from their suitors, but the aunties<sup>4</sup> need to deal with that”. He also sends money home regularly to his extended family.

He has mentioned several times that he had to work hard to adjust to the ‘English way’. He phoned me and explained that he was cooking (first time he cooked a meal for his daughters because Sisa was attending a class. She enrolled to do a social work course at Teesside University) and expressed that ‘if I was home now the servant girl<sup>5</sup> would be there to do this’. He once in conversation claimed that the adjustment he had to make is a positive one (he now knows how to Hoover), but “if I go home to the rural areas and wash the pots they – the men – would laugh at me and the people will not believe that a man will do a woman’s job.” He is also perplexed by the welfare system the UK Government has. Zimbabwe is not a country that subscribes to social support, but here

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<sup>1</sup> The expression: *waiting* refers to the waiting period to acquire *refugee* status from asylum *seeking* status. This may be several months or in some cases years, and would often include several court hearings.

<sup>2</sup> Sharing common history, norms and values? This is how he explained it when I asked him what it means to him.

<sup>3</sup> Bride-price.

<sup>4</sup> The ‘aunties’ are older women, often kin (the mother’s sisters) or close friends of the mother who will guide young girls into the social practices of courting and start the negotiating of the *lobola*.

<sup>5</sup> These would be young girls from rural areas sent to work for a family who would be responsible for their education, in return for caring for the children, cooking and cleaning. A stipend would be paid – sent to her family - but her education would be deemed as payment, as it would make her a suitable wife, thus increasing her *lobola*.

in the UK there are benefits for the disabled and unemployed. He is impressed by the fact that people get a job if they apply for the post and go through the process. Nepotism is rife in the social domain he comes from. He reads the Zimbabwean newspapers every day to know what is happening 'back home', and he made a statement: "that the ultimate dream – remember I use the word: dream – for all Zimbabweans is that they will experience peace". He is adamant that he will go back one day for he misses his extended family: "... for they are "part of me".

### **Cameroon: Tanjong Ta' Tajocho Eugene**

The former French and British colonies eventually became Cameroon of the present day. After World War 1, a single nation was divided into three parts governed by two colonial powers (French and British). New political parties formed in French Cameroon after WW2, pressing for independence.

Following independence in 1960, the antagonism between the north and south blossomed into a full-scale rebellion. Thousands were ruthlessly killed and a state of emergency was declared that lasted two decades. The Union Camerounaise held onto power and its leader, Ahmadou Ahidjo, a northerner and ardent Muslim, became president.

French Cameroon achieved independence in 1960 as the Republic of Cameroon. The following year the largely Muslim northern two-thirds of British Cameroon voted to join Nigeria when asked to decide their future in a UN organised plebiscite. The largely Christian southern third voted to join with the Republic of Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon forming a single republic 11 years later. The formerly French and British regions each maintained substantial autonomy.

Cameroon thereby became a federal republic encompassing East Cameroon (the former French territory) and West Cameroon (the former British territory). In 1972 Cameroon's federal status was revoked and the country became the United Republic of Cameroon. (Meredith: 2005, p 69)

### **Tanjong's story**

Tanjong grew up in the South-West province of Cameroon, which is French speaking, and is a member of the Banwa tribe. When asked what the word 'tribe' means he said:

“It tells me exactly where I am from...the ethnic ways you will have...” His tribe is a small group and are deemed to be an ethnic minority. He is the second born of six siblings (four male and two female). He was a student (he completed a Physics degree and part of a medical degree and one year of accountancy) and he lived and grew up with his grandfather in a small town. He had to go to a rural area and stay with his aunt for safety in the last year before his flight.

He got involved in politics as a student that resulted in him being persecuted and imprisoned. When released he had to leave for his safety and went to live with his aunt, but his presence became a problem for his extended rural family. He got given a plane ticket by a friend, and walked for two days to the nearest airport which was in Dowola. There he boarded a plane for the first time in his life. He remembers being very scared and confused. He recalls: “I looked out of the window, I was shaking and tears was coming out of my eyes and there was mixed emotions. This was terrifying. I was leaving my family and loved ones, my...grandfather...behind. I was also flying for the first time.” He landed in the UK and made his way to the Home Office building, Lunar House, in Croydon. This was on advice given to him by a ‘friend’ at the airport. There he stood in a queue, with other asylum-seekers, the whole day. Eventually at about five o’clock an official saw him. He got given a ‘ticket’, instructions and directions to the hostel. He asked around, but got lost and eventually a kind barrister (who works in Lunar House) offered him a bed for the night. He was “very confused” especially after he could not find the hostel. Early the next day he went back to Lunar House as instructed and again waited in the queue the almost whole day. Late afternoon he was given an appointment and given documents to sign and taken into room where his photo was taken (this was recalled in detail by him “they asked me to stand like this... and then like that... and they took the photos’). He compared this with being treated as if he had done something ‘criminal’. He described the only feeling he was aware of was being ‘very scared’, at this stage. He then changed over to describing his feelings as: ‘pain’. He stated: “It was painful, but I have learned how to deal with pain for it takes over the body and that rules everything”. After that he was put in a car by the border agency staff and driven around London for ‘the whole night’ until dawn, where he discovered he was still in London and taken to the detention centre (he was told) for removal. He thought he was being returned to Cameroon. The next morning he was taken to court, introduced to his solicitor (whom he did not trust) and also a barrister

(whom he liked and who took trouble to get to know his situation). He had never been in a court room, and again he described the situation as confusing. He was not sure what was happening and explained it as a “network of feelings” which was mostly ‘painful and stressful’: “I did not know what was happening tomorrow...but could make no sense out of yesterday”. He compared the Cameroonian prison with the detention centre in London and claims that the only difference is the level of hygiene and cleanliness. The rest, i.e. the treatment and experience is just as stressful. Even the detention centre is described as a prison by him.

The court ruled that he could continue with the asylum seeking process – but not fast-tracked and he was taken to a ‘hotel’. This was acceptable for it was like a ‘family’ to him. “We lived like a family (of asylum seekers) there, for there were people like me and (when questioned on what he perceives as a family) we looked after each other. We greeted each other and supported each other and when you are in pain you are helped...there is someone there for you. You just live your life and allow it to unfold”. It is at this stage he started to say the expression: “you never know” several times over and over, often starting his sentences with it.

He was dispersed to the Northeast and taken to Middlesbrough by bus with other asylum-seekers from the centre where he was. They were transported at night and could not see anything nor could they be seen. He questions this practice and would like to know why they were brought to their destination in the dark. He was given small amount of money, a place to stay (his accommodation was a small flat) and some information regarding being an asylum seeker which included the legal process. He did not know anybody and could not cook. He had never cooked a meal in his life and explained that: “it is a woman’s job” so he lived on ‘fruits and bread’ the first few weeks. He felt very lonely. There is a park opposite his accommodation and kids played football there every day. He watched them and eventually joined in the game. “I needed to talk to someone in the day and needed human contact just to make sure I was still there” and later on he said: “Children respond differently from adults”. He did not want to go into why he said that, but he continued to get correspondence from the Home Office and was given assistance by North East Refugee Centre. He was appointed a case worker to assist him in his asylum case. He continued to live there for a year and four months when he received a letter from Home Office stating; that he is not entitled to refugee status, and is a failed asylum seeker. This included no recourse to public

funding, accommodation and other support asylum seekers get. He had to leave the accommodation immediately. He arranged to stay with friends in Newcastle. Thus, in theory, he is classified as homeless. He had a girlfriend (Trinidadian medical student who left for her internship in Trinidad) but as she has left, he cannot not see the relationship continuing into the future. He decided to put in fresh claim for seeking asylum. This meant starting the process all over again. He duly put in another claim for seeking asylum.

On being asked to describe what he thinks his life is like now he explained that: “I have no control over my life or how I deal with things. I cannot set any targets and I cannot go towards a point. I was offered counselling but I only went once... (stayed quiet for a while) it was too difficult for me and I do not want to be reminded...As it is, I am still waiting (this refers to the court ruling which will give him his refugee status and thus leave to remain in the UK) and I do not know” – the last few words he repeated several times. He has been to court six times and still no outcome. He also started to compare the Cameroonian prison again with the British detention system. “In Cameroon the guard will beat you over and over...he gets three thousand francs per month, he does not know...because he is ignorant, but here in the UK the guards get a lot of money and they know about psychological torture methods to let you suffer...” The last sentence is followed by silence.

From a cultural point of view he described his life before fleeing as follows: I lived with my grandfather who is a practising herbalist. He knows about magic and uses dreams for guidance. “He would go into the woods and come back with a certain plant for a certain person who might be ill or in distress and he would say that his father told him about the plant while he was in the woods”. His grandfather would often talk and discuss his dreams with Tanjong. When I asked Tanjong to tell me more about this, he did not want to give any more information on his grandfather – he claims it is too difficult to talk about. He would resume his life-story from when he started his life in Middlesbrough as an asylum seeker, before his claim to asylum was rejected, where the accommodation he has was a room with a bed and cupboard in. He did not do any beautifying and kept the walls empty... “I just do not believe I am here. I do not know” (repeated several times). He tries to phone to let his family know he is still alive, but feels that he does not have enough time/money to talk as long as he needs. He has not sent any photos of himself to his grandfather – feels that he does not live here, only



existing on a day-to-day level. Home is far away and he does not want to think about where he might be in five years' time. He ends (after nearly an hour where he expresses that he is beginning to feel anxious) with: "One never knows" which he repeats several times again.

Five years on and Tanjong was still in Newcastle as a failed asylum person, and is doing various study courses to keep busy, including an accountancy course. He was effectively still 'waiting' and is in limbo. He cannot move forward with his life and he cannot go back to Cameroon to resume his old life, for that is no more according to him. He is fortunate that he has a friend who offers him accommodation and food in return for looking after the house when the friend goes on extended holidays. He spends the days reading and walking around. He is in a relationship with a local teacher which, when he mentions it, he smiles. His life-story is used for it illustrates the frustrations and loneliness experienced by an asylum seeker and a young man at that. It is not a complete detailed life-story, but a good sample of how the asylum seeker chose to disclose some information to people they trust. He is still in contact with me and text me now and then to let me know he is still here.

The latest news is that he and his new girlfriend (a British Citizen) decided to get married. This involved him going back to Cameroon after they got married. From there he can re-enter the United Kingdom as a spouse. Unfortunately as he had to be presented to the authorities (the marriage office needed proof of identification etc.) when they got married, he was then arrested by the border agency and deported back to Cameroon. His wife followed him to Cameroon and they applied for him to join her in the UK. After six months in Cameroon he could enter the UK as the spouse of a British Citizen. Two years later, he is now living in Newcastle with his new wife.

### **Togo: Hilaire Agnama**

The background of Togo's political and historical problems are based on a violent, military and political coup by a soldier when he shot dead the president (Sylvanus Olympio). The soldier (Eyedéma) continued to rule Togo.

Conflict in Togo has been prevalent for a long time. The president, Gnassingbe Eyedema, remained in power for the illustrious period of 28 years, making him the longest presiding president in Africa's history. He managed to cling to power come what may, surviving military coups and assassination attempts, while

managing to foil demands of democratisation time and again, and holding firm when pro-democracy movements erupted in demonstrations and protests in the early nineties, inspired by similar movements in neighbouring Benin, Gabon, and then Zaire. (Lovell, 2014)

The country's political rule is based on military rule and not a democratic political system this is deeply problematic for the Togolese.

### **Hillaire's story**

Hillaire was born in a village in the south of Togo called Akumape, but soon after his birth his father moved to Agbudafo also called Porto Seguru (safe harbour in Portuguese) and that is where he grew up. "Everything is from that village, my culture, my education everything". He is from the Ewe area and speaks Ewe, but says that his ethnic background is Wahi. However, he confesses that he does not speak Waci (but he understands it). He says that he was born in a traditional African family, believing in traditional religion - everything very much connected to the ancestors and nature. He is flexible regarding his religion, but remains traditionally African "I like very much my African religion".

Family is a big thing for him: "it is very close to me, it is important". He feels that he is very fortunate to have been born into this family. He will begin by talking about his extended "big" family, for that is how he relates to family. Then he will talk about his nuclear family.

His father is retired but still very busy as he is the keeper or 'depository' of the history of the village. "My father is the chief of the traditions in my village". Hillaire's father is seen as the guardian of the traditions in the village and the extended family. He is clean living - "he does not drink". His mother is a housewife and business woman who sells agricultural products. His father had four wives, which created the large family profile. Hillaire has four full brothers and a half-sister who was raised by his biological mother and four other half siblings (9 siblings in total).

"I shall start this by saying I love Togo. As a student I was distributing leaflets asking for more freedom, but all my friends and colleagues were arrested, imprisoned and tortured". He was very involved with politics as a student. Then in 1993 everything collapsed when all ties with other countries were cut and to use his words: "Togo stopped." This is due to the dictatorship it was under. "I started my education in my village with the primary school run by Protestants. Yes...a Christian school, I then went

to secondary school and after that to a technical school in the centre of Togo. There I finish in 1988. I then studied at the university in Lomé (capital of Togo); there I did three years in electrical engineering, and a teaching diploma.”

He started his teaching career, and was teaching electrical engineering from 1993 till 1999. During that time this was very difficult, as resources were scarce - almost non-existing with often no salaries paid. It resulted in many strikes by the teachers and students. A teachers’ union was initiated and organised by concerned teachers and students. He ran for the presidency of the teachers’ union.

“I saw how many students were living in poverty. I was poor, but with pride (dignified) instead of with blood on my hands. I chose to do something for my country. I ran for president of the union to organise the fight for our rights and fight against corruption. It was a legitimate fight and I was proud to do it. I was pinpointed as a troublemaker by the ruling party. They sent me away to shut me up. I was sent to Pya in 1996. It is mainly a camp, a military camp for the government, so they thought they shut me up, but I continued to campaign. It is a difficult place to be; people find it difficult to go into strike, do anything for themselves. That is a difficult place to be: it got me into many troubles again; I don’t want to go into that for we will be here the whole day, but I started the union again in Pya. So to finish me I was sent to the toughest, harshest place, the extreme north of the country, where the climate is very very harsh; very cold and very hot. It is on the border between Togo and Burkina Faso. I was sent there in 1998, and I got myself into trouble again in there trying to... the north is completely under the ruling political party and military... in the south we can speak, but in the north, you are the personal property of the president. In the north you cannot speak at all: that is the end of you...it got me into trouble, and I had to leave after seeing my property, my belongings destroyed – again I do not want to go into details here, but it was a serious situation which brought me no choice but to leave; it was a tough decision to leave my country.”

He had travelled to neighbouring countries previously to explore and see for himself how life was there. This was done during the teaching time when he had breaks and could travel. He visited Ghana, Benin and Burkina Faso.

“The first time I went into exile I went to Benin where I spent two years – it was a painful time. I came in to UK in 2001. I left from Benin. I arrived in Dover where I

claimed asylum and spent two weeks in Dover before being dispersed to Sunderland and from Sunderland, Stockton and spend nearly two years in Stockton before moving to Middlesbrough.”

The interviewer for the life-story project then asked what were his expectations, dreams and fears in arriving in the UK.

“Expectations? I wanted to be safe.... I wanted things I was not able to in Togo. I wanted to participate in the decision-making of the place where I live in I say that.... – Fears? A lot... of the unknown. I don’t know what I am going to see, where I am going. Hope? The future will be brighter .That was all I was thinking when I arrive... Yeah. Yes In a sense I fulfilled my expectations. This is central to my life, participation, being part of a community, being just seen as a member of a community. Doing what is good for others my expectations are reached. I am ok“

Difficulties;

“The biggest difficulty is isolation. That was the time of very few Africans in Stockton - we would run after each other calling Hallo... hallo ...where you from are...things like that. I met very nice people from Stockton. The second barrier is the language. I am originally French speaking. I found it is difficult to communicate. The lack of language made me perceive things differently as they should be ...really. When you cannot communicate you are afraid... ashamed... you feel watched you feel... you don’t feel secure... very, very frustrating when you can’t speak cannot express. I think... the language barrier is the biggest. More than isolation...I am one of these people that can make it...I will be part of society... language is that biggest barrier. .. “

He went to the ESOL classes to learn English and the effort he put in got him speaking and communicating with English people. He did volunteer work and became part of a community in a short time. He is perplexed about: “How the English culture is reliant on the government e.g. if a child is behaving badly you have to call social services... in Togo a child is part of the whole community. The traditional belief system is important... your ancestors walk with you... I have not seen any of that there”.

The interviewer then ask if there are any similarities he noticed:

“The people are the same all over... I find the attitude of the government frustrating.”

“My work is working with people... I feel totally part of this community... Respect for others – how you address people and listen and be compassionate. .. To answer your question, I feel attached to the country and the people... I want to learn about the history of this country... it is the way to connect...English people ... I have many friends... I help people and people help me – that is how I feel part and valued by the community”.

How do you keep your identity?

“Yeh... very much...Hilaire is from Togo... Hilaire believes in my ancestors, Hilaire believe community is important Hilaire believe his culture is important. He should play a part in everything. Through everything... their culture and education. So I keep it and I want to share it. It is only when we know more about others... we can live more in harmony. I believe my culture is important. Everything, so I keep it...It is only l when we know more about others... where they live... what they wear, and how they think ...we can live more in harmony and cohesion in society ... “

The next question was what his occupation is and how he contributes to society in general. He does a lot of volunteering work and helps Africans to settle in Teesside. He talks to them about the differences in culture and also does a lot of translation for court cases. He is a member of the drumming group in Middlesbrough, and helps to organise an arts project within the African community. He is very comfortable with English and can communicate with ease.

He suddenly remembers his family here in the UK, near the end of the interview. He and the interviewer think it because he is a ‘real African’ as he thinks about the community before he thinks about his own nuclear family. He tells the interviewer that he is getting married later in the year to Susan Stevenson, and that they have a son Colby Ayaho Agnama. Ayaho is his middle name because he was born on a Thursday, for in the Togo (West African culture according to Hilaire) the day the child is born is part of the their name. The son is just under two years old at the time of the interview. They talk about how Hilaire transported his culture from Africa to England by giving his son the traditional middle name. Therefore, transferring his culture on to his son through the names. Hilaire explains that not only it is capital (the word he used) and important; he sings songs and plays the drum to him to give messages through drumming, so that his son understands where his father is from. He tells his son many

stories about Togo. He hopes one day he will understand and go there himself. He tells the interviewer that he misses Togo. “My family My Dad, my brothers, my Mum, the community and my friends and my culture”. In contrast to this he says that he spends most of his time in Middlesbrough. He then says: “My grandfather used to say that where you spend 90% of your time... that is where your home is”. Therefore he feels that his home is here in the UK, ultimately in the North East (Teesside).

In the interview the last question is that, if faced with a choice again, what he would do. He says that he would make the same choice of fleeing (for his life and try and be safe) and come to the UK. “It taught me a lot. And I will go back to Togo, one day. England is not Togo – there is no comparison; Togo needs its children to help”. He is experiencing an ethical conundrum: that, if he goes back, will his children follow him to Togo? He does not know the answer. He feels that the UK is a better place for his children to grow up and wants to be with them, but also would like them to understand him as a Togolese. He is adamant about where to be in his old age and claims that he will go back to Togo. (If I am 75... 80years old...I will not stay...) The care for the elderly in the UK is centred on the care home practice. It is not part of what he wants when he is old.

### **Sudan (North): Osama Sahil**



Fig 5.1 Osama Sahil

The background to Sudan's political and historical problems is the result of an ancient and long-standing conflict between the south and the north of the country. This is intermingled with the colonial input in the history of Sudan. Religion plays a strong role in the rationale of these struggles, and is folded into the attitudes displayed by the political leaders with the Arab north demanding that Islam be the ruling religion. Over the years several political groups and military sections are responsible for the ceaseless conflict and war situations where raids and slash and burn actions caused many refugees to flee to the UNHCR refugee camps; mostly in the south. The complexities of the conflicts strengthened by tribal disagreements, but the military presence continues to be aggressive and destructive. (Meridith, 2005)

“It is common knowledge that the borders of many African states were drawn arbitrarily by the colonial powers, dividing areas that had strong historic links and bringing them under the rule of separate, distant capitals. Thus, in many large post-colonial states in Africa, the hinterlands are historically, economically, politically and culturally dissociated from their capitals and oriented towards neighbouring areas across the border. Eastern Chad, north-eastern Central African Republic and Darfur provide telling examples in this respect. The status of the border area between Sudan and Chad as a historic intermediate zone represents a structural aspect of the process of regionalisation of armed conflict in northcentral Africa. The people in the region share a common story of being squeezed between two regional powers that posed a constant existential threat to them. Hence, they have learned to fight in self-defence – a tradition that continued to be fostered in the context of post-independence turmoil in Sudan and Chad. They are also susceptible to opportunistic alliances with bigger powers on both sides of the border in order to gain an advantage locally, for example in land struggles. (Giroux et al 2009, p.12)

### **Osama's story**

Osama is from Khartoum, the capital city in Sudan. He was three years into his medical studies when he had to flee. His family (mainly his father and uncle) decided that he need to get out of the country for the situation for Osama was getting to a point where his life was in danger. He explained to me briefly that there was an incident where he and his fellow students went on a day outing by coach, but were captured by soldiers. They were apprehended by the soldiers and they (the male students) knew that they would be initiated into the military as was the practice in recruiting by the Sudanese

military. They were held for two days when he and a fellow student saw an opportunity to escape and managed to get away. “We ran for days to get away and get back to the city” – Khartoum. He showed me a long scar on his head. An injury he got “from the soldiers” according to him.

His uncle had business networking connections in Tripoli, thus he was sent to Tripoli to continue his medicine studies. There, with the help of this uncle’s business friends, he managed to enroll at the Tripoli University to carry on with his studies. He was top in his class. At university, generally in the city, and his social environment he constantly had to struggle with problems of a racism. When it became apparent that he is not popular with the authorities for being Bantu-looking, he decided to flee. The decision to leave and flee was made after two years of trying to fit in with the university and being a top performing student. He discussed this with his father, for he felt that he was going to be persecuted in the near future for being an outspoken person and also a foreigner on campus. He felt unsafe and things were getting difficult for him. His father and he decided that he should go to Europe. Osama arranged with an agent to get on a boat and after a time was contacted by a boat agent, he paid the money and followed the instructions given to him on where and when to get the boat. This happened at night and he was lucky as some of the people on the boat did not make it to Malta. He and the surviving refugees duly managed to reach Malta. There he was put in detention for the mandatory eighteen months and afterwards in the Open Centre where refugees (the Maltese government refer to them as migrants) could live and try and find work. After about two years he and some of his friends rented a house where they set up home, socialise with friends (refugees and locals) and go to work from. He visits the Open Centre every day to attend the Mosque, see his friends and have a Sudanese meal in the Sudan restaurant. When we met, he explains that he works for a greengrocer doing deliveries and have an occasional second job as a handy man in an upmarket hotel.

He continues his story when we meet for a coffee. He found life very difficult in Malta. To demonstrate to me, he describes a situation with a Maltese official. He had forms be filled in and he was querying the form given to him: “She says to me, ‘You are stupid!’ I answered: do you think I am stupid because I am black, or because I come to Malta by boat, for I might die, if I come by boat?” He continued by telling me that he explained to her that he filled in and completed that particular form already. She eventually conceded that it was a mistake and gave him the correct form. Later, after he and I sat



down to have a cappuccino (his favourite drink), he tells me how he tries very hard to be happy in Malta. He described his situation in Malta as follows; “I do not have my life in my hands”. Here he closes his hand in a fist and holds it up, fingers closed tightly. He continues to tell me that he had to break up with his fiancé in Sudan as he cannot give her a future. The uncertainty of the opportunity for them to get married is very real. This makes him very sad. He describes how he tries to keep it going for it is important to him to have her as link to home. He would send written letters and cards (e.g. a Valentines card) to her. Their daily Skype conversations became fraught with demands, her parents and his parents wants him to either come to a decision with regards to a date for the wedding or let her go to continue her life in Sudan. He decided to break off the engagement, for it turns out to be too stressful for him and her. His house, which he shares with three other Sudanese men, always has visitors and food are regularly prepared and a main meal eaten together with several other Sudanic refugees on a daily basis.

We kept in contact after I left Malta in January 2011. He is very popular in social circles and can be very confident within himself and very charming in any social circle. This resulted in him eventually meeting a young Bulgarian woman with whom he entered into a serious relationship. He posted this announcement on his Facebook page in January 2012. This was a critical step as his family in Khartoum would be able to see the message and declaration of his relationship with a European, Christian woman. He was planning to come to the UK eventually to finish his studies in medicine and maybe settle. Sadly he died in March 2012 after he was brutally attacked (by two Bulgarian men). His girlfriend gave birth to his son eight months later. She continued to post photos of the little boy on Facebook reminding everybody that this is Osama’s son. Therefore the Facebook community has been watching him (little Jacob) growing and are reminded of Osama through his young son.

## **Discussion**

Michael Jackson (2006, p.102.) wrote that there are always two spheres of governance in our lives.

On the one hand there is the immediate sphere of family and friends, our local community, the world of which we have a 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 count 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 these two spheres, to feel that there are things one decides, chooses, and governs and controls that offset the things over which one has no power. Stories help us negotiate this balance.

The main investigation of the thesis is focusing on several issues relating to social interaction between the incoming asylum seeker and refugee and the local host community. These life-stories are one of the platforms where the initial and significant social markers can be traced and recognized. This would be for instance; country of origin, how they grew up, and details of the journey, the arrival and trying to assimilate pans out ultimately. This in turn refers to the maintenance of being and belonging by the individuals who arrived as incomers into the North East. They are individuals with families, some left behind, some family members have joined the individuals later, in Teesside, and some created a family (got married) in Teesside. Each individual has their own way of relaying their story and explaining what is important for them at the time of telling their stories. Therein lies the balancing act for them to find their place within the new host community.

Hanna Arendt (1998, p178) asks the question that is asked to “every newcomer”: who are you? Here the life-stories can assist with responding to the query. Osama had dreams of completing his medical studies and making his father proud of his only son, he was the person who assisted other people in the centres where the asylum seekers and refugees were living. He became a spokesperson for them, and was able to get the community organised when any action was needed. Therefore he worked hard on reconstructing himself as a useful person in his community for this would have made his father back in South Sudan proud. Yet, he still felt that he did not ‘hold his life in his hands’, for there was no security in his future. He wanted to finish his studies, but even that was in limbo. He clearly lived a liminal life in Malta. He does however continue to be recognized in his son. Many of his friends continue to post messages to his son on Facebook explaining that this (little Jacob) is Osama. He is now personified through his son by his many friends (identified on Facebook), thus his memory is very strong and vibrant to those who knew him.

Hilaire tried to assimilate as soon as he arrived and had not only the language to learn, but a complete new set of social rules, customs and practices through his English wife.

The relationship developed over the years as one of my main informants resulted in a rich ethnographic chapter in the thesis. Here the content is about his life in Teesside. Tanjong had to make a big effort to be able to cope with his new life; here it even included the cultural change of rules, where he had to learn how to cook. His experiences as an asylum seeker is not unusual; especially the waiting experience. Fortunately for him, he is now married to a British Citizen and they have settled in the North East. This is one way to embrace into the host community. Herbert's experiences are from (again) a different culture and he also had to fit in, try and make his life a valuable one in the new social setting. He immediately started volunteering as part of his assimilation process; and eventually after a period of time his wife and two daughters joined him. This made his experience a different one from the other three life-stories. Moreover the four individuals share one similarity. They were all asylum seekers and refugees, even though, sadly one lost his life. One had to go back to his country of origin to become an individual that could re-enter the UK. Another one married a British citizen after he became a refugee and one brought his family over to join him and continue their lives as a family.

## **Chapter Six**

### **The Informant**

#### **Hilaire Agnama**

The smallest entity studied by social anthropologists is not an individual, but a relationship between two. (Leach 1967, p78)

Reflexivity is a way of exploring issues where it all becomes 'true', for the probing is focusing on how the researcher gets to the point where the information and data collected becomes part of his/her habitus. How does this assist the analysis of the friendship that forms which might bring it to the point where you can either step back (scientist) or step forward (perhaps lobbyist)? Is there a boundary where one actually has to stop and take account of the data and information and make that decision? How long does it take to get there? Knowing the group of people you study is the aim, is it not? But the friendship creates and shapes social relations or is the friendship symbolic? The methodology is available but it has, as always its anxieties. Here the researcher has to use methodology to negotiate the boundaries, but would this indicate that the person having a meal with the family members is part of the family and has a function in the family as a member, and thus has a role to fulfil. Then in the same exercise, she should be able to step back and observe too, in the name of gathering data. Within the setting of the remit called 'Anthropology at Home' there are several publications beginning with Maliowski (1938) where he claims that 'anthropology begins at home' meaning we must start by knowing ourselves first and then proceed with our studying of a culture. (Cited in Mwenda Ntarangwi, 2010, p 1). Within the focus of this research it has become known that making contact with members of one's own family in the country of origin is paramount; this is demonstrated by the copious use of mobile phones, internet, Skype, Facebook and other social media options. Not only has it a pragmatic angle of knowing if the family member is safe and/or alive, but in the social context this is significant in its social value. This is shown by the act of sending remittances and money back home which has several meaningful implications within these social norms and framework of the country of origin. The oldest brother still has to provide for the younger members of the family, if he wants to keep his social position. I have witnessed asylum seekers sending small amounts 'back home', even though they have very little

to live on, to maintain the strength of the connection; “So they do not forget me “ was what I was told by one asylum seeker. The social reference points and important cultural markers are the spikes or flashpoints in the routine of observation, and in this chapter I use the death and burial in the asylum seeker and refugee community. The birth of the daughter of my main informant is taken to demonstrate how ‘home’ (country of origin) is incorporated in the new life. Therefore, birth and death and some rituals observed around the two events that happened to two of the informants who told their life stories in the previous chapter. This chapter reflects on the events as a demonstration of how the assimilation is progressing, but some of the rituals are important to the informants, but also to me, as a migrant. We experienced similar conclusions and following a path of adjustment and integration. The chapter will start on a reflexive note to accommodate the parallel social experiences between the informants and me.

### **Becoming a friend:**

I met Hilaire in the hairdressing salon that Apollinaire, from Burkina Faso, managed in Stockton-on-Tees. The shop developed a social function to the incoming asylum seekers and refugees from Africa. Half of the shop consists of booths with telephones and the other wall had the typical hairdressing shop of mirrors and chairs etc. The front of the shop, facing the street, had an old lounge suite (a sofa and two chairs) where a few people could sit and socialize while looking at the passersby on the pavement. People could buy overseas phone-cards, popular at the time (before Skype), and phone from one of the phones in a booth which was deemed private. The section of the shop that was the hair-salon part specialized in African hair-styles and African braiding. Hair products sold were intended for the African clientele. The lounge suite was used most of the time by the men discussing issues. Very few women would join in. They would come for a hair appointment, but would not sit with the men. There was one occasion I accompanied a Zimbabwean lady, who had refugee status, to the shop as she wanted to use the phone service to phone home, and have her son’s hair styled and cut. She did not sit down, but remained standing and waited in this manner to be served and for her son to finish having his haircut, after she phoned. I was visiting the shop to leave pamphlets on sexual health and free condoms when I was introduced to Hilaire. He was reading a history book focusing on Africa. We talked briefly about African historical presentation in the West. He had arrived as an asylum seeker about a month previously and his

English was poor (as is my French). One week on, I went back to the shop as part of my weekly routine as the business manager of the charity, to leave leaflets and condoms and offer advice on sexual health. He was sitting in the lounge area and we talked again. We met up again and again through that year (2001). He insisted on speaking English as much as possible. We (my husband and I) took him to see a French film in Darlington on one occasion where he noted that it was a relief to hear French and not have to concentrate on English all the time, as it was difficult and stressful for him. He went to the TEFL classes offered to the asylum seekers and refugees and learned very quickly.

I was present when he got his refugee status. This was a very important shift in his status, not only socially, but the waiting was over. In the community parlance it is referred to as 'getting status' or also expressed as 'I am waiting' or lately just a single word: 'waiting'. His court case, from an asylum seeker to a refugee, was in Darlington and I offered to drive him there. I was going to the town and as it is, the Court is close to my flat at the time. This was the court hearing which would decide his legal status. This was about a year after his arrival. He was very nervous (it was expected, as it was his future). I parked the car at my flat and he went ahead to the hearing at the Court House. I had some business to attend to at the flat, so when I made my way to the Court House, it was just in time to see him come out of the Court House. He had received his refugee status. The occasion was a short event; about twenty minutes give or take. I asked him what the verdict was as he just looked at me and did not say anything. He then gave a big smile and said; 'It is positive; yeah, I am a refugee now.'

The shift from asylum seeker to refugee gave him the opportunity to find a job - this he did through the Art-network, and he was appointed as their project worker. This was the African Community Advice North East (ACANE) group. He managed the project. He is a very charming and highly intelligent person and that made him very popular. At that time, I was the business manager of a charity, and that was the initial basis of the connection and the regular contacts. We arranged an event to hand out information about HIV and its prevention in Stockton. He was part of the arrangement, helping with the venue and organising the West African group to attend the event. As I moved to work in Durham University, he and I kept contact. He was looking for some support in a new venture: the Life - stories Project. This was taken up by the Teesside Archive 1 in Middlesbrough who offered training in interviewing

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<sup>1</sup> Teesside Archives offered the funding and trained the people working for the project. The rationale behind the project was that the social demographic change (influx of African people) needed to be

and some technological support. He worked hard on this project, but mentioned how difficult it was for him to deal with the fact that he had to re-tell the story of his plight. He came to see me. He stayed and told me the story again, and gave me the recording disc with it. All of the life-stories are available in the archives. It so happened that I was also interviewed as part of the project. Thus, it placed me as an African and part of their Diaspora.

My many conversations with him had a sequence of their own. The first few were focused on him being away from his home. Then, the waiting he had to do to get his refugee status. But gradually they became more and more focused on what was happening around him in his social field: whom he was living with (firstly in a house with other men from Africa (but not all from West Africa) then with French speaking men, then his future wife), and who he was interacting with - mostly other French speaking asylum seekers and refugees. Throughout, he stressed the importance of learning English, struggling with its vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. This indicated to me how important he deemed his social inclusion and interaction in the community and how he ventured further afield in his attempt to get embedded into the local community too.

He understood the importance of communicating and that this would be his way in to the local community. This was in the first ten months of him arriving in the UK. Working as the project worker at ACANE, English became, by necessity, his main route of communication with the fellow employees, the local people and friends. He improved his grasp of the language by reading a lot, mostly histories of African intellectuals and similar literature. At the same time, he gathered a diverse circle of friends around him. These included people from the local community as well as French speaking asylum seekers and refugees. In due course met Sue, a local British woman and his future wife, and they had a son, Colby. He is very proud of his son, and often talks about taking him to Togo, to show him where his father comes from. When I talk to him about visiting or going to Togo, he regularly makes it clear that he would like to be able to take his son there. He started with the idea of a prolonged stay, but, returning to the topic again and again over a period of four years his picture of what the visit might be like acquired detail. He maintains that if he goes with Colby his son will not be treated as a Togolese. Colby is of mixed race and that will place him in the bracket of

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explained to the future generation, as the African people settled in the community and married local women and children.

a visitor and not family. This will then be in the cultural context of treating him with a different sort of respect and it would be complicated to explain this to his son and his family. Hilaire feels that they and/or Colby would find it problematic over a long period. This, he then explained, would mean that Colby would be placed on a level where he could not be part of the insider/local dynamics. Perhaps Colby will be able to cope with this as an adult, or when he is a little older. What would be the ideal then? When he is older and is taken up by the Agnama family as one of the many nephews? And then be treated exactly as all the other little nephews and nieces? Would this place Colby in different or higher status/social strata? And how would Hilaire react to this in reality? He has the knowledge from a cognitive perspective, but if he witnesses this social negotiation of his son's status within his own family, it might be different from what he thought it might be. For instance, Colby does not speak Ewé or even French. Hilaire will have to do the social negotiation for him. These are some of the many issues we discussed over time, watching his son growing up.

### Becoming a British citizen:

Parallel to the amalgamation process in to the North East, another social journey also occurred; this was experienced by him and me at more or less the same time. It was the journey towards 'citizenship' where we both applied for British citizenship at more or less the same time, and went through the process in tandem. I asked: Is he now British? Or still Togolese? We had a discussion about this and asked the question as mentioned above. He said that it should not be an issue as we will always be African. "That does not go away. We will always know that and we are just that. You are South African, and I am Togolese. This means that we are African". This can be illustrated in the concrete demonstration of him greeting the two different cultural groups in their own cultural practices at the same event.

He went to Togo for a short visit after he got his British passport. I met up with him shortly after he came back and in the subsequent conversation, he explained that he thinks that he has changed as a person after fleeing from Togo. For now, he had experienced the 'world' (the UK and some European countries where he attended conferences) and has different life here in the UK. It was hard for his Togolese family to understand his explanations as they could not understand the references he used in his narrative to tell them about his life in the UK. Perhaps, frustrating to him, as he is part of a large extended family in Togo, but in the UK it is Sue, his wife and his son. This is



of course, a much smaller unit he lives and functions in within the family context. This is how he sees himself: as a being that has to negotiate between being Togolese and British. He can do this with the greatest of social ease; I have witnessed him greeting his fellow diaspora members as an African and follow the African tradition in this act. And also greet the (British) staff and public, at an event, in an acceptable British manner. He could manage the negotiation between the two cultures in a few seconds. Moreover, the social and cultural dichotomy is part of who he is at this time of his life. He accepts it and uses it when needed, in an analytical process as per his work. When he speaks about this, he assures me that he is very comfortable with either social practice. 'I do not mind, I am comfortable with anybody, I can look them in the eye or like the African way, look away'.

To be part of his present local community is also very important to him: he engages and interacts with many local people outside his ethnic group. It is in the drumming group that the interaction and social relationship is demonstrated by him. This group consists mainly of local British people. The few African drummers normally turn up much later and mostly would like some sort of support from the group; either to exchange cash for vouchers etc. Hilaire started the group, and he would be there every Monday evening. He would train, coach and demonstrate with great patience. If he could not make it, he would ask Johnny (a very talented Congolese asylum seeker) to do it. In this group he would talk to both groups, again with ease.

The drumming has its own social course: Hilaire is a gifted musician and played music for many reasons; starting with enjoyment and ending with being a serious performer of Djembe drumming. In Togo the drumming is performed with his friends at important events and the songs sung with deep understanding respect. His father was a respected drummer and had his own drumming band. In Middlesbrough, Hilaire did the drumming to teach people at the drumming group and to form a social focus point where local people and asylum seekers and refugees from Africa could meet and enjoy the instrument and music. This however also became an issue which he thought was pertinent to his identity. He spoke about it when asked to come and give a talk, but also do the drumming at a public event with a high social profile. He thought about it; he then came to the conclusion that Africa is not 'just drumming' for it is akin to the photos of emaciated African children or an African (his word) crawling out his mud hut. This, for him, portrayed the stereotypical presentation of an African playing his drum (outside his mud hut). He has worked hard to assure people around him that he is part of the

whole. And by mutual reinforcement he assured the communities and professional institutions that he conforms to what is needed at the time. In relating his personal life-story I try to explain that individuals do slot into the local, but also negotiate the past as part of which they are, as in this case, the 'now' is consulted and the individual will then behave accordingly. Ruth Benedict (2006) discussed this in "The individual and the pattern of Culture". Here the individual, Hilaire, has presented himself as a Togolese initially, but as he became aware of his social environment and absorbed the necessary behavior patterns in order to become part of the local social environment. He has an English wife and is a British citizen after he went through the process and applied for a British passport. He understands and takes to heart the dichotomy of alternating and negotiating between the two very different social cultural communities and approaches it from a pragmatic perspective most of the time. Here he uses his music, work and family life to find some congruency in his life. His employment, as a project worker for Teesside One World Centre (TOWC) up until, now involves his life-story. Woven through his narrative in the UK, there I am as a fellow African, who has been with him for more than a decade. He sometimes uses me as a reference point to decide on which social position is needed at the time. As Ruth Benedict (2006, P.77) states "In reality, society and the individual are not antagonists. His culture provides the raw material which the individual makes his life"

The work he did for TOWC as the project worker was a job that reminded him constantly of his life-story and of the reasons why he is in the UK. The teachers he worked with in the local schools spoke about him with great respect.

The following sentence has been repeated by Hilaire many times, to the audiences (mostly schoolchildren in year 10 and 11), and in the workshops attached to the project: "I am an asylum seeker from Togo (West Africa) who got refugee status; I married an English girl and am the father of two small children who were born in the UK. I am now a British citizen with a British passport". (Hilaire at a presentation he gave to school children in year 6: 2004)

The project was also a sort of journey for him; as he had to re-tell his life-story over and over and also in the process explain the historical dynamics of seeking asylum. I observed him over the three years doing this project. He was overwhelmed in the beginning by all the organising that had to be done, but he very quickly got a routine which was productive and something he could manage with his family responsibilities. He trained the volunteers and assisted them in the role they had to play in the

project. He organised and did some of the, often difficult, tasks in training the volunteers. This training had its own problems which were centered on the volunteers as they were from the community of asylum seekers, and some still struggled to master English as a spoken language.

I attended one of these sessions and the volunteers (at the training) had to work hard on their own adaptation of the new life they are trying to forge for themselves. The, mostly traumatic, plight as asylum seekers was still very much part of them and this was vocalised in the session: when asked to do the introduction rounds and give their names so that the rest of the group would know their names; the first volunteer said: I am... and I am from... and: the next sentence actually came without thinking as if on automatic, "... they shot my father, and that was when I had to run for my life..." - he was cut short by Hilaire who realised that this was not what was appropriate at this particular point as he asked the volunteers to introduce themselves to each other just by giving their names. They were all asylum seekers and all had traumatic experiences. Hilaire had to explain again that all that was needed was just the person's name. It was not helped by the fact that the volunteers joined the project to improve their English and did not perhaps fully understand the instructions given by Hilaire. He persevered in the training, and the assistance from the volunteers was exceptional. They ended up being very reliable in spite of the difficulties they had to face regularly.

Jackson (2006, p. 93) states that "Refugee stories are driven by existential need rather than emotion, epistemology, eschatology or ethics". Thus for the asylum seeker the repeating and telling of the flight or the narrative that brought them to the UK is to be repeated and that is the narrative they will repeat on every occasion. Thus it explains the momentarily loss of good judgment whether this narrative should be relayed in this training workshop scenario. Khosravi (2011, P.72) experienced this too as a refugee when we was interviewed by a fellow student. He uses Malkki (1995a) to underpin the idea of this representation of the narrative:

Obviously I was telling her exactly what was supposed to say as a refugee in an interview...In that interview, as I had been educated, my self-represented victim role appeared, stripped of the specificity of culture, place and history.

The work on the trailer (a lorry trailer that has been converted) of the "Escape to Safety" is a presentation of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees. Inside the trailer the visual aids are laid out so that a person can follow the flight of this particular story and see the stages that are often experienced by the refugees. It is accompanied by an audio

explanation. The tape-recorder is handed to the students and they enter into the trailer. First the village chaos is shown with shoes, clothes and cooking utensils are strewn. The next stage they walk – videos demonstrate by showing mass exoduses of people. This is shown on the walls of the dividers. The next step is set up as if inside a container and the students are asked to climb in. They are then placed in the container tightly next to the fruit being transported. The next stage is detention; a small cell with a narrow bed in. Then the ‘crossing a border’ section where they are let through a gate out to the outside. This is at the back of the trailer. In the classroom, some assistance was given to Hilaire in the workshops by the volunteers, but in all Hilaire did the work. Here, as explained, he had to tell his own story over and over and then go into an educational presentation of the refugee in the world. The whole programme was designed on a pedagogical basis to educate the students about asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.



Fig 6.1 The trailer: Escape to Safety

When I discussed the volunteers with Hiliare he answered that he is aware of their problems, but decided not to get close to their issues. He claimed that if he did that he never be able to work and/or sleep. So he chose an attitude that portrays a professional distance. The volunteers were transient in their situations, for any given time they could be and were deported back to their country of origin, be given refugee status, or disappear as their asylum seeking cases were rejected. When given status they would almost immediately move to the bigger cities i.e. Manchester, Birmingham and London. He did have a core of volunteers that he relied on; they are French speaking, asylum seeking Africans. Perhaps it is because they are very good friends, for they arrived in the UK more or less at the same time as he did.

Hilaire is an individual in the sense that he has through his own thought patterns, worked out the issues that need addressing. He understood that language was one of the key issues he needed to address. He learned English very fast and immediately got involved with the communities, local and African. As the social and cultural description of that community developed to several African countries being represented, he continued connecting with most leaders. These would be important for him to adapt and adjust to the new and/or different social environment. When he arrived he spoke French and Eve (his tribal and Togolese language). He made an enormous effort to learn English and spent hours working to master it. He worked in the environment where he had to work hard to become an example to his community.

Then though the job he did as a project worker where he had to deal with his 'past' on an almost daily basis. Would it have been different if he was employed in a job that was more purely British in its behavior and actions? Now with the birth of his daughter, he told me that he has a bigger responsibility being a father. He has to provide for his son and his daughter. Does this double the effort he has to put into his performance as a local person who does a lot for his community? And which community? The local area or the West African community or the French-speaking asylum seeking/refugee community. I have seen him do all of the above at any given time with the greatest of ease. To give a concrete demonstration, at my Quaker wedding he played the Djembe drums, wore his best Bou-bou (typical long flowing dress of West- African kind), chatted with confidence with the English guests at the reception, ate the English food, complimenting it and then proceeded to play with the Ceilidh band a kind of fusion music (African drumming with the Irish music) and ended up leading the band. Folded into that description he had his son with him, as his wife was working (shifts) and thus he was looking after his child too. This would have been different in Togo – the women's role is to look after the children collectively. He spoke about himself at reference points in his life: learning English, becoming a refugee, meeting Sue and the birth of Colby, finding a job, becoming a British citizen and doing the charity work to promote the African (West Africa) refugee community, and lately the birth of his daughter.

## **Birth**

Pierre Bourdieu (1990, p. 112) explains symbolic capital as reciprocity exercise with a useful means as follows:

...it removes the conditions of possibility of the institutionally organised and guaranteed misrecognition that is the basis of gift exchange and, perhaps of all the symbolic labour aimed at transmuting the inevitable and inevitably interested relations imposed by kinship, neighbourhood or work into elective relations of reciprocity.

With the birth of his daughter, Saffron, I went to congratulate them. The situation was that I was not in a position to bring a gift, as I was struggling financially. Hilaire was aware of this. The next time I saw him was for a meeting at Tees Valley One World Centre, Saffron was by now about four months old. I greeted him, but knowing that I not acknowledged the new arrival in his family correctly, according to the custom in Africa made me feel 'strange'. This would be giving a gift of money which reflects the 'value' and recognition of the child being born. Becoming a parent/father and the responsible person for the upbringing and life is celebrated and acknowledged by the community and the people dealing with the community in this way. Money is normally given to assist the child into the future, thus indicating the closeness and relationship with the parent. It was very much in the foreground of my thoughts; after all, he visited me in hospital saying it is the 'right thing to do'. I did not 'do the right thing' in this situation. I apologised. He assured me that: "I am working and can provide for her, you are a student in these times". I felt ashamed; this emotion took over and ruled the interaction between him and me. It affected my approach in the meeting and how I addressed him. I felt that I had no right to ask for him to be a referee for me, as was one of the reasons for the meeting. This shifted the relationship. What right do I have asking this favour? I have not acknowledged his youngest in a social and cultural interaction by not giving a gift. Being from Africa too had us on an equal footing and understanding with regards to cultural habits. It made us both comfortable with each other, which was the beginning of the strong trust between us. But now, my point of departure in communicating and connecting with him in this relationship felt different, for I had not obeyed the social 'rules'. Thus the shame. I could not approach him on the same level as before, until I paid my dues, literally in this case. He also showed some 'shame' in that he said to me: "Oh no don't do that! There will be none of that! It is okay; I am earning a salary so I can be responsible to my family." With this expression he explained that he understood the role he played as a head of the family, and also someone who does send remittances home which will place him in a position of a high status, 'back home' and as he was not visible in Togo, this was important. He would be seen as a person of high status in the context of social positioning in Togo, but in the UK he was just a father

providing for his family. He did not see it as that; he is a person who can provide for his family, thus of a certain social status as portrayed in a West African social picture.

However, I felt that even though I congratulated him and his wife and visited the baby when she was about two months old, it was still very embarrassing for me to speak to him on the same level as before. I would only be able to carry the trust between us to a point where I do give a gift and be able to presume the interaction and relationship on the same level. It starts with the friendship as it became the pivotal dynamics out of which all the other interactions grew. This relationship is solely built on trust, we understand each other from a cultural and social angle, even though I was a migrant and he a refugee, but at some point we arrived at the same pinnacle of applying for British citizenship. We did our Citizen test and also acquired our British passports more or less at the same time. Then the social references of our weddings. I brought an elaborate bead necklace (African) for Sue to wear with their wedding and he played music at mine. We embraced the event as Africans, and thus understood the significance of adornment and music in the celebration. This concrete background creates the schemata of our cognitive understanding of the social and cultural knowledge we have of our national origins. It is part of my fieldwork observation and the reflexive thinking is part of the process where I try to conceptualise the informant's significance and my understanding of the relationship we have formed over several years. The fact that he followed the unspoken rule and I failed in this instance had an effect that shifted the balance in the relationship. Here he is above me and that has him in a different place than that of an informant and me, the researcher. I have been downgraded to a person who owes him the respect and grace of becoming a father to a daughter.

## **Death**

Of all the sources of religion” wrote Malinowski, “the supreme final crisis of life - death is of the greatest importance”. Death, he argued provokes in the survivors a dual response of love and loathing, a deep-going emotional ambivalence of fascination and fear which threatens both the psychological and social foundations of human existence. (Malinowski 1884 – 1942 cited by Geertz, 1974, 2000ed, p. 162)

The death of Mr N was sudden and a big shock to the community. He was a refugee and seen as an elder in the Zimbabwean asylum seeking and refugee community and popular in the local community and the refugee community. He died of lung cancer. When the diagnosis was confirmed, he was taken into hospital and passed away a few

days later. The funeral and burial took place in Stockton-On-Tees. That was also unusual, for in the past the family went to great lengths to try and send the deceased person's body back to the country of origin. This in turn underpins the strength of the ties the family, group or person have with the place of origin. I have witnessed and supported on several occasions where a body, or the remains, were sent back to be buried in the family plot in Zimbabwe. Funerals and the events surrounding death are often described as the key cultural events of a particular area (Jinara and Noret, 2011. p17) the notion of Mr N's funeral taking place locally was an odd and strange thing for the community. Therefore the community of asylum seekers and refugees in Teesside has conceivably moved to the idea of being part of the local environment; which even means that the grave in Stockton-On -Tees where Mr N is buried, indicates that he is now part of the local host community albeit it being in a posthumous way. It has been observed by many anthropologists that the key events are a kind of flash point for changes in communities. Mr N's body is buried here in Stockton-On-Tees. The putting to earth of his body in the Stockton-On -Tees cemetery, is significant in the community, for this gives the Zimbabweans a social message that the burial site can now be here locally. This means also that people who are here in the new/host area can visit the grave to show respect. Several people were shocked that he agreed and/or that his wife and family approved of the burial taking place in the North East. In time more people from the incoming community will think that it is the norm to be buried here and not to 'go home when the time comes'. This may have several reasons; economic, emotional and perhaps the more important cultural level where one gets buried with or next to other family members. Jackson (2006, p. 332) writing about the Knowledge of the Body states that:

It is because action speaks louder and more ambiguously than words that they are more likely to lead us to common truths, not semantic truths, established by others at other times, but experimental truths which seem to issue from within our own Being when we break the momentum of the discursive mind or throw ourselves into some collective activity in which we each find our own meaning yet sustain the impression of having a common cause and giving common consent.

Mr. N arrived as an asylum seeker in the North East with his family and in time was given his refugee status. He was in his sixties and still an active member of his community and the wider society in Teesside. This engagement included volunteering at the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), being an active church member (local Roman Catholic), and the father of four children – their ages ranging from nine years



old to late twenties. He was a lecturer in Zimbabwe in Mechanical Engineering at the local 'Poly-tech' or Technicon. He finished his studies in America and went back to Zimbabwe to work there, until he had to leave with his family due to political pressure. In the UK he was dispersed to the North East in Stockton-On-Tees upon arrival. He was a very quiet and private man, but with a strong sense of duty. I met him and worked with him at the CAB and together we worked on an inclusivity project, training refugees to join the volunteering programme of the CAB. This was part of a larger integration program as managed by the Government. This gave me some insight into him as a professional: he understood the importance of preparation and detail. For the next four years we served together on Stockton African Caribbean Association (SACA). He was greatly respected and seen as an elder in the Zimbabwe community. SACA met about nine times a year in St Mary's Roman Catholic Hall Stockton-On-Tees. The members who attended regularly were mostly Zimbabweans, with sometimes people from other African countries, mostly West Africa. The regular members were seen as the community leaders, with Mr. N being seen as the "wise one" of the group. Once at the CAB we were preparing to go and do a presentation to a group of refugees at the International Family Centre, he quietly reminded us of a cultural detail which was vital to the understanding of interaction, and connecting with the group ('the surname is always given first and then the name' is what he said, when the register to write down the people present was produced).

The funerals I have attended in the past were events that represented the deceased's life, and collectively the community as a whole. In the context of Christian practice, funerals are a sombre event where mostly black outfits are worn and people speak in whispered tones and those left behind are treated with sympathy and a little distance is kept to give the family and friends time to grieve. Mr. N's funeral was not much different from this generic description. His funeral service was in the local church he frequented, followed by a burial in the local cemetery. Dress at the funeral is an outward sign of mourning and it marks the occasion (funeral) as an event wherein "right behaviour" is followed, to show respect to the deceased. The colour black (in the UK) would indicate a sign of mourning and, as a marker for the attendees at the funeral. At Mr. N's funeral most women were dressed in black, and the majority of men wore suits. There were a few people who wore their work attire e.g. nurses as they came from work to attend the event and then presumably had to go back to work. The mood at the church, was sombre (as expected) and downcast eyes were the social act that was performed whilst greeting people in a whisper. (Generally not making eye contact is a given and

understood as a sign of respect in the Zimbabwean community). This was performed with the customary support of the arm in the hand while touching the hand of the person being greeted. I did the same on arrival at the church to people I know and joined the group of people who waited outside for the hearse. The hearse arrived, and while we waited for the coffin to be unloaded and the widow and the children to get out of the vehicle, someone started singing in a soft voice the Shona version of Auld Lang Syne, in the familiar tune. The widow and her children walked at a slow pace in front of the coffin, which was carried by the coffin bearers. People waiting filed in after them, still singing softly. I chose to sit more towards the back. The service was carried out in the usual format of the Roman Catholic Church. The exception was the performance of the “African choir”; as it was announced by the priest. With that the front singer started the song and the rest of the singers, who were sitting to the front of the church, started singing. The singing, in four harmonies, was done by most people in the church. There were mostly sub-Saharan Africans attending the service, with a handful of white people in the attendance to the service. This took a while for several songs were sung. The priest, who was sitting down in front of the church in anticipation to hearing a choir perform a song, had to delay the continuation of the service. He would half stand up, only to sit down again as the front singer starts up another song. At the end of the service the Auld Lang Syne song was sung by everybody (a photocopy of the words in Shona was handed out) while we followed the coffin, draped in an Arsenal football flag, to the hearse outside. The singing continued, but once the front singer was outside she started ululating and several women followed her. The ululating is to acknowledge him publicly as an important person. This continued as the women surrounded the hearse. The ululating got louder as more women joined in. People living opposite the church came out of their houses to observe this, pointing and talking to their neighbours. The hearse pulled away very slowly trying to avoid the women in front of the vehicle, while people followed behind, still ululating very loudly.

I got a lift with Herbert, my Zimbabwean colleague at SACCA and also a friend and informant, to the cemetery. There we gathered around the open grave. Again I noted that most people were from the refugee, sub-Saharan community, with a few white people attending. The burial rituals were performed by the priest and as the coffin was placed in the grave the priest recited the customary Christian declarations. The four children of Mr N and his wife placed some soil on the coffin and flowers were laid on the coffin by those who wished to do so. An announcement, by the family friend who led the family in the church and the cemetery, said that “people must go home now” and

“thank you for attending the funeral”. A clear silence followed the announcement. Herbert was standing next to me. The message was repeated, but the people did not move. It was clear that no-one wanted to go. With that, the front singer started to sing the Auld Lang Syne song (in Shona). The women around her started to sing too and went to stand next to her. They started to slowly circle the open grave in a shuffle dance while singing. It was a very hot day and the singing became more rhythmical, the singer sped up the singing and some of the women began to sort of half dance around the grave. People were still standing, waiting. The singing and dancing continued. When I left with Herbert to be taken back to my car, the singing and dancing was still occurring. People were still waiting for the grave to be covered. A little distance away the grave diggers were also waiting for the mourners to finish so that they could close the grave. Both groups were waiting for each other. Eventually the people left and the diggers could cover the grave.



Fig 6.2 Mr. N’s funeral.

Herbert and I spoke about the fact that Mr. N was buried here, at the last resting place, here in a foreign land. According to Herbert; “his bones have not gone home”. This was perplexing to him, and other people. This was quietly whispered while we were walking back to the car by the group of people who joined us. So the query was ‘silently’ asked. I heard that that the decision to bury Mr.N was taken ‘very quickly’ and there was also a query why could the family not wait a few days longer? Who made that decision, and

why, could not be answered? Herbert was very serious when I ended the conversation explaining that he will be buried “at home”, and not here in England.

...the pressure for elders to return home to their natal compounds in old age, even if they had spent most of their lives abroad, was extremely strong. (Eades, 1980, p. 54)

Even though Eades writes about old age, it refers to the end part of the person's life, therefore the place they want to be buried. This has been reiterated by many people I spoke to in the community. As I was talking to several women at the International Family Centre, I heard that most people in the community were very surprised by the decisions of the quick burial and the fact that the body was not sent back to Zimbabwe to be buried there. For a while it seemed the topic of gossip amongst the women at the women's group that I attended. The reasons given were numerous including that maybe the ties to Zimbabwe are weakening, and Mr N and his family have 'closed the door' to going 'back home' and other issues. This was thought-provoking as he was an elder and a respected community leader. His burial in a cemetery in Stockton-On-Tees is seen as the first and as an elder (community leader) which in a way gives the permission to be buried here to other people from the Zimbabwean community. Another issue was that the family did not wait for friends and family who live far away and needed time to travel to Stockton, the opportunity to attend the funeral. Death for the asylum seeker, who has already experienced many little “deaths” through departure, may be even more charged than for the settled person, representing according to belief, a new arrival, as well as departure. Victor Turner related this to the liminality that is present with the moving on towards the next phase of being an asylum seeker and/or refugee.

It is the very creative darkness of liminality that lays hold of the basic forms of life.” (Turner; 1974. p:51). “What I call liminality, the state of being in between successive participations in social milieu dominates by social structural considerations.(Turner 1974 p: 52).

Eventually (about a year later) I heard, via a discussion, that he was buried within a few days of his death because he and his wife, Susan, decided on it. He was a devout Roman Catholic and it turned out that Susan is his second wife. She was not going to go back to Zimbabwe, apparently, because it would remind people there that he left his first wife, thus he was not a 'good' Roman Catholic. It would bring shame on his family in Zimbabwe. Moreover, his fleeing to the UK and becoming British assisted in him gaining social status again. The children were at school here and will most likely remain here.

With Mr N's death we have two conflicting issues of a socio-cultural nature. The first is the fact that he made a decision not to be buried in his country of origin, but to be buried in the cemetery of Stockton-on-Tees. The funeral was in the manner of his religious belief, but at the cemetery, a clash came where the cultural practise is to see the grave being covered and the celebratory performance of the singers to dance and sing 'on the grave' to send him 'away to the ancestors'. This was in contrast to the usual practice of the grave diggers that waited for the family and attenders to disperse before the grave was covered and closed up. The confusion resulted in the singers continued with their performance which had them exhausted in the end. Do they adhere to the local custom of going home so that the gravediggers can complete the task, or continue singing and dancing till the grave is covered up? As it was a hot day the singers ran out of energy, and left.

It is the very creative darkness of liminality that lays hold of the basic forms of life." (Turner, 1974, p.51). "What I call liminality, the state of being in between successive participations in social milieu dominates by social structural considerations. (Turner, 1974, p. 52).

### **Belonging and Assimilation through social reference markers**

A company of porcupines crowded themselves very close together one cold winter's day to profit by one another's warmth and so save themselves from being frozen to death. But soon they felt one another's quills, which induced them to separate again. And now, when the need for warmth brought them nearer together again, the second evil arose once more. So that they were driven backwards and forwards from trouble to another, until they discovered a mean distance at which they could most tolerable exist. (Schopenhauer 1974)

Saffron will have a life, which is essentially British, but also folded into her father and mother's lives. Her father, Hilaire is African, but her mother is very blond and British. The event of her birth is a key event for her father as he applied for British Citizenship just before her birth. What does this symbolise for her father? Perhaps he can now socially see himself as a British Citizen and in his location engage with identity and nation. Added to that, her brother is 5 years old, and beginning to understand the dynamics of this father's identity and ethnicity; which is different to that of his mother's. Hilaire now has two children with his wife, a settled and safe life in the North East of England. He has to accommodate the children in how he is moving forward with his life. He is adamant that he will stay here for he feels that it would be too difficult for his children to settle in Togo. In a way the birth of his children has assured the assimilation effort he is prepared to do to be acknowledged in the new community. He had to

negotiate many social interactions, including a relationship, marriage, fatherhood and becoming British. A lot of the time he was reminiscing about 'back home' and talking about how he will take his children home, but eventually he found a social position where he was not able to be comfortable and is looking to a settled life. Therefore, socially he moved forward and backwards till he realised that there is a position where he could be happy and content which includes his family as the family grew with the birth of his children.

Mr N had been in the North East for about eight years before his death and he had to negotiate many social and cultural scenarios during that time. He indicated that he was Zimbabwean by making an effort to continue SACCA, being an elder for the community and working in the voluntary sector which supports the sub-Saharan African community. His sudden death and the burial in the local cemetery was a shock to the community, not only the Zimbabweans, but other sub-Saharan Africans. It turned out that the rationale behind this decision had several layers which include; practical, emotional and cognitive reasons. It also indicates the liminal position a lot of asylum seekers and refugees are in and how that affects the individuals, including how ritual, inherited patterns of belief are weakened during this time.

## **Conclusion**

Both case studies demonstrate the challenging issues of assimilation into a strange and diverse community. Hilaire arrived as an educated single young man and Mr N as a mature, retired family man. The social journey became a journey we both took; as friends and as an asylum seeker and refugee with me, as the migrant and friend, and eventually we both became British citizens. I observed how he oscillated in social interactions with locals and within his own community of asylum seekers and refugees and even a tighter social circle of his French-speaking friends and fellow asylum seekers and refugees. We had a relationship that included me being affected when I could not subscribe to the social practice of giving a gift with the birth of his daughter. Ultimately, it was rectified, and we could continue the relationship of researcher and informant and being friends. Mr N. was also part of the circle of asylum seekers and refugees that I saw as my group in the field. I worked with him and served with him on several associations and committees. With his death several cultural questions and concerns came to the fore where the community had to face a puzzling and perplexing

social and cultural action. That of being buried in the local cemetery instead of his remains being sent to Zimbabwe to be buried at home. Ultimately, this may be seen as an assimilation act, in fact the ultimate integration performance.

The two social settings described in the chapter are important for they are the socio-cultural reference matters that are useful to capture the cultural practices of the group and/or community of asylum seekers and refugees. They are from different countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; this means that the social construct is such that there are different practices. The funeral is an event that most family and friends attend when a family member or loved one gets buried. One is saying goodbye and the funeral is to determine closure for the live that passed away. In the birth scenario, a new life appears and one is greeting this person and welcoming the person into the family, community and society. In both social settings, many issues play a role in how social interaction is to take place. With Mr N's funeral the expectation was that he would 'go home', but he did not. With Hilaire there is the concern that his children would not understand his ancestry and be treated as visitor in his Togolese family for they are mixed race. These two ethnographic events demonstrate the constant discussions by the asylum seekers and refugees on the push-pull of Home and Here. It is also a suitable theme to demonstrate inter-subjectivity or sociality of the asylum seeker and refugee group as a whole. With the new life, new babies will be born, where they will stand within the hierarchical setting and kinship links between the family in the country of origin and the British cultural construct.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Social events in Teesside**

As a summary, the month of October is a busy four weeks for the asylum seeking and refugee community with several events and occasions centred on the Black History Month as a vehicle for awareness and bringing forward the importance and worth of the cultural markers which ultimately display the traditions and social performances to the new host community.

#### **Introduction**

With the different social profile (from the local population) of Teesside, the newcomers have an influence on the public events that are organised by them. A few big events take place in October, which is part of the celebration of Black History Month. These are the Black History Month Award Dinner, The Taste of Africa entertainment event and for several years, a Public debate was organised by the same person who organise the Award dinner and the Taste of Africa event. The invitations to the events are managed from one office and ultimately one person is instrumental behind these large social events. This individual is not an asylum seeker or refugee, but from West Africa (Nigeria) and arrived as the spouse of a person in the medical profession. The invitations are sent many organisations, institutes and individuals in Teesside. Flyers are displayed and left at strategic public places and emails are sent to everybody on the email account of the person organising the events. Attending these events year after year, it is clear that they are more than social events in Teesside. They become a platform and place where the new community can display and demonstrate their traditional dress and strengthen the community and establishing their cultural position within the community and the country of origin. The events will be described in the following order: The Black History Month Awards Dinner then The taste of Africa event and the Public debate. All of these events take place in October.

The Black History Celebrations is to bring the Black people's profile to the fore and in the local public eye. This event was created in the UK about thirty years ago to make the British Public aware of Black people's achievements in the history of Great Britain. As David Olusoga (2015) writes in his article published in The Guardian:



So little was known back then that Walvin, latterly professor of history at the University of York, began his research by writing to every county archivist in the UK, asking them if they knew of any forgotten black figures whose lives had been recorded in the documents under their care. This was ground-breaking, pioneering work and it was because of the books that came out of it that it was possible, in the late 1980s, for Black History Month to be inaugurated in the UK.

The Taste of Africa is an event that has entertainment at its core and it is free to the public. It normally has music, dance and other performances including a fashion show and African Food on offer to the audience. The audience includes the asylum seeking and refugee community, the migratory African community, and the local British communities. As the event is free, the Town Hall that is used for the event is normally full. The Public Debate, also organised by the same person, occurred a few times, but did not continue. A topic, and people prepared to sit on the debating panel is sought, and then advertised through the same route as the other two events: namely email and flyers.

### **Black History Month Awards Dinner**

This event gives awards to worthy individuals from the new incoming community. The procedure starts with the nomination of the individuals and the panel of judges choosing a winner in categories that are decided beforehand. The nominations come from the community via the social networking platform. When all submissions are received; the person who organised the event gathers a panel and they then decide on a worthy person to get an award in the specific category. I have served on the judging panel for several years. Nominations are discussed and a consensus is reached on the winner of the award. Then the invitations are sent out after the venue has been secured. It normally takes place in a local up-market hotel. This is a formal event. The invitations normally state that the expected dress is formal or traditional. People have up until now adhered to the code and the traditional dress has been worn.

The evening has a dinner and entertainment included and of course the awards that are given to the individuals that are elected for the category. The atmosphere is formal and the evening dresses and black tie outfits clearly noticeable in that people made an effort for the evening. After arrival, and finding their table, and being given palm wine imported from West Africa, people would mingle, greet friends and meet new people that have joined the community. There is normally a key-note speaker for the evening

who is also the person to hand out the awards. The food is prepared in the West African way and served. After the meal and the keynote speakers address, the awards are handed out and entertainment offered. Then the socialising happens and people would normally move from their allocated table to friend's tables and socialise.



Fig 7.1 Two friends from West Africa at the Black History Awards dinner: 2009

The traditional outfits are always very colourful and here the visual appearance of the dress would often give an indication of the county's traditional dress. The West African bou-bou worn by the men, and colourful dresses with cloth topknots worn by the ladies. The head dresses of different types would normally indicate a public identification of the area they are from. The audience consists of the incoming asylum seekers and refugees that have been able to get the point where they are settled in Teesside. The awards are aimed at the black community, but there are occasions where it was given to a local individual, who are working in the asylum seeking and refugee community.

For refugees, uncertain of their future abroad, there is and must be room for rapprochement. Caught in a web of opposed certainties suspended between two worlds, seeking a future that rejects the presents but both valorises and meliorates the past, they are forced to rethink themselves. (Boddy, 1995, p. 18)

The public platform is one way the asylum seeker and refugee can assert and manage their traditions and social practices and escape the double-bind situation they so often find themselves in. These events, especially the dinner, are opportunities where the dress, traditions and other cultural practices can be displayed and celebrated. There is an element of performance and presentation, as the entertainment is music and the

musicians are from the asylum seeking and refugee community, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa. The public staging includes the traditions and cultural differences of each subdivision of the community. This includes the dressing up and clothes the attendees wear at the events. The African tradition dress and fashion of dressing up has an identifying element to it and can be recognized in the regional slant of the person wearing the dress. This can be broadly speaking the east, west south and north which the dress can pinpoint the area an individual are from. This conforms to the traditional section of dressing up for the evening as demonstrated in the photo above. A few of the guests decided on the western take of dressing up for the evening and a black tie with a dinner suit or a ball gown would be seen amongst the African guest. In the main the traditional African fashions are what most African guest would wear for the evening. Rabine (2002, p.28) analyses African fashion as a semiotic system. She suggests that 'economic and symbolic exchange comes together in African fashion production...imbuing the products with meaning'. The meaning of the dress in this case would be to display the region and/or area where the individual is from, some information on the social status the dress is able to display for example marriage status or even if the person has children in some cases. The symbolism embedded in the traditional dress varies from region to region, but there are some generic particulars that are understood throughout large areas.



Fig 7.2 Some of the prizewinners at the Award Dinner. Each of the four winners are from different counties in Africa

The social component of the event has been very obvious every time I attended the event over several years. Friends would meet and introduce the new people attending and catch up on how things are with people. In essence there is a lot of mixing, talking in groups and greeting friends and colleagues at the reception, at the tables when the meals are served, and afterwards. This indicates the relationships that are there between the individuals in the community and also further to the next circle of people from Africa, but not asylum seekers and refugees, and further outwards to the organisations, institutions and support efforts of people that work for and with the asylum seeking and refugee groups. This creates a social circle that mixes with the insiders of asylum seeking and refugee community, and on the outside the supporting cast for them to be able to operate socially and forge relationships with the new host community. As a judge on the panel and as a person that has formed friendships with a large group of people in the community, I am greeted with hugs and kisses and the greeting of “how are you” and “What are you doing now” or “where are you now, we have not seen you for a long time”. I often would find that this is a place where I was able to talk seriously about being an asylum seeker and/or refugee with some individuals while the rest of the people attending the evening would mill around us undertaking more or less the same catching up conversations. The relationships would be asserted and assured until the next meeting. The conversations would be the greetings, asking about family members and friends we both know and then somewhere in the mix would be the catch up conversation. This would be on who got their refugee status and are not waiting anymore to get their indefinite leave to remain and/or leave to remain. A few times I was given the news of a person that was deported back to their country of origin.

The several Awards dinners that I attended had all the same pattern and programme for the evening. I would find that when I arrive most people recognise me and will come over to greet me and we have conversations on what is happening. A few times my outfit was admired and on one occasion I could explain that the embroidered waistcoat I was wearing on that occasion was made from beads sewn by hand and designed by a Xhosa woman. And as I am from South Africa where the Xhosa people come from, it was appreciated and admired. People would be invited to sit at their appointed table and food would be served. Then the awards will be handed to the winners. The names of the winners would be read out after all the nominations are read, and in Oscar-style an envelope would be opened by the person on stage, and the winner’s name called to collect the award trophy. Entertainment is spread throughout the evening. At the end of

the evening, there is often dancing and people would enjoy the music and artists performing. The theme of the entertainment would obviously be ‘African’ in that songs will be sung in African languages and African artists from different countries’ work are performed. For example, a troupe of dancers performed Zulu dances and would sing the songs in isiZulu.

The public display that is performed at these events can also be seen as trying to explain to the host community that the new incoming community is trying to remake their own heritage and organising the social framework of their past and constructing some certainty in the uncertain future that being an asylum seeker and/or refugee has.

### The “A Taste of Africa” event

This event also takes place in October as part of the Black History month celebrations in Teesside. The leaflet that is distributed to advertise the event is colourful and shows several pictures of the performers and features that makes up the event. This is showcasing the new community in Teesside to the local host. It is free to all and the audience is given a meal as part of the evening.



Fig 7.3 Advertising leaflet for the Taste of Africa event

The evening is very popular and is deemed a success due to the large number of local people that attend the event. The venue for the last few years has been held in Middlesbrough town hall. It is a large space that has a stage and the capacity for about 700 people in the audience. For this event the back section of the hall has been set aside for stalls, and tables which people can either sell their products and/or make the people entering the hall aware of their service. The tables have art work like wooden carvings and tailored clothes made from imported brightly coloured African cloth and the services are local services like the NHS England and the Third Sector organisations that support the Asylum seeker and refugee community. The employees of the organisations and institutions at their tables would hand out leaflets and answer questions. The rest of the hall had the customary rows of chairs are arranged in two blocks. These would fill up with the audience from the asylum seeking and refugee community and local community. At the back of the hall where most of the stalls are, there is also an area that is open and this is where a lot of the men would stand and converse. There they would get the latest news and gossip from the community and I would, upon arrival go to the area, and greet friends and the people I know and catch up with the latest gossip and news. The women would go and find seats and if there were children, they would be seated with the mothers. The children would run back and forth to the fathers during the evening.

Apart from the entertainment and an event where people can socialise, this would be another occasion where the new incoming group can showcase their social markers and social profile to the host community. This occasion has the stage as the focus point and the entertainment is singing, dancing, drumming and clothes in the form of a fashion parade. Added to the display is the African food served, which is prepared according to (mostly) West African recipes. Here the socialisation and sociality is experienced as an oscillation of African displays and experienced by local people and the asylum seeker and refugee community from Sub-Saharan Africa. James Clifford (1997, p.192) writes about a 'moral relationship and a set of exchanges' and continue to explain 'the display (or in this case: the performance) as a message delivered, performed with the ongoing contact history' (p. 193). Here the entertainment, a very colourful occasion is expressing the diversity of the new incoming group. The exchange is the entertainment enjoyed by the local host and in the same time being shown the significance of the social environment change that occurred when the new group started to arrive in Teesside. The social markers and indicators like clothes, outfits, music, songs, drumming and dance

are definitely in the forefront of the evening. Combine the programme with the stalls of artefacts and creative goods; it is a demonstration of the Otherness of the new incoming community. Thus the ongoing story or history is performed by these events and occasions to explain where they are from and who they are. The specific items on the programme consist of items that are from different countries from Africa e.g. the dance and dancers are from central and Southern Africa and some of the songs performed by a choir, from east Africa and the fashion show, exhibiting and displaying the popular dresses and topknots from west Africa. All of this is to show the detail (songs and dances) of different countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Michael Jackson (2006, p. 330) writes, "...within the context of communal rites, music and movement often take the form of oppositional practices which eclipse speech and nullify the divisions which dominate everyday life". Included in the programme is an item performed by the local Sixth Form College; by resident young people from Middlesbrough which is in contrast to the other performances on the stage. This may also assist in the integration of the evening as a local Teesside performance by the host. This is performed by a group from the arts and drama department of the local This English, and perhaps western, piece is in contrast to the African theme of the evening.

The audience is a mix of local and incoming asylum seekers and refugees, as shown in the photo below. The groups sitting together would often be divided by the country of origin. The local people in the audience (often the parents, family members and friends of the Six Form students performing) and the asylum seeking and refugee audience would enjoy both kinds of performances as a whole; the focus of the evening is to bring the African practices or performance to a local audience. Moreover, the piece performed by the local young people in the programme is perhaps acknowledging that reciprocity of entertainment segment of socialisation is a good and positive exchange. This exchange feeds the relationship that needs to be nurtured between the new incoming community and the host community. Therein lays the social action and social drama as devolved by Victor Turner (1982) of the situation and the development of the assimilation in Teesside.



Fig 7.4 Part of the audience at the Taste of Africa evening in Middlesbrough town hall

### **Public debate**

This event is created to give the asylum seekers and refugees a chance to argue their case in a public arena. The case in this instance is the fact that they are not often listened to and it is difficult to voice an opinion as an incoming community in an established community. In a way this is a continuation of the entertaining events that precedes this as it carries on to transfer the knowledge and information of different social systems that have been brought with by the sub-Saharan community. Here the performers as such are still from the community, but the occasion is a debate which is about exchanging views. The social message can be dramatized by the individual that takes part in the event as often they refer back to their journeys, the difficulties they have encountered upon arrival and still experience living in Teesside. The venue has been a place that has the layout where a panel can sit in front of an audience. Several times this has been at the local university where an auditorium is hired for this purpose. Twice I have been part of the panel over the last decade. We are normally given the topic a week ahead. On the evening of the event, each person is introduced, on which side they would argue, and then the proceedings would go ahead with the first person delivering their address. After all people taking part in the debate had their opportunity to argue their case (for or against the topic) the audience has an opportunity to take part and give a public address on their opinions.



The public debate was advertised in the local newspapers and a local media person/journalist is normally the Master of Ceremonies and the Chairperson. The audience is the asylum seeking and refugee communities and the local Teesside residents which includes the student population. Topics would be centred on issues like “Abolition of Slavery Act: cause for regret or celebration?” and “Race equality in the work place – is it still alive” etc. Therefore, sympathising to the new group of people, which are predominantly from Africa This section of the evening, though controlled by the Master of Ceremonies who plays the role of a chairman, can be difficult as the members of the audience can be very adamant and insisting on telling their stories in support of the argument they want to put forward. In the two occasions where I was part of the panel, I have heard several recourses on personal experiences from the audience that indicated the differences and similarities in the understanding of social settings.

These are some notes taken from my field notes two years in a row:

17th October - Public Debate - topic: "Race equality in the work place – is it still alive”:

“The audience was mostly black people - some students, asylum seekers, refugees and a few migrants. There were about six white locals in the audience of who work in the local authority and were specifically invited by Sade. One of the white local individuals asked the question to the panel and the audience in general: how do I address you? Can I say black person? On the other hand, are you African? - No one answered her and there was a feeling of perplexity from the audience.

18th October - Public debate – topic: “Abolition of Slavery Act cause for regret or celebration?”

Several members of the audience voiced their opinion in that there is no cause for celebration as racism is still at large and several people described their experiences in the local community (mostly being yelled at in public things like: run nigger run etc. why don't you go home etc...). It was seen as a public space for the individuals to voice their argument about how they feel about public issues. One claimed that he "had to run for my life for Zimbabwe” and the English has done nothing to help him. He still feels like he is in prison here for he cannot go back. Why is that man (Mogabe) still there? There is not a reason for celebrating". There was a verbal ding-dong between two members of the audience - Silas and Maurice regarding the idea of celebrating versus regret - they refer to each other as: ‘My brother’ in the debate but clearly not happy with each other.

The presentation and then a performance here are mostly by the audience and are in the format which can be described as telling a story; their story. Nigel Rapport (1997. p76) writes about something basic in the human condition:

And that is the basic relationship between identity (knowledge and perception) and movement: the universal way in which human beings conceive of their lives in terms of a moving-between – between identities, relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures and environments... it is in and through the continuity of movement that human being continue to make themselves at home...they recount their lives to themselves and others: they continually see themselves in stories, and continually tell the stories of their lives.

The audience had the need to tell their story and the public space where the discussion was centred on their plight as asylum seekers and refugees coming into a new social environment were a space where this could be done. The difficulties of building the relationship with the new community which does not have the same cultural and social references are highlighted here. These markers are often visible in that the addressing of an individual is not agreed on and/or understood. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991) under the *Social Structure of the Public Sphere* Jurgen Habermas (1991, P.27) explains that “people in the public sphere use the space for each for their own reason”

The building of interacting relationships between the new incoming community and the host community is as play here as the Asylum Seeking and Refugee community is trying to interrelate and explain their public position in the fortunate public debate. Here new links can emerge and the host community have a change to listen to the issues that are a problem or not to both sides. Thus a relationship between host and guest community can developed to a positive implementation of the two communities sharing the same neighbourhood. Here Meyer and Moors (2006, p.11) support the idea where they claim that ‘group identities and interest are always at play in the public sphere’.

## **Conclusion**

The three kinds of events described all took place in October, year after year, during my field work. The events and occasions would be similar and often the same people would turn up for the events. There is however one person in the centre of the organising of the events and that is a Nigerian woman who is not an asylum seeker and/or refugee. For the asylum seeker and refugee from the Sub-Saharan African continent, these events are a public platform where they can show-case who they are. The significance of these

events is not only connected to the historic perspective, but an expression by the new incoming group of the traditional practises and social markers in the form of dress, food, entertainment, and also articulating their social narrative as a community to the local host community. The traditional dresses and bou-bous are in contrast to the western way of formal dress, but to be able to wear the outfits is noteworthy to the individuals attending the occasions as they can identify with each other as a group (from same or different countries from Africa) . And showcase the important indicators in culture like clothes, language, music and food to the local community. It is therefore creating a sphere where a relationship can be nurtured and hopefully emerge between the host and in-coming community. The performances here is not only showcasing the social and cultural markers (like the clothes worn) and signposts (the awards dinner) which are important, but it also is also from an anthropological perspective significant in that it is a cultural process of assimilation. The host can observe the rituals during performances (Taste of Africa) as it is strutted, danced and performed on stage. Listen to the songs sung by e.g. Eritrean women in their colourful outfits and in their language and eat food prepared in the West African way. Well-presented performances are always enjoyed and taken in as entrainment, here the visual observation of the rituals, songs and artefacts take the understanding a bit further for the local people can have conversations with the new incomers, if there are questions. They are sitting next to each other in the audience and thus communication, which can focus on the event, is possible between the two groups. The public debate has the same role to play. These events assist with creating an understanding between the two communities. It is here where the public comes to the fore and the new incoming group can claim their identity and display their art, music other identity indicators. This public event has the host community asking questions and the new incoming community trying to answer the queries. This interaction can be seen as a positive action for the sociality and social interaction is evolving and construction a relationship between the two communities.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Field Report: The Asylum Seeker Trajectory - East Africa to Malta**

#### **Introduction**

Sharam Khosravi (2011, p.5) explains as an anthropologist how he discovers that in his fieldwork, he finds that the informants' experience overlaps, confirms, completes and recalls his own experiences of crossing borders when he was fleeing his home country as a refugee. He writes that:

...one interesting aspect of the auto-ethnographic text is that the distinction between ethnographer and 'others' is unclear.

This idea of the blending of roles has been noted all through the thesis, but in this chapter, I travel back and recall the route and people that I met long the way of the trajectory. I try to write the chapter in the style and presentation of Eleonore Bowen's *Return to Laughter* (1964) where the anthropologist is the centre of the narrative, but the discourse is from an anthropological perspective.

Ultimately this is a short term exercise where I have the opportunity to travel to a few chosen countries representing the trajectory and journey followed to Europe by asylum seekers and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. The start of the trajectory is Kenya where I visited the refugee camp called Kakuma in the north of the country. The next visit was in Egypt in the capital Cairo and after that I travelled to Libya. Unfortunately, due to the detaining at Cairo, the reduced time I had made it difficult to make contact with any refugee community in Libya. My host managed to get me to a church where I could have a few conversations. I then travelled to Malta. There I spent time with the caseworkers, the centre and some refugees. This experience gave me an insight into the traveling and journey of the asylum seekers that was often described to me while doing the fieldwork in Teesside. Visiting the camps and cities which the asylum seekers and refugees come from, and traveling through the landscape of where they are from, enabled me to witness some of the issues they have to deal with. This also allowed me to understand the difficulties encountered like issues around language, and trying to move on. The differences in these issues are often the trigger to homesickness and/or some traumatic memory for the refugee. However, most of the asylum seekers and

refugees try hard to accommodate and negotiate the problems that come with moving to a new environment, socially and otherwise.

Nita Kumar (1992, p.3) states a case for using field work as an ethnographic effort. She identifies the “person-specific” nature of field work and uses Geertz (1988) to explain:

...The highly situated nature of ethnographic description – this ethnographer, in this time, in this place, with these informants, these commitments, and these experiences, a representative of a particular culture, a member of a certain class - needs as much elaboration as ethnographers have the time patience and talent to give.

Therefore the descriptions I can use, and the conversations previously had of cities, dust heat, fear and hope, are now understood in a way that perhaps is more empathetic. My interpretation of their stories became more focused, with the realisation that the importance they place on objects, music, food and symbolic gestures is not random, but emerges from the cultural and political context of their journeys. My journey was such that it even placed me in a position where I had to negotiate my moving on to the next goal/country with authorities. This resulted in a shared narrative with some of the asylum seekers and refugees I know. The first country I arrived in was Kenya, where I landed in Nairobi very early in the morning.

## **Kenya**

I found accommodation at the YMCA in Nairobi. I then set out to find a driver and, after asking around, Wilson was introduced to me as a very reliable person and we agreed for him to be an allocated driver for the week. My most pressing and main task from the point of arriving in Nairobi was to get permission to visit the Kakuma refugee camp from the Refugee Council Office. It took many visits to offices where I was sent from one official to the next, and one building to the next. Eventually the right office was located and I applied for permission to enter the camp. This took two days of going there twice a day and waiting for the letter, including phoning regularly to check on the whereabouts of the commissioner who had to give permission and a letter of introduction. While waiting and driving to and from the YMCA and the official’s office, Wilson and I had an alternative tour of Nairobi. Kanneh (1998, p.7)) uses Fabian’s argument in *Time and the Other*, where Fabian claims that any knowledge of the Other is fundamentally informed by politics of temporality which positions the object of anthropology investigation in a relationship outside the interlocutor’s present.

In the conversations Wilson and I had during negotiating the traffic, it also came to light that Wilson's mother-in-law was hospitalized that morning. The next day she passed away. He asked if he could drop some things at his house for the funeral. "Where do you live?" I asked, "Kibera", came the answer followed by, "Not far". We drove to his house in the slum suburb of Kibera. I was invited in and given a seat inside the mud house's kitchen. There; cramped in the small space were Wilson's wife and her sisters. I got introduced to everybody. People came to look, at me, and at one stage a very drunk man was manhandled out of the courtyard of the cluster of houses. Wilson apologized for him saying that this family member was "no good, he is drunked all the time". We then left for the commissioner's office again to see if the letter was available. As expected, I was informed that the letter was not ready and I would have to try again later. The journey to Kakuma was discussed and Wilson suggested that I might take the coach there. He drove me to the offices of the coach company. At the coach company's office Wilson asked for information with regards to traveling times and cost while I waited at the back of the room. He was given a price by the person serving. He then turned around and called me. As I came forward, the bus owners saw me and Wilson was told the price is more, apparently the last section of the journey needed armed guards traveling with the coach. I decided not to go by coach, mainly due to the time constraints as it would take about 24 hours to get to Kakuma. We, again, drove to the Commissioner's office and this time the letter was ready. With the letter giving me permission to visit the refugee camp, in my hand I could book a flight to Loddhoggio – the nearest airport to the camp. Wilson knows the airlines and times of flights, but was not sure of the cost. He turned out to be a valuable source of local information and very helpful. He speaks seven languages (mostly tribal dialects) and is well known. At the airport I confirm with him and he is confident that I can be back in one hour to get the plane. This means that Wilson has to get me back to the YMCA. I pack and return with Wilson's help to the airport. Near the airport, close to the airport gate, there are policemen checking cars at random. We drive past, and he waves at the policemen. "They know me", he says.

We get to the YMCA, I packed, and got in the car and off we go to the airport. Walls of big lorries, matatus (minibus taxis), and the rest of the capital's vehicles are all in the road, including a camel, and we edge forward, slowly. During this time, trying to get to airport through the traffic, Wilson arrange for a driver to pick me up at Loddhoggio and take me to Kakuma refugee camp. Just outside the city with the airport in sight, I started to breathe out. Wilson got stopped by the police, the very same ones he waved to

earlier. This time I had to get to the airport on time, for if I miss the plane I would lose the opportunity to visit the camp for with the time constraints, missing the plane would defeat the aim of the trip. I have a week to achieve this, and cannot be very flexible. Wilson knows this, for I explained my mission to him in the beginning. He swore underneath his breath, as he was checking who stopped us, and leant over to take out the payment I gave him for driving me around, out of the cubby hole of his car. He took some money out of the envelope and said that I should not worry. “Wait here I’ll talk to him” he whispered while getting out of the car. He was not happy; I could see that by his face. While he started talking to the police man, who instructed Wilson to open the boot, I watched the car in front of us going through the same routine. The driver, standing next to his car, was asked to open the boot of the car. The policeman stood at the opened boot and the driver was handing over the bribe/money. The passenger of this driver could not see the transaction as the boot was open, but this took place in full view of me, sitting in the car behind. The policeman taking the bribe with a smile all the while talking to the driver and letting the driver go with a wave of the hand. I turned to see where Wilson and the policeman are, standing at the back of the car, with the boot open. I did not see what happened with him and the policeman out of view behind the open boot. Wilson got in and said: “This is how it is”, he is very angry but stays composed. He needs the money for his mother-in-law’s funeral, which is in two days’ time. I am sitting next to him, while he sped on, crying quietly. This feels very degrading. I get to the airport with one minute, really just one minute to spare. I run in to book in and got to the departure lounge to catch my breath. There are a few people in the lounge including people who work at Kakuma camp. The flight was short, in one hour the landing strip was visible from the plane.

Upon arrival, as we disembarked from the plane, a large armed guard strolled towards the plane past me. I got to the little building that serves as the airport official administration building and looked around. I watch as the employees of the refugee camp get in an off-road vehicle and drove off with armed guards following them in the second vehicle. After waiting about ten minutes, I see a very tall Turkana man walking towards me holding a laminated paper with my name on. He is my driver, Alpha. We shake hands. The car is in the same rundown condition as Wilson’s car: no seatbelts. The road was of very good condition and while driving, we made small talk and he would explain things like the herdsmen walking with their cattle at the side of the road armed with old rifles hooked across their shoulders “they are soldiers really, but need to protect the cattle”. “From raids” he answers when I ask. He points out the camels being

herded by near naked very tall Turkana men. One herdsman walking with his goats was completely naked, but wore homemade car-tire sandals and the rifle across the shoulders. Later we encounter a group of women walking with a gliding grace that I can only dream of, and while passing them he would mutter; “they are not available...married you see the beads...”pointing to the bead necklaces adorning their necks row upon row. These are large bead necklaces, reaching from their shoulders to their earlobes and underneath their chins, in a colourful display. We arrived at the camp gates. There Raphael, my contact, was waiting for me. The reception at the camp was warm and the accommodation good. I was introduced to the team of the KNCC (Kenya National Council of Churches) working in Kakuma. The work is basically providing roofs for the houses in the camp (The National Council of Churches of Kenya, 2014).

The next day I was allocated a driver and a guide (Robert and Mark) by Raphael who, it turned out, is the manager of the KNCC project at Kakuma. I was taken to the UN representative in Kakuma town and had to show my letter of permission from the office in Nairobi. She was very friendly and explained that her work consists of managing the refugee camp and co-coordinating all the different organizations that give an input in the camp. I was also told to that there has been trouble in the past with the local Turkana tribe as they were deeply unhappy about the arrival of refugees. Being pastoralist it means that grazing is important for the Turkana livestock. This area is historically their grazing area as it is near the river, a dry river bed at the moment, until the rainy season. The result is that the Turkana became aggressive and some of the refugees were shot, killed or wounded. Eventually an agreement was reached between them and the Camp. The refugees and employees working and living in the camp will not keep livestock and the Turkana will supply the fresh meat to the camp. It works out as a commercial benefit for the locals, as well as the grazing not being depleted by extra livestock brought in by the refugees. The Turkana are treated with caution by the refugees and know that if they keep animals their lives might be in danger. I witnessed a Turkana man dragging a goat to a house in the camp as it was sold to the household. I was told it had to be slaughtered soon as it was dark, for the family was not allowed to keep it in accordance to the agreement explained above.

### **Kakuma refugee camp**

This was to be our next home, we were told, and we stood in that land and we waited that day as trucks and Red Cross vehicles came and left more people there, in a land so dusty and desolate that no Dinka would ever think to settle there. It was arid and featureless and the wind was constant..., but within a year



there would be forty thousand Sudanese refugees there, too and that would become our home for one year, for two, then five then ten. Ten years in a place in which no one, simply no one but the most desperate, would ever consider spending a day. (Eggers, 2006, p. 362)



Fig 8.1 Map of Kenya and surrounding countries



Fig 8.2 Map of North-East Kenya showing location of Kakuma

We left early in the morning to the town for the meeting with the UN representative, and the rest of the day I was taken through the camp by the guide and driver. The camp was divided in the following way: The reception was where new arrivals were directed to. There they were noted in the little office and the paperwork completed. The numbers of the daily arrivals were taken down on a white board, and later in a book. Then the new arrivals are assessed according to need, for example a widow or a woman with or without children is classified as a dependent for they would then need assistance in

erecting a house etc. and also the family size. One question I would hear from the employees, Mark and Robert is: “What size are you?” meaning the number of family members in the house or tent – depending on the stage the household is at. I witnessed a family arrival. They got given sleeping mats, cooking utensils and were shown where to sleep. This was a dormitory type building where they would find a place to stay for about a fortnight. I was taken into the living area (in front of the dormitory buildings) and had the opportunity to speak to a young Somali Mother. She had six children aged from about 18 months to 9 years. Mark helped me find out a bit more. When he asked if she was alone she answered: 'husband no'. Mark confirmed by drawing his finger across the front of his neck – saying; “dead?” She nodded. She arrived 9 days ago. One of the children ran up to her when he saw that she was being spoken to by strangers and clambered on her lap, snuggled his face in her neck – she took him (he was about 18 months old) held him and spoke to him – reassuringly.



Fig 8.3 Somali mother and her son

This was one of the watershed moments for me during the trip. The family unit being preserved; in her role as the mother, in the gesture of cuddling him. Normally, the stay in reception area is about two weeks maximum. The two weeks a tent would have been allocated to the refugee (and family) according to the size of the family, meaning the number of people in the family. As explained, the number of people in the household. They are then allocated a UNHCR card with a tracking number. This gives them formal identity as a refugee and they can queue for the World Food Program (WFP). The basic food stuffs, including maize, beans and cooking oil, are handed out. They can then be allocated a plot, start building the walls of a standard house and the roof can be given by the KNCC.



Fig 8.4 Plan of Kakuma refugee camp

The next step for a refugee was to settle into a tent. This was allocated to the household and placed in street groupings. After that, the place you are allocated is recorded, and the household then starts to organize their lives around this. The tent then becomes a house, with mud-bricks which is then donated a roof. The roof was corrugated iron, donated by the Kenyan Christian Council (KCC). The rest of the surroundings of the house are then beautified with local materials. The bigger area around the grouped houses then forms a block where neighbours will drop in, and the social dynamics evolve around the courtyard, where cooking takes place. I was shown the schools and hospitals and housing and invited into one house – Mark's (the guide) house where his family, including his young pregnant wife is residing. The houses are all fenced off with a hedge made out of local plant material. Everybody is given privacy and adhered to I was introduced to one of 'The Lost Boys of Sudan' (see book written by Valentino Achek Deng) – clearly under the influence of chat/kat... and not very coherent. He tried hard to communicate but I was asked to move on by Mark and Rob. I was shown the brick making, the roof delivering and the food distribution. The new and old schools and taken for coffee and a meal in the Ethiopian section of the camp at a Eritrean hotel and restaurant. This idea developed naturally, according to the guide. As people from areas and countries turn up they tend to group themselves together and thus the blocks and areas will become e.g. the Eritrean area or the Somalia area or the Sudan area. Mark, the guide and counterpart-employee was known by many people in the camp, and obviously trusted. In a full day I was driven through the camp and shown places like the

Hong Kong police station or post as it is called in the camp. This is the area where the Lost Boys of Sudan were placed when they arrived. The camp was just forming and in its beginning stages. All the boys were placed together. As the months went by the boys started to fight, perhaps out of boredom or perhaps as part of growing up and becoming men. This fighting was in the form of sparring with sticks, or stick-fighting. By then the camp had grown to a considerable large community and families were residing there. This was not acceptable, and a police post was placed at the area. The fighting was described by the Lost Boys as; Kung-Fu fighting, after the films that were popular at the time. Thus the name: Hong Kong, was given.

While driving through I was also shown the commercial development of the camp. Shops selling food-stuffs and other commodities like cooking utensils, clothes, and tailors sewing, and bicycle shops where bicycle mechanics were working away with many a young boy sitting observing or doing small jobs. The bicycles were not only a means to get from one place to another, an bicycle owner is able to run a business by transporting people on the back of the bicycle , mostly women, on the back of the bicycle and/or goods. There were also hotels (we had a delicious lunch in one of the hotels) and coffee shops. The Eritrean coffee is exceptional and I was told the owners of the establishments import the coffee beans for their business in the camp from Eritrea. I saw adult Muslim women (wearing hijab) on their way to school and was told they are on their way to an adult class for women. Electricity is available and this increases the possibilities of development. This is demonstrated by the several internet point or internet cafes I saw where a few PC's were set up and managed as a business. Several mobile phone shops were seen. This means of communication is paramount today, especially for the refugees as this would often be the only means of assuring that family members and loved ones are alive and/or safe. More and more young people acquire mobile phones to keep track of friends and – I was told – to follow the money being sent from family members abroad to them. On return to the HQ I had a meal and returned to my room to write. I noticed that the staff quarters consist of not only the offices, but living quarters too. This area where the staff resides and work, has a gate and fencing around. The gate has 24-hour guards. Their goal is security and they have to check all vehicles and people coming and going. The gates are shut and locked at night.



Fig 8.5 A street in the commercial district of Kakuma Refugee camp

Khosravi (2011, p. 70) argues that (refugee) camps have the function to both expel and receive the refugees and are therefore a place to position undesired people outside of society. He writes:

Camps occupy space but are not recognized as official places. Their inhabitants live, give birth and die there for generations but are not recognized as a community. Camps are unnamable, indefinable.

This creates the state of being a refugee or as Malkki (1995) puts it through one of her informants where he explains that he was educated to become a refugee. I had a very short time to observe the camp as a whole and interview individuals, but the routine I could gauge was that of a refugee camp routine in a large and vast space. Paradoxically the camp has the feel of a city. There are houses, shops, businesses, hotels and other commercial operations working and functioning in the camp. I witnessed schools, churches, hospitals and police stations operating as per in a city with staff working every day at their jobs (Agier 2002, p.322). Frustratingly, I had to go back to Nairobi and after two days, and had to get ready for the next place to go to. This time I got to the airport without any trouble with the help of Wilson.

## **Cairo**

This city has asylum seekers and refugees in its demographics, but here the difference is that they are embedded in the city. Upon arrival at the airport I shuffled forward in the queue with the rest of the travelers to have my passport stamped. I was waved through. When I got my luggage, I queued to get a taxi, got in and we drove off into the traffic. The taxi driver made it clear that Cairo is the best place to be, seeing that it is so big. He

tried his best to inform me that the buildings are of the oldest in the world pointing to several palace-like homes. He then pointed out the 'music' from Cairo that is world famous. With this he opened the windows and tilted his head while listening. I was not impressed. To me, it was the sound of many vehicles weaving in and out of the five lane traffic, hooting constantly with black smoke being emitted from every vehicle in sight. My personal first impression is the city is messy, dirty and choking on air pollution being spewed out by all the cars. It feels like a kind of chaos that is busy imploding, but pretends that it is not. He looked at me as if I was an alien when I did not react, even when he dramatically said 'look there is the great river' pointing to the Nile where the pollution in the brown water was obvious. He gave up. Clearly the tourists he normally taxis around are a better entertaining experience for him. I explained that I am here to work and this is not a holiday. The hotel is ideally situated. I booked in and unpacked and went for a walk. I was ambling along on the pavement towards a coffee shop, suggested to me by the hotel staff, when a man came up to me from behind and touched my hair. It was a brief stroke with some words muttered. I turned around and he backed off. With that a man came out of the said coffee shop and shoed him away. He apologised and indicated for me to come in. My hair is blond. This perhaps is the indication that one should fit in, or be treated as an anomaly. After that I covered up with a headscarf whenever I was in public. The next day, I took a taxi to All Saints church where Refugee Egypt is based. After arranging with the taxi to pick me up two hours later I entered through the small pedestrian gate next to the large locked gate.

There I was met by the guard/security man and taken to the offices. No one was available in the offices, but I left my details and was introduced to Rev Emmanuel who is the Sudanese priest (ordained) for All Saints. I was lucky in that he was having a break and was sitting outside with a few men socializing. He turned out to be very friendly and we chatted for the two hours I had to wait. He was very patient with my questions and gave me the logistical information about the refugees in Cairo and some information about Refugee Egypt. In short the refugees are sent to the UNHCR offices upon arrival. There they are issued with a yellow card, they then get an appointment for an interview and if the officials are satisfied about the narrative being that of an asylum seeker, a blue card is issued and that makes them an official refugee in Egypt. This sounds different and one-dimensional in contrast to Kakuma where the personal details (yellow card) are taken with arrival where basics are given and seen to, and then an interview (blue card) and decisions made on how to proceed in assisting the refugee and/or the refugee family. In Cairo, after the blue card is given, they are then left to fend

for themselves. There is no secondary support structure in the support to refugees in Cairo. They then can come to Refugee Egypt where assistance and other things are worked out. The refugee then takes it from there and tries and gets accommodation etc. After six months they have to re-register to keep the refugee card – where they are then processed into the Egyptian bureaucracy as part of the government official count etc. Thus they have legal refugee status. This continues for five years when they can then apply for citizenship. The Centre has a workshop where skills are being taught and a shop which sells the goods that are created and made here to bring funds in. Rev Emmanuel continues to tell me about the difficulties that are experienced by the refugee community. The main issues are finding employment. The Sudanese make up the bulk of the community are mostly employed as cleaners. This would be the women, and the men are at home. “They struggle for they are at home” claims Reverend Emmanuel. The upshot is domestic problems, as he put it. Housing is expensive and this all brings a lot of stress which accumulates over time. He also told me his story. He came to Cairo from Sudan in 1982 on an exchange programme which ran for two years only. He studied Theology and when he completed his studies, he stayed on as the ordained priest for the Sudanese community. We compared stories about moving countries, studies and settling down in a place and social environment that does not always understand your own. After two hours, my taxi arrived. The security smiled and shook his head. He thought the taxi would not return for I paid when he dropped me at the church. I must admit I was a bit worried, but he returned.

The next day I was introduced to George Chimen, another Sudanese (also Dinka tribe). His job at Refugee Egypt is interviewing all new arrivals, noting their narrative in the forms the NGO set up to manage the new arrivals. It mainly requests information like, name, place of birth, country traveled from, passport details and why they are in Cairo. He then proceeds to tell me that he listens to many stories on a daily basis. He states: “They come with great hope that things will be better, but now they are still waiting, for they have to find work, a place to stay and hope that a sponsor from Australia, America or Canada will come forward to help them.” He explains the UNHCR process (which confirms the information Rev Emmanuel gave) me of getting a yellow card upon arrival and then after an interview the blue card. The refugees have to carry the card on them at all times, like an identity card. They could be asked for it at any time by the police and/or other governmental officials. (This sounds like the domestic pass black people had to carry on their person in the apartheid years in South Africa, and the identity card the Palestinians have to keep on them at all times in the Gaza and West Bank areas).

After five years an application for Egyptian citizenship can be put forward. When I asked him if he knows of anybody that has been successful with their application he answered that he was not aware of anybody that completed the process. He himself has been in Cairo several years, but still he has a 'big' wish to go to Australia and to study further. Alas, he has no funds to do it for, with the job he has he is apparently earning enough to survive in Cairo and send remittances home. Apparently the refugees wait. If they are lucky a sponsor comes forward, via the embassies. The refugees fill in an application, and wait. He refers back to refugees hoping that their future will be in another country. I also ask to attend the church services. George gave me the time of the service and bible study after the church service. As I was leaving for Libya the next day, I planned to attend the bible study that evening.

That evening I made my way to Zamalek to the All Saints church. At the bible study I discovered that I could not take part as it was done mostly in Sudanese Arabic. Until a young man joined us and explained that he is from Nigeria and would like to take part. He does not speak and/or read Arabic, so they switched to English. We, the Nigerian and I, were given English bibles and the group changed over to English. Afterwards George insisted on accompany me back to the hotel as it was after ten o'clock. At the hotel, I thanked him and we said goodbye.

I left early for the airport. I went through security and was reprimanded for not having my papers ready, which included passport, ticket (e-ticket), and a travel itinerary and a letter of permission from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. I explained that I am traveling alone and the e-ticket is a real flight ticket. Clearly, this was not good enough, for I got scolded again. "Where is your husband?" was the first observation from the official. I showed the e-visa sent by the Libyan embassy (London) and I was asked to wait. Not long and two officials turn up. With excellent English they explained that my travel documents are not valid for I do not have a valid visa to travel to Libya. The officials also pointed out that I did not have Arabic translations in my passport. I showed the emails (from the embassy and the agent in Libya) confirming the visa and that no translations are needed, but to no avail. I was asked to wait. After two hours they came back, I was asked to come with them. They took me to a side room where I was left, alone. By now I realize that I probably will not get on the plane. They came back and tried again to persuade me that I do not have the correct traveling documents and visas. With every exchange, one of the officials indicated that;" Madame? You want to go to Libya?" Holding his hands palms up in front of me. I phoned the agent in Libya



and explained that the Egyptian officials do not accept the traveling documents. He is livid. “The Egyptians have empty heads, they know all is okay”. More insults follow. He speaks with the agent. As it is in Arabic, I am out of the communication loop. Again the hand gesture: palms up, the hands about three inches apart. I pretend that I do not see it; he gets angry, indicating, which I would not be able to travel to Libya. I phoned a friend in the UK who suggested the Libyan agent to me in my preparation for the journey. He was very very angry and a series of insults aimed at the Egyptians is the reaction. By now, my plane had left for Tripoli.

I knew I had the option of paying a bribe. I chose to ignore it. I felt that this is not my money, and I have a responsibility towards the Trust. I also did not need anything underhand which might become a social complexity as I am not part of that culture. That is easy to say, but in reality it cost me. Mostly time. I felt that all my documents were intact and correct (confirmed later at the Libyan airport) and there was no desperate urgency to get to Libya that day. I phoned the Libyan host, and explained. He was very upset! My first task was to find accommodation. I got a taxi back to Zamalek. As I got out of the taxi the security at the gate of All Saints Church recognized me. He greeted me with a big smile. I explained that I need accommodation. Within five minutes I was guided to the guest accommodation of the church. After I unpacked I enquired about the embassies, and as luck would have it, they were all within walking distance from the accommodation. The next day I queued at the British Embassy. I have to get some authenticity, that my passport is bona fide, and also the Arabic translation. I was told to collect it the next day. I went back to the church. This was a serendipitous opportunity to get to know the regulars better. I spoke to George and he got permission from the manager for me to hang out. I started in the reception room. This is a large room, with rows of plastic chairs and a large television against the wall. Several people occupying the chairs. They had the stance of someone that knows that a long wait is in store. There were women with their children and men. The men were alone. Here they wait either for instructions, as they have just arrived and/or have done the initial process and have the UNHCR yellow card. This means that they are entitled to support by the Centre. They will be called and their particulars taken and filed by George, as described earlier. Outside, there were several groups sitting on the inevitable plastic chairs. One group was clearly women expecting, some with little children, and I was told they are waiting for the weekly maternity clinic to open. This is run on a voluntary basis. At the moment there is an Australian doctor who is working and training a local woman to run

the clinic. I had long conversations with some of the refugees which were mostly Sundanese and from the Dinka tribe (the Darfur region).

The next day I went to the British embassy to collect my passport. After queuing I received it, all in order. I made my way to the Libyan embassy and found the visa section. Several men were working by showing people the way, I was greeted by; “Where is your husband Madame?” This is a query that became a standard in the first communication with the Egyptian officials, and this institution was not an exception. I came prepared with reading material, notebooks and a newspaper. I explained the problem and produced the e-visa. I was asked to wait. After a while I was asked for a visa number (a sort of reference number), I phoned the agent and he texted it through on my mobile phone. Again, I waited, and watched as every passport given to the official had money placed in the passport and handed to him. I read and wrote while I waited, sitting at the back. Five hours later I was the only person left. I was called to the counter. According to the official, they cannot find the reference number on the computer system. He held the passport open while passing it to me; looking expectantly at me. I ignore it. I phoned the agent in Libya, and passed the phone on to the official. I was given the phone back after the conversation. “These Egyptians are very stupid! You have to apply for new visa” was the message from the agent. I asked for a form. Not needed I am told just give the passport. I declined and said that seeing that they are about to close I shall come back in the morning. While walking back to Refugee Egypt, I was thinking that maybe I should pay the bribe/baksheesh? Then decided against it, I have come this far and will try and hold out. At the accommodation I met a Dutch woman while making myself some tea. She claims that she pays a bribe every time she encounters an official. It makes things easier for her. I discussed it with her. It turns out that she visits a person in jail and the only way she can complete her task is literally paying a baksheesh to every person she encounters in the prison. The cost of her visit is trebled because of this. The following day I took my chances and went to the airline headquarters. After a few false starts I managed to find a person who can speak English. I explained my situation. The lady picked up the phone; and when she put it down she confirmed that she can re-book the ticket to Tripoli and the e-visa’s reference number is on the ‘system’ as it was tracked down by her colleague. So, the airport officials and the embassy could not find the track/reference number without a bribe, but the airline company could track it without any problems? After I was given my ticket and contacted my host in Tripoli, I felt better as I was at the point of giving up, and paying. The longer stay resulted in me

getting more stories, mainly from the Sudanese community, and I was able to go to the wedding which I was invited to. Added to that, the accommodation was very good and I could have longer and more chats with the same people that I spoke to the last week.

Back at the accommodation, I went to the Church. I wandered towards the open space in front of the main building – the cathedral. I joined George and sat talking to him. After a while we were joined by other men, until there were six of us sitting in a row, watching people coming and going. To me it felt like that of a village square, which even the African villages and/or small towns have. As far as the men, including me; it was an observation point. Young women enter the space with a ‘task’ at hand; this is presented by the way they walk across the open space, with a purpose towards the end point. This may be the shop or the clinic. Men on the other hand, saunter in and greet with handshakes and enquiring after health of family and friends, then either move on or stand for a while until they continue to the destination, also the workshop or clinic.



Fig 8.6 The wedding at All Saints in Cairo (2010).

I was told about the Sudanese wedding that was going to take place by the Reverend Emmanuel; and he asked if I was coming. I explained that I do not know the groom or bride and have not been officially invited. “Ah... this is an African wedding, you must come” was the answer. I asked the time and he indicated that it will be about six. I shall come at seven then? I asked. Everybody laughed and pointed; “Ah...she is African, she knows”, was exclaimed by one of the men. I arrived at the wedding and was greeted by

a full church where the band was playing gospel type music. Sudanese ladies, I suspect Dinka tribe, were dressed in shimmering dresses and it only accentuated their height and grace. More singing took place and after about thirty minutes the bridal group arrived. The bride made her way to the waiting groom. There was constant ululating of the women in the pews. The ceremony started. Children ran around in the church, playing, and clambered up on any adult lap that was available to either watch or fall asleep. I did not escape that privilege for a little girl decided that she will fall asleep on my lap. It turned out to be the Reverend's three year old daughter. He informed me the next day that the little girl is his daughter. I had more conversation with people which turned out to be productive and informing, like Charles who knows the camp in Kakuma as he was there during his teenage years, made his way to Cairo as an adult and is settled with a young family while working at the Refugee Centre.

## **Libya**

At last, all was in order to go to Libya. Apart from the delayed flight, everything went smoothly at the Libyan airport. I asked the official if the e-visa was sufficient to be able to enter the country. I also pointed out that I was informed that I do not need an Arabic translation of my personal details in the passport if I came in on a tourist visa. He assured me that the translation is not necessary for tourist; as the officials can read and speak English in Libya. My host and his family settled me in. It was very hot and stifling with a dry breezeless heat. I explained that my stay with them will be shortened. They were very disappointed as I stressed that the interviews are very important. My host discussed with me the options that I have. My host had a program planned for me. He wanted to show me around his country and had several visits arranged with his family members. Once again I experience the trademark of hospitality in the Middle Eastern cultural practices. My host and his family wanted to make up for the problems in Egypt they explained hence the reason for the program of visits and sightseeing. I pointed out that perhaps it was serendipitous, for I got wonderful stories from the Sudanese community in Egypt. Alas, my work is my priority and thus I need his assistance to take me to requested places and/or introduce me.

He very graciously said that we can try to get to the Roman Catholic Church in Tripoli. In my preparations I came upon this church and found out that this church was an orientation point for the sub-Saharan refugees. This is also a charity that hands out food and other necessary things to refugees. They go there for advice and of course to be

blessed by the priest before moving on to the next point in their journey; Europe, mostly by boat. My host, being Muslim, said he will take me, but he cannot be seen to enter or even park nearby. He, with his family in the car, drove me to the church which was more or less in the centre of Tripoli. It was closed. I tried to look for some information notices outside the church but there was nothing that I could see. He mentioned a church that he was aware of, but not sure of the denomination.. He then took me to the church outside Tripoli, which turned out to be a Coptic church. The outside did not resemble a church or a religious place at all. It was situated in an industrial area, with high walls around it and large metal doors, similar to all the other industrial businesses around it. Upon entering through the pedestrian door in the big gates, I was very very surprised. Several young men, Somalian looking, loitered. The priest, very obvious in his black cassock, skullcap, long grey beard, and swinging cross around his neck stood up from his chair and greeted me. I explained with the help of a young woman called Maria, who was called to translate. I gave my details and he in turn gave me permission to attend the service the next day, as that day's service was done. He also gave me a blessing. His deep bass-like voice rhythmically annunciating the words in Aramaic (I think). He looked tired and his beard being grey did not help. The next day I arrived on time. The service was in the extension of the complex. I had to leave my shoes outside with all the other shoes. Maria gave a head scarf to cover my head as I entered the church. The service was long. Almost four hours. I sat on the women's side. Several of the women had prostrated themselves in the isle for almost an hour, remaining very still. Maria came to fetch me for the Eucharist section as the priest gestured to her to bring me forward to receive the Eucharist, I presume because I was seen as a guest, for I was the first to receive the Eucharist. I also watched as the envelopes came round on a plate. One was expected to put money in, close it up and place it back on the plate. A woman called, Abby, hesitating, put money into the envelope; I could see the worry and concern on her face, I suspected that she was calculating her household money etc. With her eyes closed in a short prayer whispered, she put all of it into the envelope. She sighed and shook her head. I am sure this is not easy for her. When I spoke with her afterwards, she told me that she has two daughters. The husband is working. Where? "Oh here in Tripoli", she answered. They are from Ethiopia. She is soft spoken and looked down, while talking to me. I did not ask anything further.

The complex had accommodation too. I was told the priest perform services over several days for the different communities. On Friday it is the Egyptians, on Saturday, the Sudanese community and the Somalian community, and Sunday; Somalian and the

Eritrean community. I attended the Sunday morning service. He clearly has a strong leadership role in this community, for as he was sitting in the court yard drinking his tea, people would come and ask questions and he would answer in his deep bass voice. The accommodation was of dormitory style and I saw mostly young men. Upon leaving through the pedestrian gate I noticed women arriving, while I stood waiting for my host. The women approached and before entering, they kissed the decoration (flower design) and then entered. My host collected me and when we got to his house, I had a meal with him and his family and packed my bags as I was leaving for Malta early the next morning.

## **Malta**

As per the classic travelling scenario, my luggage got lost en-route. I made enquiries at the airport and filled in the forms. I was met by a friend who took me to the hotel where I settled in as best I could (without my luggage) and rested. The next day, I went to Valletta and had a coffee with Dr Paul Sant Cassia. He had a long conversation with me and asked some pertinent questions with regards to the collection of the narratives, the role it plays within the field I work in, and the application of it in the NGO's and the community I move in. He gave me some interesting ideas to think about in the research ; within the rationale for the data collection, and the specific trajectory of the refugees trying to come to Europe and ending up in Malta.

During the next two weeks I visited several places and spoke to locals, managers and the refugees. The main place I wanted to visit was Marsa Open Centre. This is a center for asylum seekers and refugees for in Malta. Here refugees are not taken up with ease within the social political structure, thus the vernacular description of 'migrants' reflects the position of these people. The accommodation is not called camps but centers, each with its own name, and the inhabitants are called migrants not refugees. I was taken to several other accommodation set-ups for the refugees; was introduced to men and women, and was fortunate to have been told the stories they told me.



Figs 8.7 & 8.8 Eritrean food stall at cultural event, Valetta, Malta

The asylum seeking and refugee system in Malta is as follows; the asylum seeker would upon arrival be taken to a detention center (an old prison is used for this purpose) and he or she will be kept there for a period of eighteen months. Thus, behind lock and key while their authenticity is confirmed and documents arranged. Koshravi (2011, p. 101) uses Foucault (1977) who writes that the modern prison is assigned the task of administering its inmates' lives in order to foster 'docile and useful bodies'. This is in contrast to the immigration detention center which he describes as a pre-modern prison.

While prison is associated with ‘disciplining’ and ‘normalization’ (Foucault 1977), detention is associated with exposing undesirable non-citizens to abandonment or even death.

After eighteen months they would be placed in one of the centers where they would have to stay until they find jobs and then are able to rent accommodation and become part of the Maltese society. There are several centers in Malta which include the Marsa Open Centre, The Peace Camp, the Women’s Centre and Hangar. I will highlight two of the centers for the purpose of the chapter’s ethnographic input.

### **Marsa Open Centre:**



Fig 8.9 Marsa Open Centre, Malta

At Marsa Open Centre (MOC) the refugees are given a bed, two meals a day and rudimentary leisure possibilities. These consist out of watching television, playing cards and pool. The population in MOC is only men, and mostly young men. Previously the buildings were used as a school. The classrooms are now used as bedrooms, packed with double bunk beds and the larger spaces are also crammed with beds. There are sections clearly set up as to the country the inhabitants are from. There are also



rudimentary restaurants where the cultural specific food e.g. Sudanese, Somalia and Eritrean food is prepared and sold to the inhabitants and visitors. The visitors were mostly other African migrants who are not living in the MOC, but come to eat at the restaurants and socialise with fellow countrymen. There is a large room that functions as a mosque where worship takes place for the Muslim inhabitants. This is also frequented by other African Muslims who live and work in Malta. The rationale behind the Open Centre is that the inhabitants can come and go as they please. (A year on the situations changed, but not of relevance here). The shops and restaurants were full of people socializing and watching television. There are two televisions on all the time. One is set on the world news; mainly covering news from Africa and the other television, facing the opposite direction, shows films ranging from Bolly-wood type to popular American films and sports. Wrestling and football as a spectator sport (on the television) seems to be very popular.

I was shown the first restaurant (Somali) and was invited to have a meal with some of the inhabitants of MOC. There are four men at the table I am invited to; one of them is called Canady. The rice and meat was cooked in a basic open kitchen and I sat down with to enjoy the meal. We ate with our hands and questions were asked; where are you from, what is your job, how long have you been in the Centre? I need to explain that the refugees in the Centre call the eating places, restaurants, but it does not resemble any western and/or contemporary description of a restaurant. The interior (a big classroom) consists of bare tables, some tables are home-made wooden tables, and others cheap white plastic with cheap white plastic chairs. Cement floor and grubby walls, no decorations and the food basically the one dish prepared which is linked to the country the restaurant represents like e.g. Eritrea, Somali and Sudan. Canady and the student showed me around and we decided to have a tea. With the help of the student I ordered tea and a shi-sha pipe from the little kitchen near the Sudanese restaurant and sat down to chat. I chatted to several young men and they told me their stories; mostly on how they got to Malta.

I visited the Centre daily the next few days and was warmly greeted by people who recognised me upon returning. I watched card games played in silence, but the communication was obvious in the gestures. When the players finish a game all the cards were thrown on the table almost simultaneously, then a player would get up and the next player, waiting and watching would, without a word, take the seat and the game will commence with firstly, the shuffling by one person and the dealing by the next

person. The cards would be slapped down on the table with an exaggerated gesture by the players. When they order a drink (the table was next to the Sudanese kitchen door) they would speak and ask for either a coffee or a tea, and then turn back to the game and continue the game in silence.

I continued listening to the narratives offered to me. The men sitting the circle had more or less the same story. One would start telling the story and then the others would nod in agreement: the story line would start on a description of home and then the short account of the conflict and what urged them to flee. Then, the journey. The biggest hurdle was crossing the Sahara desert. One young man told how he and nine other men started walking. “We walk and we walk. After a few days the men...they fall down”. Silence, followed this and the teller looked at me. “Yes, they fall down”. This was conveying to me that their friends died on the journey, while trying to cross the desert. “Only three of us we get to Libya”. The men in the circle nodded and echoed similar stories. Then the life in Libya was described. This mainly consisted of finding accommodation, a job, and saving enough money to pay for the passage to Malta.

Canady was a Somalian and was on his way to America. He is a fisherman who had to flee after his family was killed in a violent conflict. He managed to get to Libya. He was not keen on disclosing how he crossed the Sahara. Once in Libya made friends with people and because he had a skipper’s licence, he did not need to pay his passage for he would be the skipper of the vessel that sailed to Malta. He took five and a half days to sail the small boat and arrived with all the people still alive. He is deemed a hero as so many people drift and eventually do not make it to safety. While he showed me around he told me the story of the ‘Half-boat’.

The narrative of the Half- boat is as follows: The refugee boat set off from Libya filled with refugees and migrants which included families. The boat sailed half way to Malta, when another boat pulled up next to them. This was about five days in to the voyage. The people in the boat that docked next the refugee vessel called out in Italian, and explained that they can take some people on board as it looked like the refugee boat was crammed with people. The caller claimed that they are on their way to Italy and that their skipper is a good sailor, people can join them. Thus people from the refugee boat started to climb over. In the process, one of the men heard the people on the Italian sailing boat speaking in Arabic (North African dialect). This brought on the realisation that this boat is actually a coast control boat from Libya and tricking people into their boat. He shouted a warning to his people saying that the new boat is a coastguard vessel

from Libya. The chaos that followed as people tried to clamber back into the refugee boat as fast as possible, was disastrous. For the coast guard control boat's skipper comprehended the situation of the refugees climbing back into their boat. He then pulled the coast guard vessel away with speed. The result was that some people fell into the water, some were still on the coast guard vessel and of course the rest were still on the refugee vessel. Families were separated and there are stories that people drowned as they fell into the sea in the chaos that ensued. The people in the refugee vessel eventually arrived in Malta with half of the people that were meant to arrive. Hence the referral to the Half-boat.

### **The Women's Centre**

A MOC worker and Canady smuggled me into the Women's Centre by climbing through a hole in the fence that was clearly used on a daily basis. The gate was guarded. The building, a rundown block of flats, is stark and dark inside. The cooking facilities are a two-plate electric cooker underneath the stairs. The grimy table with the cooker (not too clean) and a few cooking utensils on it, is squashed underneath the stairs where there is one electric socket. One room accommodated several women with their children. There were two women in the rooms. The beds were bunk beds and again, like the men, big cloths and/or sheets hung to make a private space. I was introduced to a young Somalian woman who gave birth a week ago to a little boy. She called him Abraham Malta. She seemed happy to have someone taking notice of her and her son. She placed some of the things she had on her bed underneath the bed, made space for me on the bed and invited in me 'in' while pulling the cloth aside. I was given the baby to hold. The other woman joined us and tried to translate my few questions.



Fig 8.10 Abraham Malta and his mum

It turns out that she arrived with the Half-boat. Her husband is either drowned or back in Libya for she has not heard from him. She told me (using gestures) that she gave birth the day the boat arrived in Malta. She gave permission for me to take some photos of her and of her son. I could not stay long as I was smuggled in. So we sneaked out again and left through the hole in the fence.

### **Makin's story**

Makin is in his early thirties, as most of the refugee/migrant men that arrive in Malta. He is from Darfur, Sudan and is unmarried. He tells me that he decided to 'get away or be killed', so he traveled with some friends to Libya. They traveled by road; mainly by car and then bus. In Libya he stayed for two years where he worked in the building industry. While earning an income to save money and survive, he also learned building skills in which he became very apt, and which he now applies to earn a living in Malta. He is good as a craftsman and earns a steady income doing mostly plastering and renovating work. He described his life in Tripoli as a time where he 'just worked'. After two years he thought that it was time to leave. He asked around for information. 'One day, a man told me that he knew what to do, and he knows a person that can assist in this'. He realized the seriousness of the decision but went ahead with it. He 'went there' and found that there was a waiting list, but he was told that if he wanted to leave he had to 'wait there'. He did not disclose details of the accommodation where he and others had to wait for the next stage of the journey.

He continues the story; ‘We waited there for two weeks. Then one night we were told, get ready, you go now. We go to the beach, it is very black and we are told to get in a boat that is waiting in the waves. I am very very scared’, here he shakes his head and continues softly. ‘but I go..., I climb in the boat, there are many people in the boat and it is dark, I think 99 times, I die, but one time I live’. Here I asked him about the risk element he described with such emotional aptness. “Why, if you think you will die 99 times (99%), you still get in the boat?” After a few seconds, of thinking he answered; ‘I think, maybe there is a better place, a better life as here in Tripoli where I have to hide. Yes, yes, I believe that’. He and his fellow passengers were lucky. After four days, they were picked up by a coast guard boat. The passengers explain that they hope to reach Italy. They are towed to Malta which is the closest harbour.

Here he was in detention for the compulsory eighteen months, and then he was moved to Marsa Open Center. He works as a freelance plasterer and builder. He has moved out of MOC and is renting a house with fellow Sudanese migrants. He feels it is still a nightmare (his word) and he is not moving forward. Thus in a liminal position where he is between options and future possibilities, but struggle to move forward. He works hard and he wants to be treated better. He feels no-one (Maltese locals) believes he is a good person. He describes situations where he constantly has to bring a “white person” aka Maltese, to confirm that he can do the work he is required to do. He also feels that the officials that he has to deal with, are treating him and others badly.

## **Conclusions**

Michel Agiers (2011, p. 11) starts his book “Managing the Undesirables” by explaining that his ethnography of refugee camps has a purpose;

...one aiming to define in law and in practice categories of identity to be used to classify and sort individuals as refugees, displaced, disaster victims, tolerated, detained, rejected, in order to integrate them, expel them or keep them waiting.

The purpose of my travels experiencing the trajectory and exploring it through the thesis is to give the reader the setting and landscape, internally and externally, of where the refugee comes from. In this case the Sub-Saharan asylum seekers and refugees. One life story is taken from these travels as part of the life story chapter to explain the life of an asylum seeker in transit and the short observation and few interviews in the camp, in All

Saints Church in Cairo and the centers in Malta hopefully does give a snapshot of the life of an asylum seeker and refugee.

Telling the story is a convenient remodeling of the happenings/events or journey. How does this fit in with the stories they tell which have, no doubt, a tragic content with horrific details and often it is all about the traumatized teller of the story. The teller of the story becomes the outsider and looks at their lives through the 'story'. Often the teller is 'sans papiers' (without papers) and an official identity. Therefore it might be the rationale of telling the story, to assure themselves and the listener that they do have an identity and are living a life accordingly. The re-building of a life which are safer than from where they come. There is strong rationale for the flight but, motivation of moving and the phenomenon of starting again or to continue living is also evident. In this case; the next chapter, a 'new' life etc. Hanna Arendt (1973, P 99) explains that telling our stories has an incentive: "The reward of storytelling is to let go".

The narrative of what 'I' could do is indicating that narratives are not just stories, but an active commentary on contemporary reality and social reality. In Malta, at the time, there is a 'dead end' and they have to wait in limbo (Turner's Liminality theory (1979)) until a possibility comes forward e.g. being offered a green card or sponsorship to Germany, Norway or other countries.

In Malta I had a conversation with a West African migrant. We met in a park. He was sitting on a bench with a can of beer. He briefly informed me that he had no choice but to leave Niger. His mother forced him to leave he vaguely explain that she wanted to have son that have crossed the desert and are then able to send money back to her. The rest of his narrative ran along the same lines as the other refugees that I have spoken to in Malta. He traveled across the Sahara desert by foot and vehicle. He arrived in Libya and worked in the building trade for a few years. Saved enough money to buy a place on a boat and managed to get to Malta. He is working at that time (again as a labourer in the building trade) and felt very down. He uttered a phrase when he finished his story; "People do not have to ask for our stories, it is written on our bodies". Michael Jackson in *The Politics of Storytelling* (2002, p.102) writes that there are a quest for a balance in *What Happens to Who* We Are saying that there are always two spheres that govern our lives.

Every human life is a struggle to strike some kind of balance between these two spheres, to feel that things one decides, chooses, governs and controls that offset the things over which one has no power. Stories help us negotiate this balance. And the succession of stories that refugees tell offer us, far more than so called

facts, glimpses into the processes whereby control over one's destiny is recovered and the imbalance between contingency and necessity redressed.

Most of the narratives that are part of the ethnography convey the idiom of both the struggles in their content. Some things can be controlled and then there are the other side of the balance, where there are things that the asylum seeker and refugee cannot control. The fact that they are still here to tell the stories; and can decide on how to tell their stories to an audience. Like Osama that confronts the government official, explaining that he is not stupid, because he chose to live and come to Malta. Makin made the choice to get on the boat even though he knew that he has a very slim chance to survive. He believed that he has the potential to survive. The mother in Kakuma refugee camp cuddles her toddler to re-assure him that they are safe. And there are the things they have no power over. They are forced to leave their homes, fleeing for their lives, moving to the next destination and whether they can get leave to remain and become refugees. Also the weather and other elements when they embark on the boat journey; e.g, the vessel runs out of fuel. Or in the case of the Half-boat woman in Malta when she lost her husband in the confusion, but naming her son is a way of claiming control back on how she would like to remember her life.

The camp and centers, outside, and also embedded in towns and cities is where the asylum seeker and refugee end up. The descriptions of Kakuma refugee camp, with the shops and housing order and the way the different countries are represented by refugees from that country.

All these activities presuppose uses that transform the everyday vision that the refugee have of space in their daily lives. They are a companied by the beginnings of a symbolic of place, as seem for example in the fact that certain anonymous spaces have been given names by the inhabitants. (Agier, 2002, p. 329)

Like the area called Hong Kong in Kakuma refugee Camp where the Lost Boys were placed. The camp was created to accommodate (in the late 1990's) young men and boys who fled the war-torn Sudan in order to avoid forced recruitment or the devastating effects of the conflict (Agier, 2011, p.55).

In Malta there is the difficulty of the many centers and very little space and place to accommodate the asylum seekers and refugees, called migrants in Malta. The island is not ideal for people to start again, therefore they try and move on, but even this is prove to be very difficult. The issues start at sea, when the expectations are that rescuing will take place, but not as the Maltese official line is "they (the people on the boat) did not

ask for assistance”. Silja Klepp (2011, p.554) quotes Karl Schembri (Maltese writer, journalist and humanitarian):

Tony Abela, the parliamentary secretary who is responsible for the army, said that the immigrants had refused assistance. That was an outright lie. The migrants couldn't refuse assistance because they were never asked.

Refugee camps and centres are places that can be considered where asylum seekers and refugees are given a place to live. The life lived there is not always a desired by the people that experience the life in camps and centres as they have to negotiate a balance between controlling their lives and being controlled by the higher authorities.





# Part Three:

## Discussion and Conclusion

## Chapter Nine

### Reflections on relevant literature

Accordingly, ancestral home-lands , family graves, family dwellings, spoken words, personal names, material possessions, spirit entities , and significant others may figure severally , equally, and actively ..., all these elements merge with and become indispensable parts of one's own being: one cannot live without them. (Jackson, 2002, p. 66).

### Introduction and grounded theory

The function of theory is to guide research and then make sense out of the fieldwork and the collected data. Wolcott (2001, p. 184) upheld this by using examples from Malinowski, and clarifying that the 'sense-making' is critical to the fieldwork task and addressed by the appropriate theory. In conceptual terms, theory provides the underlying principles used to persuade the reader of the rationale behind activities observed and noted during the field work. This is the process where establishing qualitative research as the mainstay of the thesis, as the research concentrates on the outcome and the conclusion of the analysis done out of the fieldwork. The trajectory of the observed is of importance here, for the individual becomes a refugee migrating, therefore fleeing from the homeland to safety and a new country. The thesis has an auto-ethnography where I wish to relay the same as Khosravi (2011) where he claims 'the auto-ethnographies offer a human portrait' (p. 5) and he continue to cite Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 745) in his argument and declares "Unlike depersonalised narrative, auto-ethnography asks its' readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically and intellectually".

The theoretical foci of enquiry in this work as stated in Chapter One are the following:

1. The refugee migrating, therefore focussing on the distinctiveness of the refugee uniqueness and identity, as he or she is fleeing, traveling and moving into a new social environment;
2. The assimilation into the new community and communication; these are likely to be the main concepts used to interpret the ethnographical evidence. The next two components of the research queries are;
3. Memory on how the life-story of the refugee is narrated, and
4. The impact of power and violence on the outcome of all the above.

The consulting, and overarching theoretical foundation for the above four research queries is taken from Gregory Bateson (1972) where he devised the expression of Double-Bind as an explanation of where the scenario is such that the individual is in a position where whatever the individual do, it does not matter: he or she cannot 'win' and is therefore caught or stuck 'in-between two concerns and/or problems. In short, the grounded theory for the discourse analysis. The brief explanation is that the social construct of the refugee is that of the home or country of origin, therefore different from the new and/or host social environment. This brings the refugee in a Batesonian Double-Bind situation where the givens (the social construct of their home) are contradictory and very different to the new construct. To integrate in to the new social environment the refugee has to adjust accordingly, but finds it problematic. This is the dilemma; for the refugee finds it difficult and struggle to assimilate is described by Bateson as; "unresolvable sequences of experiences" (1972, p. 206).

### **Migration and refugee**

Life of a refugee is truly hard. You are manipulated by greedy politicians. You are abused, disempowered and mocked by citizens who do not recognise your humanity (Bol, 2009, p. 108)

By starting with the individual, the refugee, as the centre point of the theoretical foundation, the background would be, who he or she is; and this is inextricably linked to where he or she is from. Moreover, the elements mentioned starting from autochthony through to the belief system and kin merge with and become indispensable parts of one's own being: one cannot live without them. That is the being of the refugee as stated by Jackson (2002, p. 66) quoted above. In an attempt to define identity, there are several suggestions which distinguish different forms in which it can manifest, but according to Bernard and Spencer (1996) the term 'identity' was brought into general use by the psychoanalytic theorist Eric Erikson. For Erikson (1968), personal identity was located deep in the unconscious as a durable and persistent sense of sameness of the self; whatever happens, however traumatic the experience or dramatic the passage from one phase of life to the other. This thinking on the theoretical discourse around identity is also echoed by Manuel Castells (2004) where he maintains that a primary identity is "self-sustaining across time and space" (p. 7). He continues to say that the social construction of identity always takes place in a perspective where power relationships are evident and has an obvious influence on the symbolic content of the identity, for

those identifying with it or placing themselves outside of its construction (ibid). The community in which the individual embeds him or herself becomes the collective connection for the identity which is based on the understanding of similar traits and social practices. As argued by Amit (2002) in *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, identity and Collectivity* (Amit and Rapport) community, identity and ethnicity are “linked” by symbolic boundaries. These in turn were theorized in ‘The symbolic construction of community’ (Anthony Cohen, 1985) where symbolism is the mainstay of the community within a community to separate and identify the smaller and different section in a community. From a philosophical stance Ronald Laing (1960) brings identity to a more focused position using the ‘self’ as the starting point:

“The embodied person has a sense of being flesh and blood and bones...alive and real: he knows himself to be substantial. The individual thus has as his starting point an experience of his body as a base from which he can be a person with other human beings” (p. 69).

Mapping these thoughts on the asylum seeker and refugee, Angela Carter takes it to the more global thinking and explains that there are starting points and points of arrival not only of the person but how the ‘world’ sees that category.

“It becomes ever more urgent to develop a framework of thinking that makes the migrant central, not ancillary, to historical process...An authentic migrant perspective... might begin by regarding movement, not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world” (Carter, 1992).

The social identity of the refugee and/or migrant would have an abstract starting point with the life-story. Therefore, according to Rapport (1997) the study of the social life and the study of the story-telling (life-story) might be seen to be bound together by a commensurate interest in the relationship between movement and identity. He (Rapport) also makes use of Bateson’s work in supporting the theoretical discourse by citing “Gregory Bateson put it like this: the human brain thinks in terms of relationships. Things and events are secondary: ‘all knowledge of external events is derived from the relationship between them’: from the relationship which the brain conceives between them (195, p. 173). To move things relative to the point of perception (the brain)...Movement is fundamental to the setting up and the changing of relations by which things gain and maintain and continue to accrue thingness.” (Rapport, 1997, p. 65).

This point out the baseline of the migrant and/or refugee's identity where the association between movement, perception and movement and accelerative actions and between movement and order, which in turn looks towards movement and individuality of the refugee and the telling of his or her story. This indicates towards the identity of the refugee as being in the sense of reassigning him or herself to adjust to the new social environment.

The exploration of identity as a socio-cultural anthropological concept in the effort to 'make sense' of it will bring the focus not only to the functionality of identity, and its bodily starting point, but also the outcome of the idea in the wider framework of the society. This manifests as social networks as described by George Devereux (1975, p. 45): "A sense of common origin, common beliefs, and values, a common sense of survival – in brief, a "common cause" – has been of great importance in uniting men into self-defining in groups". Social networking is then seen as the interactive dynamic that is created by people and clarified by Manuel Castells (2004) in the following way: "Their (identities) relative weight in influencing people's behaviour depends upon negotiations and arrangements between individuals and the institutions and organizations (p. 7). This provides the concept of identity's theoretical meaning; in that it is a construct within the framework of social interacting and assists in giving rationality to the person's behaviour in the negotiating process. Castells (ibid) continues to define the rationale around his theory on identity and social network and interacting as follows: "I define the meaning as the symbolic identification by a social actor of the purpose of his/her action. I also propose the idea that, in the network society ...for most social actors meaning is organized around a primary identity (that is an identity that frames the others) which is self-sustaining across time and space". (p. 7).

The research question, explores the rationale and motivation behind the application of the constructed sociality (new and historical) in the asylum seeker and refugee community. This includes the interpersonal connections articulating between the refugee and the social interactions they use when they embark on the journey of becoming a refugee. The concept of "community" and its specific cultural benchmarks and references needs to be disclosed in its concrete manifestation by the research. Cultural specifics particular to the asylum seeker and refugee community is identified through the observations made and examined, for both their "nature" and the extent to which they may be unique, or be derived from "home" or "host" communities. Here the more mentioned social references like weddings, funerals and the birth of children

proofed to be the most informative in the query covering the moving into the new social environment.

...identity is a social-cultural marker, when a person identifies him/herself as belonging to a particular group, he or she is pointing out that he or she does not belong to the other group. (Kebede, 2010).

This returns to the alternation of inclusion and/or exclusion of the incoming refugee and/or asylum seeker. This is validated by the struggle that occurs between the establishing of the group's own unique identity and then in the same time trying to define an identity that makes them part of the new community. This creates a push-pull scenario which in turn can become a complicated socio-cultural arrangement. Wolfe (2007) quotes Wellman (Networks in Global Village, 1999) who:

Identifies a 'Community Question' that has two parts: one part asks how the structure of large scale social systems affects the composition, structure and contents of interpersonal ties within them. The other asks how community networks (these ego centred personal communities or action sets) affect the nature of the large scale system in which they are embedded" (pp. 10-11) "...to envision a whole complex social system as being organised in a hierarchy of levels, from national (nation, state)...somewhere among those levels we should be able to identify a structure – even a loose cluster or set of nodes, a set of interlocking circles, a set of equivalent nodes – that is doing what Linton said there would always be a need for, making that connection between the immediate biological realities of humanity and the longer term historical continuity of human institutions.

Wolfe (ibid) continues to describe the perspective on network and interaction in communities as a twofold system: the network of the individuals and the nodes related to each other through their common members (thus including both persons and groups). Each community e.g. individuals from the same country of origin, can be classed as a node and each can be treated as a complex cluster in a larger network i.e. African asylum seekers and/or refugees. As Anthony Cohen (1994) clarifies, with regards to the theory underpinning community and social interaction and networking, it is abstract in its formation for it is created via a symbolic understanding amongst the members of the community. This stresses the complex inter-relationship of individual and society. This (Cohen 1994) is used by Campbell and Rew (1999) in the overview on the subject of social networking and they define the rationale behind the creation of social networking as: ...“networks provided the link and mechanism for conceptualizing sociality in an otherwise fluid milieu” (p3). An understanding of the different interactions between asylum seekers and refugees within the community and the institutions and agencies can

produce an understanding of the conditions that create the social systems where the refugee interact within his or her own community and within the new community. Richard Jenkins (2004) writes in *Social Identity*: “Identity can only be understood as a process of being or becoming: One’s identity – one’s identities, indeed for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular and plural – is never a final or settled matter. Not even death freezes the picture” (p. 17).

## **Assimilation**

Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop in interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through and ‘in-between’ temporality that makes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 19)

The relationship of the integration process is a long term, and layered application that involves not only the individual, but the community, society and the historical past of the refugee and asylum seeker as with the community. Therefore, in the understanding of being incorporated into a community, the issues involved can cover many aspects. Primarily, the starting point of the integration process is the person, the individual; here the refugee and/or the asylum seeker is the centre point and from this the rest of the process to assimilate ripples out to the peripheries of the community and the society. For the purpose of the theoretical reflections around this consciousness the refugee is not only an individual, but an individual with a specific identity who networks and negotiates his or her social position from afresh in the new social environment. There are several ways this can be observed, as it is discussed in Chapter Three, which not only includes participant observation, but distinguishing the interactions of the people in this community with each other and with the new community. Therefore a social network framework can be used to establish the interactive patterns of the refugee and asylum seeker community.

Horst and Miller (2005) used 25 individuals for an ethnographic research project in Jamaica, and realised that the social network pattern that emerged was based loosely on kinship. This had the value of potential income and support on many levels, especially for the single mothers who were the focus of the ethnography.

The implication of all this is that this general system of asking and giving is part and parcel of the powerful concern for building extensive social networks (p. 762)

They point out that much of the literature on social networking they used to strengthen their findings makes the point that: “an ego-centred web of relations is becoming the dominant form of sociality in the modern world” (ibid p763). Evidence from this approach may be in juxtaposition with that obtained through participant observation contributing to the creation of the ethnography. Social reference points that are visible are important per se, but in this case it represents the community and is often an opportunity to display the collective identity of the refugee. In this case the refugee and asylum seeker is from sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore they are to be identified as black<sup>1</sup> African people.

To address the issue of identity in the African context Kadiatu Kanneh (1998) very vividly describes being African in reviewing literature focusing on the African identity as follows:

African-ness is, literally and figuratively, etched upon the body, also reveals the possibilities and the dangers of transgression. African identity, as a product of surveillance, of cultural and moral policing, and of psychological suffering, is presented as a constant negotiated space. To be ‘between’ cultures or ‘between’ races is to be at the fraught and dangerous interstices of sanity, community, self. It is to be in ‘the middle passage’ between worlds. (p. 165).

The social setting they arrive in is predominantly White British. Added to that there is the distinctive cultural outlook known in the north of England. The local North East population are known for a particular cultural description which includes dialect, behavioural patterns around socialisation and how family life is perceived to mention a few issues. The commencement of the new life, gives the refugee a position which is in contrast to the local population and shows a clear Other-ness in the community they were dispersed into. How do they become part of that community? It is an apparent difficulty which can be confusing and seems almost impossible given the differences. This makes the Other-ness very ostensible and apparent consequently an indicator that Bateson’s Double-bind (1972) is at play in the social and cultural interaction for the asylum seeker and/or refugee. To be able to slot in the social setting and the local

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<sup>1</sup> To clarify: the individuals that I interacted with over more than a decade have always referred to themselves as Black Africans.



community the asylum seekers and/or refugee need to have a platform to function from that includes language, food and other socio-cultural references. Or convince the people of their plight and ultimately of their convincement to become part of this new community and social setting they are given. If the socio-cultural references are similar to that of the host, then the individual would not have to struggle to communicate the need to integrate. If one of the issues is for example that language is a problem, and the incoming person has to learn not only English, but the vernacular of the North-east then it will take time and work on the part of the asylum seeker and/or refugee. Hence the position of Bateson's Double-Bind; for to integrate language is necessary, and if one does not speak the language of your host; integration is a problem. This can be classified as the context of Bateson's Double-Bind theory: "What is known of learning theory combines with the evident fact that human beings use context as a guide for mode discrimination" (1972, p. 206). Communication is problematic and if that is combined with cultural practices that are diverse and contradictory to the local patterns, the asylum seeker and/or refugee has a situation where he or she cannot win or be successful in the outcome.

The situation can also be explained by Victor Turner's Rites of Passage (1969) where rituals associated with life changes or flashpoints where often it require movement and integration into, or back into society. There are three stages identified namely; separation, margin and re-aggregation. In the final and last stage the reintegration of the person that left and often spend a long period of time in the Liminal (second) stage which has as part of it dynamics a hazardous journey or time. This is followed by the re-aggregation into the society with a new and/or different social status attached to the person.

## **Memory**

Thus stories of home, of the Eviction, were not just stories of the past. Told in space, settlements, and camps that were structured around the assumed importance of ... they were injunctions to remember difference, and thus were stories of the future. (Thiranagama, 2007, p. 134)

To the refugee and/or asylum seeker, memory and the actual memories, in all its manifestations are crucial for it 'provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity' (Creet and Kitzman, 2011). In this, the refugee and/or asylum seeker has more than just assets to transport over the many miles that they travelled to get to

the North East of England. These memories would be part of what they bring with them on the journey. These memories, inevitably, are of the critical events and incidences that occur during the journey and what was left behind and the event/incident that initiated the process of becoming an asylum seeker and/or refugee. It is perhaps worth noting that the memories of traumatic experiences on the whole are sincere as demonstrated by the numerous research studies done with the Jewish survivors of Second World War concentration camps: “It is perhaps worth noting that this again reinforces Neisser’s (1988) point that spontaneous autobiographical memory tends on the whole to be accurate, with errors only introduced when subjects try to go beyond the information that is readily available” (Baddeley, 2003, p. 279). Therefore, perhaps one of the elements in the remembered profiles is fragments of the event that created the reason for the plight, the memory of the event that caused them to become refugees and/or asylum seekers initially. Moreover that of the home and life before the plight occurred. In between arriving in the new community and the place of departure and generally seen as ‘back home’ there is the journey and other detail where the refugee has to establish themselves to be able to move forward. Often these places are the borders of countries they cross into. James (from South Sudan who fled to Kakuma refugee camp in the North West of Kenya) who made his way to in Cairo could describe in detail the time he had to convince the border guards that he was not wanted for anything, but he could not speak Arabic then, but manage to get through the border post by being patient. He could relay the experience in detail and could even repeat the sentences spoken by the guards while querying him and his answers; including the fear he felt and how anxious he was, but waited for the answer a decade later. As Makaremi states in ‘The Waiting Zone’ (Creet and Kitzman, ed, 2011). “The narration reintegrates a crucial issue dismissed by asylum administration: the way border control emerges within the larger migratory trajectory and the way it will influence it – particularly through the impact of deportation. Emerging and confiscated narrations inform the ways that migrants detained at the border experience subjectification and – temporarily – occupy a place again, be they assigned to it or claiming it, be they confronting it or resigned to it, they wanting to go around it or to avoid it” (p. 81). James remembered the detail for he was very aware of that the border guards can arrest him and send him back or let him through to safety; moreover his life as crucially in danger for he could not run or hide, but he had a position to take and had to recall his story for the guards and wait. He was fortunate in he could move on.

The West African refugees in Malta at the Marsa Open Centre could tell me their story of the journey through the Sahara desert. Moreover this was in contrast to how James remembered and relayed his journey and they would not give the detail, like James, on feelings and emotions and the waiting that occurred. They were escaping from violence and as most of their family members have been killed in the conflicts, and/or disappeared, they decided to try and get to safety. The fleeing was part of the experience of the violent environment they were escaping from. They walked the desert for more than twenty days; as a group of young men, not all of them survived the ordeal, but those who did would remember their companions that did not.

The deaths of the young men that walked with the survivors cannot be taken lightly, for 'it could have been them', and there is also a feel of a kind of responsibility to recall the event as described by Ricoeur "To do justice to others, through memories" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 85) - This duty is performed by the remembering of the people and the non-description of how they died. Hanna Arendt has her take on this practice as she explains in *The Human Condition*: "Indeed, the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences,...is at the same time the most private and least communicable of all" (p. 50-51). Here she refers to intense bodily pain; but from what I can observe this experience, of seeing your companions dying in transit to safety, and the trauma of this would place the memory in that kind of category that can be described as; 'the least communicable of all'. Therefore when recalling the event, humans struggle to give it a public appearance and therefore chose to remember the framework of the event and/or experience and not the detail.

With the Life-story project in Middlesbrough which was managed by the Local Authority Archive; (see chapter 5) the retelling of the journey and how the asylum seeker and /or refugee came to live in the North East of England, is to preserve the memory for the future generations. This is to prepare the historical information for the future. This aim and objective behind the project has a different angle on keeping the memories alive. This project not only has an purpose for the individual that want his or her grandchildren, therefore the future generation, to understand their different looks, but the reason for being in the North East of England which is as far removed from the country of origin as possible. This includes not only the geographical distance, but also the socio-cultural and phenotype of the person. This means that the purpose of the narrating the journey on a device that can be shown to future generations is to make sure

that the story-line not only explains, but show the person arriving in Teesside (Middlesbrough). The memory will be carried into the future with resolve.

Zofia Rosińska in *Memory and Migration* summarizes the importance of memory as follows;

Memory plays a triple role: it is identity-forming by maintaining the original identifications; it is therapeutic because it helps bear the hardships of transplantation into a foreign culture; and it is community forming, by creating a bond among those recollecting together. (2011, p. 39).

Ultimately to try and unpick memories, what they are, and why we remember what we remember is complicated and complex, but the purpose of what is remembered seems to be significant and valuable to the person reminded of events and incidences and sometimes the audience has the benefit of this value too. This will assist in creating a community in which the group of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers can function safely. Thus the feeling of a community is crucial for 'feeling at home'. Ghassan Hage (2010) in *Migration, Food and Memory* points out in his chapter that the articulation of migrant memory of "back home" through the active process of home building, the newcomer engage in when they settle, therefore a place where opportunities can be taken;

A home has to be an existential launching pad for the self...the opportunity to develop certain capacities and skills, the opportunity of personal growth, and, more generally, the availability of opportunities for advancement whether as upward social mobility or emotional growth or in the form of accumulation of symbolic or monetary capital. (p. 419)

Collective memory is also deemed important for this group as the social and public events will demonstrate. The traditional dress code the asylum seekers and refugees wear at the events is not only a marker of where (which country) the attenders are from, but helps maintaining the collective traditional practices and rituals. Paul Connerton (1998) argues that ritual re-enactment and its quality, is of cardinal importance in the shaping of communal memory (p. 51) and "performatives are encoded in a set of postures, gestures and movements" (p. 55). This theme of collective memory continues into the arena of food and narratives as validated by the descriptions relayed in the life-stories.

## **Ethnographic context/Africa/migration**

“To be an African is not a choice, it is a condition...” (Breytenbach, 1992, p. 75)

The asylum seeker and/or refugee from sub-Saharan Africa often and repeatedly faces challenges, when he or she has to make decisions that might have a serious impact on many issues.

We speak of tragedy when there is an absolute and irredeemable loss of this balance between microcosm and macrocosm – when one’s own familiar world is overwhelmed and eclipsed by external forces that one is powerless to understand and to withstand. (Jackson, 2002, p. 67)

These choices would be made in the context of life and death. The refugee would, in most cases, flee from danger and conflict, which in turn expresses the disposition to try and survive the conflict, violence and moreover the power that is destroying their lives, families, community and/or society. As Michel Foucault express about the transformation of what he calls bio-power (1991, p. 136) “The mechanism of power is addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used”.

The thesis is attempting to comprehend the refugee in many social setting while in transit, including: the refugee migrating (this expression is used in a generic term to explain the movement etc. of the refugee), therefore focussing on the distinctiveness of the refugee uniqueness and identity, as he or she is fleeing, traveling and moving into a new social environment. The whole experience in its totality is a complicated arrangement of identity shifts and conceivably the dynamics that initiated these transformation and/or transgression.

...as resources dwindle and relations of wealth are reconfigured in the wake of violence, identities and ideas of belonging – whether to a gender, generation class or ethnic group – become the focal areas of conflict and negotiation. (Broch-Due, 2005, p. 2)

The way power is presented to the refugee during this period emerges to the extent that it motivates the refugee into action and thus making the decision to flee.

This focuses the reflections of theoretical issues on the body; as the refugee only has his or her body to negotiate with. In this situation, the body is directly involved in what is known as the political field. Foucault (2006) uses this knowledge of the body in a theoretical way where he describes how the body is also directly involved in the political field:

... power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs (p. 353).

He continues to explain that these political investments of the body are bound up in accordance with complex reciprocal relations where the body is dedicated to relations of power and domination (p354):

This subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology; it can also be direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on material elements, and yet without violence; it may be calculated, organised, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use of weapons nor of terror and yet remain of a physical order”.

The decision to flee to safety and undergoing the journey to a place of safety can also be attributed to this ideology of the body (of the refugee) being the point of departure of the negotiation and reciprocal exercise of a kind of power against the subjection of it being exposed to in this particular social setting of, often, violence. This is the compromise of the refugee fleeing and leaving the home and country of origin.

The social and cultural heritage travels with them and they will arrive with the habits and rituals embedded in their thinking and it will come forward in the daily routines as demonstrated by the Zimbabwean Herbert when he was doing housework. The power demonstrated by Zimbabwean men versus women is clearly seen in the practices as written by Lindgren (2005) in his chapter ‘The politics of identity in Zimbabwe’. e.g. “men also often dominate women in a rather unconscious way in everyday life. For instance, when a man greets a woman he places himself in a higher position, while she bows curtsies to him and avoids his gaze. If they are in a homestead, the man sits on a bench or a stool, while the woman sits on a goatskin or mat placed in the floor or ground” (p. 163). Herbert was still very much aware of his place in the power position of being a male and a Zimbabwean. He also understands that the power he has as a male in the new home in England is not the same as ‘back home’ and needs to shift into a more western attitude. He makes an attempt to be a husband that can see to the house tasks, but know that in Zimbabwe he would not be doing the same tasks. He is trying to demonstrate his eagerness to assimilate and become British. In ‘Violence and Subjectivity’ (2000) Mamphela Ramphele writes that “The gender division of labour is blurred by the demands of survival, which require the co-operation of as many members of the household as possible to contribute to its smooth operation” (p. 111).

## **Conclusion**

The theoretical direction of the thesis has an element of being grounded in the Batesonian double bind as the observation and the outcome of the fieldwork indicates. Then there is the ethnographic detail anthropologists rely on, for the rich descriptions to bring into life the emerging themes of the research. With this thesis the attention is on the assimilation and the lives of asylum seekers and refugees negotiating the social issues that hold up their profiles of where they are from. There is a challenge in the thesis to be recognised; namely, that the refugee settling in a host community is a not passive and dependant individual, but engage in social and cultural assimilation, while at the same time holding on to memories and telling stories they remember of where they are from through many kinds of media, including public events. Jonathan Bascom (1998) writes in the Introduction of 'Losing Place' "At least as yet, the distinctiveness of refugees has not been established in a theoretical sense. Perhaps in time it may be proven otherwise, but refugees remain field of study based on a category of people, for which the defining conditions are more difficult than ever to differentiate." (p. 3). The research shows that the difficulties they have in integrating and negotiating the track and journey to safety is complex, but the cultural reference points and social markers are significant to this group of people. Then there is the ethnographic section of the thesis that drives the cultural themes to support the actual assimilation that takes place when a stranger, in this case an asylum seeker and refugee settles into a strange place (willingly or unwillingly). As Robert Layton (2000, p. 101) explains:

Theory guides the way, which we separate interesting from the trivial events experienced during fieldwork. It helps link the observations that interest us into a coherent ethnographic account and points towards particular interpretations or explanations of what we consider related events. Theories do not however, blind us completely to the complexity of the field experience. Our finding may lead us to modify a useful theory or even reject theoretical orientation altogether if it appears indifferent to what interest us in the fields.

# Chapter Ten

## Discussion

### Introduction

My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life, as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters, even when they bend him like a heavy snow? So many other men have lived and shall live that story, to be grass upon the hills...these things I shall remember by the way, and often they may seem to be the tale itself, as when I was living them in happiness and sorrow. (Black Elk Speaks, Neihardt, 2008, p.1)

With the life-stories, the ethnography of the events and the trajectory described in the previous chapters the inference is that the social and cultural conditions of the asylum seeker and refugee journeying and arriving, show how some specific issues emerged as themes. These themes are profoundly important, remain as part of their mind-set, and are specifically significant in the adjustment and development of the social and cultural part of the asylum seeker and refugee. The themes in turn, contribute to an assimilation process in the new social environment. Primarily, memories and remembering, in the act of storytelling seem to be dominant. I have established, in the long fieldwork process, which included observing, and listening to the narratives being relayed, that there are four basic essentials, which become themes in the anthropological sense and which, the refugee takes into the new life. As mentioned before they are memory, language (which includes music and poetry) food, and belief, (which encompass hopes, and risk). Moreover memories, which manifest in the narratives being told and retold by the asylum seekers and refugees. The memory element is the fundamental issue with the narrative relaying and telling the story repeatedly, to different and/or the same audience. As Johannes Fabian (2006), explains in the chapter titled 'Forgetting Africa':

It is also true that the fervour applied to narrating the past concentrates on memory, which means that in the examples to be discussed remembering will be in the foreground... (p. 147).

Furthermore remembering all the details of one's life when it is (often) violently uprooted, disturbed and moving to a strange and different place, where one has to start again, is important and vital to continue to be the person who you are, culturally, socially and include expressing one's selfhood.



Memory, in all its forms, physical, psychological, cultural and familial, plays a crucial role within the contexts of migration, immigration, resettlement, and Diasporas, for memory provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity... (Creet, 2011, p.3)

In *The Politics of Storytelling* Michael Jackson (2006) concludes that telling one's story and actively taking charge of our own memories is a process entailing the recovery of narrative memory. He refers to Van der Kolk and Van der Hart's expression to describe narrative memory as "the action of telling a story" (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995, p. 175, cited in Jackson, 2006, p. 56). This gives the indication that the two actions; narratives, and remembering the stories, ergo memory, are woven into each other. Furthermore, narratives can be a useful tool to tease out the separate categories of the ethnographical connections.

The first set of data collection and participant observation is in Teesside, which is the area where I live and work. This includes the Life-story project of three individuals in Chapter 5. The ethnographical perspective became multi-layered for not only were the refugees trying to explain why he/she was living in Teesside to their future generations, thus acknowledging their kin and how kinship is recognised, but moreover to show that the group is trying to assimilate into the community by clarifying their roots to the host community. This public, and in a way a permanent, acknowledgement, is then a point of departure for the asylum seeker and refugee to start the integration process. Thus, it is a sort of implementation to present the social and cultural profile of the incomers in Teesside. The rationale being that if the host has an idea of the origin of the guest, then there would be better understanding of their diverse cultural profiles. Paul Connerton (1989, p.22) refers to the social memory in social and cultural theory and he classifies it under the heading of 'personal memory claims:

"Through memories of this kind, persons have a special access to facts about their own past histories and their own identities, a kind of access that in principle they cannot have to the histories and identities of other persons and things.

The second set of data collection occurred during the travels emulating a trajectory into Europe. The stories collected during the trajectory journey from East Africa. These narratives can be seen as the contextual content of the commencement of being an asylum seeker and refugee. This explains the situation that they find themselves. Several times, it was clear to me listening to the story that the person or persons telling the story are not an original inhabitant of the social setting where the story is told to an audience. They are the new incoming people telling their story. In the actual refugee

camp, the new arrivals told their story to the officials and perhaps their fellow refugees, already settled in the camp. Refugees who moved to North Africa recall the camp life and the moving away from the camp and then the new life in the place of settlement. Again, this gives the narrative a multi-layered texture, which is a demonstration of the complex lives of the asylum seeker and the refugee in transit and at the place of settled habitation.

Narratives are not just stories, but an active performed constructive commentary on contemporary reality and social reality. This creates relatedness. So; the constructive section around telling or relaying the narrative; on becoming a refugee, therefore the reason why the sub-Saharan African is now living in Teesside, is perhaps also a way to rationalise the reality of not being 'home', but that there is another construct to work on; namely assimilation. Here the new home is shaped to encompass the home of the past too. Michael Jackson (2002) describes the story telling performance as an oscillation between being an actor and acted. The act would be the fleeing from danger, and then becoming an asylum seeker in search of safety the actor's role. The narratives and recalling of the events creates the subjectivity of everyday life, and the struggle to deal with adverse risks, which demand a negotiation between, and being the condition and surviving the shocks of being a refugee.

The refugee telling the story then has to make sure the narrative include the actions of many indicators that defines him or her as an asylum seeker which adds to the complexity of telling the story, including remembering the detail. Putting it in the concrete framework of an object; a simple wooden handmade bowl used as a kitchen utensil initially, or perhaps a pair of shoes that is used, now shifts into a position of importance, which thus the value of these objects changes for the refugee. If an audience ask about the bowl/ pair of shoes the content of the story you tell need to include importance of the object to you, the narrator. The value is that it will indicate security, safety and/or viability including a strong reminder of where they are from. Therefore an act to remember and not forgetting where they are from. From an ethnographical perspective, I have encountered this when the counterpart employee in Kakuma refugee camp asked me if I could take a small parcel to London for his friend. It turned out to be a pair of sandals made from old car tires; the friend of the counterpart employee, living in London asked for a specific pair from a specific shop in Kakuma. As I continued with the field work in other countries, it took a while for me to parcel up the sandals and send to the address given to me, in London. I only did it when I

completed my fieldwork and got back home in the UK. Upon receiving the shoes, the person who requested the shoes sent me a text to let me know he received the parcel and to thank me. He explained in the text that these are now his 'proper pairs of shoes'.

## **Memory**

In the autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, written by Dave Eggers (2006), Valentino reminds himself of people that were important to him in a memory he experienced when, at last he and his fellow 'Lost Boys Of Sudan' reached Kakuma. The refugee camp was set up (for the Lost Boys) where they lived in relative safety till they moved on. In his case he got a sponsor to go and live in America after more than a decade in the refugee camp. The memory was of people that are family and important to him.

You were there Tabita. You were there with me then and I believe you are with me now. Just as I once pictured my mother walking to me in her dress the colour of the pregnant sun, I now take solace in imagining you descending an escalator in your pink shirt, your heart-shaped face overtaken by a magnificent smile as everything around you cease moving. (Eggers. 2006, p. 363).

This element (remembering and memory) is vital to the content of the narratives: for this is the complex relation between the world/society and our shared lives, and influenced according to oscillation of events. The presentation of it (narrative) to the different audiences according to Jackson (2002) is how we are driven by the world around us. The narratives I heard during my travels are obviously recalled by the refugees and I had to be aware of the oscillation effect where events are brought forward or sometimes left in a corner of the person's thoughts and not verbalised. There seemed to be a formula that was used by the narrators (asylum seekers and refugees) which would go as follows; firstly, the home and family left behind are briefly mentioned, and then the relaying of the journey and sometimes the experiences during the flight and travelling. Obviously towards the country the refugee aims for which in most cases, I am aware of, is in Europe.

This structure and sequence becomes the core of the narrative, with exceptions and sometimes slight differences or as formulaic as most of the stories being told to me.

This was noted by Jackson (2002, p. 31):

In all societies, stories echo the developmental cycle of the individual – a passage from dependency to independence... This journey has both temporal and special dimensions. It is often sequences of events aligned along a continuum from a beginning, through middle toward an end.

Sometimes the reason for fleeing is mentioned, but often woven into the narrative: for example James, in Cairo, who started off in Kakuma, explained how, in his experience, he was arrested and forced to join the army to deal with the conflict in Sudan, but managed to escape and ended up in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. In Malta the stories had a similar feel, as if the narrators either got together to tell the same story or they heard each other tell the stories so often that they present the narratives as an inter-subjectivity of the refugee community there. Moreover the fact that all of the refugees arrive by boat perhaps had the result that the thread is the same one, but with different people telling 'their' story. Again Jackson (2002) can underpin this in the explanation where he stated that stories are not like journeys because of the effect they have on us but are about journeys. Within the context of storytelling there is the remembering, thus the memories, not only of the narrative's sequence, but also the detail in the content. My observations come either to the conclusion that the teller would address the audience *per se* and delivers a short description, or, at the other end of the spectrum, a long drawn out narrative. In the perspective of the audience, either would suffice. Moreover Zofia Rosińska (2011, p.39) noted that Freud and Heidegger developed the idea that memory is not capable of storing and preserving the past intact and unchanging for: "A collected memory is never the same but rather change its meaning, depending on the horizon of other experiences that surrounds it".

In the course of the fieldwork in Malta, the Young Ethiopian woman (The Half-boat) told me her story and she ended the account of her journey with the introduction and presentation of her newborn baby boy. She named him Ibrahim-Malta. She had lost her husband, but has a newborn son. Avishai Margalit (cited in Junker-Kenny and Kenny (eds) 2004) asserts that memory forms part of "thick relations", i.e. of the life of natural circles of belonging, like families, religion and nations. (p. 22). As a demonstration of this, she named her son with the specific objective of reminding herself of the gruelling journey, which brought her to Malta. The memory of the rationale and outcome of the journey are kept alive within his name. He is her son, therefore he will be the reminder of her husband and family that are lost or passed away in her ordeal of becoming a refugee and starting over in a new country. As Ibrahim-Malta grows older, the narrative will be told (many times) to friends and relatives therefore this will be passed on not

only to his children and future offspring, but also to the family members and friends of the family. Paul Ricoeur (1995, p.373) in *Time and Narrative* explains that there is a relation between memory and the past and it is a relation of reality "...that is no longer real in the sense of being present (as, for example, the physical object)..." Here the object is her son albeit a living object, but present and alive, he is the only relative she has and knows of at the time.

This is one demonstration of how asylum seekers and refugees hold on to and deal with their memories and the importance of keeping the memory alive in the retelling of the story. Here it folds into kinship; there are two survivors of the family, she and her new born son. The family name will continue and hopefully become a component of extended family members in time. This in turn will ensure the story will be remembered. Walter Benjamin (1968) describe in the chapter called *The Storyteller* in his book *Illuminations* that "Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation." (p. 98) and "It is, in other words, remembrance which,...is added to reminiscence, the corresponding element of the story, the unity of their origin in memory...". In the life-stories described in Chapter 5, the four people have decided to make their stories available to the public and to future generations. The hope, as expressed by Hilaire, is that the wider community will be able to understand that the communicable experience of coming to the North East, or Malta, for safety and this can creates the setting for asylum seeker and refugees and the wider community to connect. Hanna Arendt clarifies that "Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act at the same time contains the answer to the question asked for every newcomer: 'who are you?' This disclosure of who somebody is implicit on both his words and his deeds." (1958, p. 178).

## **Language**

Language, in its essential properties and manner of use, provides the basic criterion for determining that another organism is a being with a human mind and the human capacity free thought and self-expression, and with the essential human needs for freedom from the external constraints of repressive authority. Chomsky (2008, p. 81).

Language in this section is a communicative means, which has the task to bring forward the freedom of expression in the telling and re-telling of stories. This human communication is ultimately not just the transfer of information, but also a rich

interlaced experience, and layers of alternating meanings and often second-guessing. This would often encompass the cultural and social meanings including gestures and other code like actions and words. In the telling of a story in the case of the asylum seeker and refugee it has the language corresponding to that of the person which encompasses the country of origin ( perhaps it is not English, but French and then the ethnic/tribal dialect) and its own cultural eccentricity. Carrithers (1992, p. 74) writes that:

The sense of simultaneously informing and acting on others is combined powerfully in what is arguably the most information-laden speech activity of all: story telling...from this perspective humans can understand a complex social setting with a long time dimension, they can understand changes in that setting; and beyond that they can also urge on each other particular information about, and interpretations of, that flow.

For the asylum seeker and refugee this is an important tool in the quest for a safe life. Words, phrases and expressions with specific meanings are the mediums used to communicate between people, and the refugee and asylum seeker does not only sometimes need to learn a new language, but if he or she is familiar with a language, they need to become pragmatic in the approach to the language; by understanding the social and cultural nuances of the language. As Sperber and Wilson (1986, p. 23) observe: “Communication is successful not when hearers recognise the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker’s ‘meaning’ from it”.

Thus telling their stories, they are establishing themselves in the patois of the host. There are however curious issues and thematic structures that may be taken for granted by the person telling the story and/or misunderstood by the listener. Therefore explained and inferred in the explanation, where the meaning is prevailing in the performing of the narrative by re-telling it, therefore the meanings are understood by the audience, the listener and the teller. The act of communication relies on a mutual expectation of cooperation between speaker and listener. There are situations where the re-telling becomes a traumatic memory, but the refugee uses a strategy of what I call ‘support words’. This is when the meaning of what is inferred is placed in a word or words that has to explain a much more difficult scenario than what is portrayed by the teller. For example: when I was in Malta at the Open Centre in Marsa; I was told by the group of young East African men (Ethiopian and Eritrean and Somali) I got to know, about their journey across the Sahara Desert. They walked to the border of Libya across the desert following the direction, and not a road (as there were no real roads to speak of) across

the dunes to the north towards Libya. Sadly not all of the men who set out in this group survived, it was conveyed to me as follows: “...they fall down...” followed by a silence and thoughtful look while gesturing with the hands, palms down and fingers spread out. This indicated that the men did not get up again, but died in the desert. The young man did not use the words which would directly say that his friends died in the desert from exposure and thirst; the audience, me, had to assume that is what he meant. Everybody listening to the story understood this and showed by nodding in agreement. The support words in this story are: “they fall down”. The indication is they died. This was supported by the serious looks, hand gestures and nodding from the group of men sitting in the circle. Again, Sperber and Wilson (1986, p. 23) explain this by as follows, “The description of communication in terms of intentions and inference is, in a way, commonsensical”.

There are other scenarios where the inference is important from the perspective of the asylum seeker and refugee, especially with women (and sometimes, men) and this is when experiences like rape are part of their story. It is often inferred and not mentioned directly because shame and embarrassment are the issues attached to this. The field notes and interviews taken here points to how important the content is, even if told in a sparse way.

The author Flannery O’Connor’s statement is true here:

A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way. And it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. (O’Connor 2011)

From a practical perspective, how do the border officials translate this when they investigate by interviewing the refugee? Here the refugees need to convey a difficult issue in an idiom that can be verbalized easily, but the narrative he or she must give to the officials needs to be real and explicit. This clearly would be a problem for the refugee upon arrival at border posts. Included here, would be the translator’s interpretation of the narrative, if the border officials use a translator. Koshravi (2011, p.34) give a detailed discourse on borders and the difficulties experienced. He writes, “Only those few who could ‘translate’ their local stories into Eurocentric judicial language had a chance. Those who came first were interviewed first, and their narratives of their ‘well-founded fear’ set the authenticity benchmark the UNHCR officers used in scrutinising other asylum seekers.”

In my observations, I came to the understanding that the narratives have a structure that is the basic outline of the story: why the person had to flee, the journey and the tribulations during the journey, the arrival and experiences at the arrival point. The content given to me also had a similar feel to it. The content of the narratives have its own twists and turns and often the teller, refugee, would alter and/or shift some of the content to suit the people being addressed at that time.

Then there is the fact that many asylum seekers and refugees arrive in the North East not speaking English and have to learn the language as an adult. Not being able to communicate in English permeates everything in daily life and the support needed to survive (from a social perspective) being an asylum seeker. Initially the supporting services use translators, but there comes a time when the individual learns the language to become independent and has the desire to be able to do daily interactions and communicate self-reliantly. Richard Jenkins (2004, p. 143) links language to the person and selfhood with a symbolic belonging in Social Identity:

“Language allows individuals to participate in the collective domain; according to Mead, it permits reflexive selfhood, in the capacity to take on the role of the Other .”

Hilaire, made it his task to be able to speak English as soon as he could, for he (and many other non-English speaking asylum seekers) understood that communicating in the host language would be beneficial. He is able to do many daily tasks like shopping, asking directions, communicating with his lawyer and eventually have a family life with an English wife. This is something I hear repeatedly from my interactions and socialising with the asylum seekers and refugees: “I needed to learn English, it is important to speak it. I could go to the doctor without the dictionary, and speak to my neighbour”. (Congolese refugee 2011).

## **Food**

Having a meal with family and friends is important to the refugee, as with any individual, that seeks commensality, but for the refugee it has perhaps different meaning and significance within the idiom of memory and identity profile. This is clear in the feeling of commensality that was expressed, every time I had a meal with the refugees in the camps and centres. Pat Caplan (1992, p.5) introduced the importance of food in



her inaugural lecture delivered at Goldsmiths in 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1992, and published the same year, by saying:

Food can be viewed as a language, a way of communicating with our fellow human beings or even our deities. It is of course, a basic necessity, but is also much more.

Moreover I would be invited for a meal regularly to the homes and places of asylum seekers and refugees to have a shared experience of eating a meal together. This often assisted in establishing my aim in being there (in the camp, and centres) and I could continue with conversations which gave me useful data, including the continuation of a narrative, often started in a formal setting where I was introduced by a gatekeeper. Often the refugee arrives alone and/or as a single person at the end destination. The collective knowledge of his or her cultural frameworks for the refugee would be demonstrated and confirmed by having a meal with fellow countrymen; including the manner of eating; for example eating by hand, sitting on a rug etc. This was very evident in all the centres and camps that I visited.

Kakuma was the biggest camp I visited. That is where refugees would live in large groups with people from their own country of origin and thus not only be able to converse (the importance of language accentuated here) in their mother tongue, but also to eat food familiar to them. The shops and little eating-places reflected this. The hotel where I had a meal with the guide and driver was no different. The hotel was in the Eritrean area and it served food prepared in that manner. This included the coffee. The people were, and rightly so, very proud of their coffee. The discussion on Eritrean coffee continues with asylum seekers from Eritrea in Teesside. When I mention to the group that I had the coffee in the camp, there are smiles and invitations to their places “to drink Eritrean coffee with us” even though it is Teesside. Drinking coffee would be part of the consuming of food (and drink) within the cultural context for the asylum seeker and refugee. Again Caplan (1994, p.6) says;

Food can evoke a taste of memory, feelings and emotions: for an anthropologist it is also about social relations, identity and selfhood: Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.

In Cairo the community was spread out in the suburbs and members would cook meals in their own homes. The wedding I attended was in All Saints Cathedral and the reception in the grounds; the fare given during the celebration was Sudanese, prepared by the women from the community. This was commented on and the women would

indicate how proud they are of being able to offer the food. The food in Marsa Open Centre (Malta) also had the same presentation as Kakuma Refugee camp. The 'restaurants' were clearly defined by the country and/or region of origin. This included the names e.g. an inhabitant gave me the answer when I inquired where a person was: "...such and such is in the Sudanese restaurant". These places and spaces were understood to be the place where the people from that country will come and have a meal with their fellow compatriots and friends. The meal will then also reflect the countries' traditional meals and drinks. The places were in a way owned by the country-men frequenting them to socialise and have a meal. Again, Caplan (1994, p. 30) sums it up as follows:

"Food, then is a metaphor for our sense of self, our social and political relations, our cosmology and our global system, and it is a small fragment of this complexity ... "

There is also the connectivity of being together, drinking coffee, eating a snack or meal with fellow country-men. One is not alone in this strange and new place. There might be a feeling of being with kin and family and there is a bonding that takes place when a meal is cooked and eaten, for it often refers to a ritual that has significance to the people gathering to eat and drink according to Brett Williams, (1984, p 116) 'The Performance of Group Identity'. Even at the public social gatherings like the Black History Award dinner, and The Taste of Africa events, groups in the asylum seeking and refugee community prepare the food served. Indeed the title of the entertainment event refers to 'taste' of Africa as if to give the local (host) community an idea, a feel or a taste of the continent via the tasting of food.

"Thus, food is available for management as a way of showing the world many things as about the eater. It naturally takes on much of the role of communicating everything. Indeed, it may be second only to language as a social communication system". (Anderson, 2005, P. 124).

## **Belief/Hope**

Ibrahim Malta's Mother is looking towards the future and hoping her family will be united.

Past ages will thus have to be understood from the standpoint of their hopes. They were not the background to the now existing present, but were themselves the present and the front-line towards the future (Moltman, 1965, p. 269)

This would be reasonable. Hope is clearly part of her conceptualising of a very difficult situation where she is alone with a new born baby and unsure about her husband's whereabouts. It also reflects a re-construction of her life. This comprises not only of her as a young mother and a possible widow, but also as a person who has a story to tell. The story is part of her and can be utilised in the re-creation of her social place in the new society. This will also be the case with her son for he would continue to tell the story of how he arrived in Malta to his offspring after her. She is hoping that the future can be better than where she comes from and what she experienced in the journey to Malta, and so thus have some influence on how her son's life might unfold.

The men, mostly young men, are also very aware of the chaotic initial state and outcome of being an asylum seeker and/or refugee. Their stories show the same uncertainties and they use the idiom of hope to deal with that disordered state. The 'walking' paradigm features in all of the narratives I witnessed from them too. Several young men explained how they walked the Sahara desert from East African countries. They were the lucky ones that survived. The actual vocalisation of the sentence per se was, in the understanding that it carries a lot of weight and is said to convey the many images that support the narrative of the trajectory. These are the walking from their homes, in an effort to flee violence.

The group of young men are from East Africa and in the conversations, the frustration of being stuck in Malta is clear. The 'walking' cannot continue as not only the social movement is curtailed by the legal issues, but also the racial and xenophobic incidence that happens regularly in Malta have an impact on the moving or overcoming the socio-cultural hurdles of everyday life. The walking of the Sahara desert has some implications for the idiom of hope. For how does this happen? There is a reality in the idea of walking a desert with hardly any outside assistance. They are aware that here is a reality that some might not make it, and die in the process, as described in the few words: because some people... they down, fall, is obvious. The desert was crossed on foot in this case, and some are willing to tell the story. Albeit in a concentrated, way that is performed by saying two words: 'We walked'. A powerful message of hope, and bravery relayed in the two words with a lot of unsaid detail in the communication.

## **Risk**

With a few steps, I crossed the border and so began my odyssey, outside all regulations and laws, without travel documents and across many national

borders. There I was, on the other side of the border – without papers, on the same earth just a few steps away, yet the soil was not the same? I, my body, identity and culture were ‘out of place’ out of their place. In conventional terms, I had become ‘uprooted’ condemned to wither. A woeful destiny for those who do not abide by the rules of borders. (Khosravi, 2011, p. 24)

This is something that is to be negotiated on a daily basis by many people in the asylum-seeking category. Risk was a daily element in the mind of the asylum seeker and refugee – especially during the flight and fleeing. What the asylum seeker and refugee do with the risk situations is the question here. Does it become part of everyday life, thus part of everyday thinking without being conscious about it? Walking a desert where there is nothing else but sand for days on end. Makin and Osama climbing in the boats not knowing if they will arrive alive Abraham Malta’s parents traveling from a conflict zone to Malta. Hans Lucht (2012, P.12) in his ethnography about impoverished Ghanaian fishermen migrating across the Sahara writes that;

“High-risk immigration from West Africa to Europe is an attempt to revitalise life by re-establishing connections.”

Does this portray the asylum seeker and refugee as a person that is unsure of the future, and is prepared to risk an extremely perilous journey to confirm and support the idea that all is lost, therefore have nothing to lose? Perhaps it is so, for the risk factors are numerous and is clear that it is evident from the start of the journey, during the journey and often there are still issues that render the asylum seeker and refugee unsafe at the arrival in Europe. Initially, for this group according to the analysed field notes I have, the primary risk is seen and understood to be in the following three main categories. The groups that were interviewed, recorded and observed by me indicated that the three foremost issues are:

First, in their country of origin the asylum seeker and refugee risks their life by standing up against oppression or conscription or any other conflict or war scenario – thus has to leave loved ones, home and other social security elements e.g. income etc.

Second, the risk of leaving is so high that those who leave have to lose everything or make the decision to leave which means that their own lives are at a high risk. This might mean that the people who leave are not large groups together but small groups and even perhaps just a minority.

Third, the journey itself is a high-risk action. The successful arrival in a safe country is a feat in itself. The field notes indicate that there are several stages in all the journeys and at every stage, there are new and different risks that come to the fore.

Ulrich Beck (2009, p.4) in his book 'World at Risk' defines risk as something that has two faces namely, change and danger.

Risk represents the perceptual and cognitive schema in accordance with which a society mobilizes itself when it is confronted with the openness, uncertainties and obstructions of a self-created future and is no longer defined by religion, tradition or the superior power of nature but has even lost its faith in the redemptive powers of utopias.

Osama, and the other asylum seekers mentioned in the ethnographic chapters all found themselves in a situation where they made the decision to leave, flee and try to stay alive. This was because the difficulty to stay and deal with whatever the issues were happened to be unthinkable. The risk was too high for them. Thus, they fled, some with time to prepare for the journey, and others just with the clothes on their backs and a few personal objects. The next stage would be the journey.

### **Future and assimilation**

Only in the process of reconciliation between originally undivided subject-object constellations, when men's decisions are a response to really given possibilities and new real possibilities give rise to new decisions, do future prospects and ordered ends emerge. (Moltman, 1965, p. 269)

"Please do not tell the people at home I am doing this (washing the dishes), but here I am doing it" (comment by male refugee from Zimbabwe). I visited the person, as we joked about him doing the housework, while waiting for his refugee status and for his family to join him in Teesside. He grew up in an era and place in Southern Africa where labour division is clearly defined between men and women. This is confirmed by Hilda Kuper (1965, p.479)

Men have a higher status than women and specific 'masculine' tasks include warfare, animal husbandry and hunting...women's life is more restricted by domestic activities. (p. 495).

More than a decade has passed with me working in the community and the field. The time is significant, for being able to observe continuously I witnessed how the incoming community settled in and attempt to slot into the local habits and patterns of the host

community. It did not happen immediately or even in a short period of time, like a year on, but in more than a decade there are signs of integration occurring with marriages, and other social markers indicating assimilation. One of the events that can be used in the ethnographic sense is the exhibition project called, Victoria; our home.

### **Victoria: Our Home**

The asylum seekers and refugees who arrived in Teesside just over a decade ago have now come to the point where their families are seen as 'settled' and the social life has been incorporated into the local host community and they have established their lives as part of the community. They were placed in housing by the local authority that is owned by a private company. The private company is solely responsible for the housing for the asylum seekers and/or refugees upon arrival in Teesside.

The Victoria estate is located in central Stockton and adjacent to the commercial town centre. Following a stock transfer in December 2010, Tristar Homes Limited (part of The Vela Group) now owns the social housing stock. The Victoria Estate comprises 254 dwellings, made up of maisonettes and flats. (Stockton Council, 2012)

It so happened that a large group of Zimbabweans who arrived at more or less the same time were placed in Victoria by the Local Government. The area was seen by the locals as a rundown estate and not a popular place to reside. The asylum seekers, all of whom are from Sub-Saharan Africa and mainly Zimbabweans and some Kenyan, Ugandan and Malawians, were placed there. It changed the social profile of the estate to a more diverse community within the Stockton-On-Tees context of mainly white communities. The exhibition was organised by the housing group Tristar, and the local people living in the community. It is to commemorate the inhabitants living on the estate as there is a regeneration project starting soon. The Council for Stockton-On-Tees carried out a consultation with the inhabitants of the area.

This resulted in the exhibition done by SACA members and the Housing agency. The leaflet handed out at the occasion stated:

The 'Life in Victoria' project commenced early 2012 and took approximately four months to complete. Film, Photographs and audio recordings of interviews with people living in the area have been used to document the recent history of the estate and to celebrate the unique diversity of the community.

It resulted in a photographic display and a DVD of 15 minutes called: Life in Victoria Estate 2001 -2011. The DVD consists of a focus group, made up of some residents, and

interviews held with three young people from the estate. The young people were a young white woman, a young black man (former refugee) and a young man of Asian descent. It turns out that the young woman was the young black man's girlfriend at the time. The focus group was a diverse mix of women and men, mostly elderly and black African men and women and white women. The African residents in the DVD are all refugees (previous asylum seekers) and all spoke positively of the estate. Most people started their story with: "At first this was difficult/ I was scared/ I was not sure..." and then continued to explain that with the prevailing community spirit they would like to be returned to Victoria Estate after the programme is completed. The photo display is mostly of houses, streets and the people in the DVD. It is therefore a replica of the DVD as if a still-life representation of the project. The advertising of the project was described as a "Life in Victoria - History Project". It is also described as "best practice example of multi-cultural living and community spirit" as expressed in the quote below.

Film, photographs and audio recordings of interviews with people living in the area were used to document the recent history of the estate and to celebrate the unique diversity of the community. The video reflected this best practised by the expression vocalised in the interviews prompted by the interviewer and the inhabitants being interviewed. The project gave an interesting and unique insight into the area, presenting a best practice example of multi-cultural living and community spirit. (Stockton Council, 2012)

Sarah Pink (2001) clarifies the ethnographic use of photographs, in the way people can weave their own narratives around their photographs which is then used by the researchers: "...researchers may learn about how these individuals construct their lives and histories" (p. 74). This is then essentially a tool to ascertain the narrative of the person as they see the section of their life being displayed in the photo. Moreover; it can be a valuable resource to enhance the telling and descriptions performed in the story. Therefore it gives colour the content of the narrative and more meaning to the audience. Here the photos and DVD showed the environment and the actual housing; the architecture, the street scenes, and the chosen individuals that were interviewed. The housing is run down and clearly not the affluent section of Stockton-On-Tees. The change was more evident with the interviews and the focus group used in the video.

The inhabitants used in the interviews are individuals who are part of the refugee community and also the local community. The film and photos however depict a small group of people and it has the feel that only the positive must be emphasized. Perhaps, this is a promotional exercise for the local authority. The query is then how authentic is this exercise about the area? Is it truly representative of the Victoria estate? The

filmmaker thought it good to edit the film in such a way that the instructions given to the focus group was the following:

“We are here to give our views on the Victoria Estate; our positive views of living here in Victoria”. (Herbert Dirahu; chairperson of the Stockton African Caribbean Association, SACA, 2012).

Even though the film had a positive slant and a bias towards the good things about living as a diverse community with people arriving a decade ago, the content of the film indicate that the new incoming group has been accepted as part of the community and has a right to voice their point of view.

In another DVD commissioned by the North East Strategic Migration Partnership the interviews, reflect the same opinion as the Life in Victoria Estate DVD. The refugees interviewed confirmed the importance of language, and other integration elements, like giving music performances and sharing food. The film shows the meals taken together with local inhabitants and expressions of enjoyment listening to the African music. A drumming group, started by Hilaire, is part of the content of the film. He expresses in the interview that he is now part of the community:

“...I don't see myself as Hilaire the African or an outsider. I am part of this community...”

## **Conclusion**

Using the important issues that are specified in the transference into being and becoming an asylum seeker and refugee emerged out of this chapter. Some of the issues are tangible and can be used in a concrete way to demonstrate the value of the issues to the asylum seeker and refugee like food, language and music. This can be experienced by eating food, using the language or playing music. Then there are the more abstract issues like memory, belief, hope, risk and the future which the asylum seeker and refugee have to deal with as a very vivid experience in the daily routine and ultimately portrayed in the social and cultural profile they exhibit.

In telling the story of becoming an asylum seeker or refugee, one has to remember details of how it all happened, then the journey and one has to repeat the story many times over. Using Hanna Arendt and Michael Jackson's work to underpin these issues it can be demonstrated that there is the telling of the narrative and how the memory is used to retain the details. The field work collecting the stories is not only from the local area of Teesside in the North East of England, but from Kakuma refugee camp in North



West Kenya, Refugee Egypt in Cairo, Tripoli and refugee and migrant centres in Malta. This then includes the trajectory and liminal places like the centres in Malta. The memory of their experiences and the story is important and significant for the asylum seekers and refugees, as this is what they have to offer in a place where they have to start again in establishing themselves. They have to be the person that makes a substantial shift to who they are in a new social environment.

Tangible objects carried with them, or sent to them by friends from the refugee camp, and names given to newborn babies are a few of the ways they use to remind them of their new social profile in the host community. Language is part of the telling of the story and carries a weighty message of change and the difficulties that needs to be expressed. Some of the informants had to learn a new language to be able to communicate with their hosts. This is vital to be able to slot into the host community and be able to make use of local and national services. Food and the traditional ways food is prepared come with the asylum seeker and refugee. From a cultural perspective, it is central, as the food is part of the cultural profile of a person's upbringing and understanding of where they are from. For example, it is a way of identifying the group (and oneself) in the refugee camps. It also brings together family and friends in celebrations and events.

Hope and belief in the future are paramount to the person who has to make great decisions about leaving home, crossing deserts and getting into vessels that are not seaworthy to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Malta, Italy or Greece to get to safety. It also indicates the high risk factor that the asylum seeker and refugee have to deal in every decision they make to move towards their goal. The possibility of dying is very real and they are aware of this. There has been enough news about the deaths of refugees on the Mediterranean Sea and social media is available to confirm the risks that are being taken when climbing into a rubber sea vessel on the instructions of the people smuggler.

A place where you can settle down and lead a normal and relatively safe life is what most asylum seekers and refugees are hoping for. With the descriptions of the projects being undertaken in Teesside there are positive demonstrations on how the incoming people are trying to assimilate, yet holding on to their customs and cultures by displaying them at specific events.

# Chapter Eleven

## Conclusion

### Introduction

The rationale behind the thesis is to understand the being and lives of asylum seekers and refugees. The group of people I observed are from sub-Saharan Africa where the political situations, conflict and other dangerous situations in the regions give rise to people becoming asylum seekers and refugees. Here they have to negotiate between the experiences of the past and the expectations of the future. This way of living is difficult and one has to be constantly vigilant not only on where one is, but also who one is. I use four life-stories and descriptive writing about the events that take place to present their socio-cultural 'who' to the local host. I also use some reflective writing, including my own experiences as a migrant for ultimately it has an impact on how I approach the observations. I try to establish that this work and it has value, in the context of sociality and understanding of arrival and trying to fit in with the host community. The fitting in, includes the social settings and interplay of duality of the asylum seeker and refugee in Teesside. As I giving my own thoughts in the reflexive writing I agree with Maurizio Albahari (2015) who wrote:

As noted by Bateson (1958) and as phrased by Latour (2005, p. 137) good description can make pointing to additional explanations superfluous. By using my voice I take responsibility for what I say and how I assemble what I come to know. The rhetorical and authorial power at my disposal is a tool of narration and analysis, not a redundant exercise in self-indulgence. (p. 25).

I establish in the beginning of the thesis that my voice is part of the experience in the research and that growing up in South Africa until adulthood is part of what is unfolding in the thesis. I am from the southern part of Africa and this influences my bias throughout the process. It also played a role in me becoming part of the community in a very short time. This was useful for participant observation which was the main research tool in the ethnography.

The ethnographic basis of this thesis is a multi-sited, extended and a moving field. The three sections constructions and demonstrations of the field are where the collecting of information and data took place from archives, the North East of England, Teesside, interviews with informants, participant observation in the Teesside group (community)

of asylum seekers and refugees. It also include a field site which can be clarified as the extended and multi-sited section (several sites and travelling) that describes a trajectory from East Africa from a refugee camp in the north western part of Kenya to the portal into Europe at Malta. The method can be described as per ethnographic endorsing as 'participant observation which proves true to the interactive inductive research' (O'Reilly, 2009). I tried to produce involved and detailed written accounts of the human experience of individuals, groups and communities and the awareness in total being an asylum seeker and refugee.

The main objective of the research was to provide an ethnographic account of the community and identity emerging activities and procedures shared by sub-Saharan African asylum-seekers and refugees in the North-east. Thus the questions of how social identity is maintained and displayed in the sociality of being an asylum seeker and refugee are wrapped up in the following namely the Life stories of four individuals with one individual journey to citizenship. Also some social references that validate the interplay between African (guest), and North East of England (host) namely a burial and a birth. The social maintenance of being and belonging demonstrated at public events and to give more substantive weight to the difficulties asylum seekers and refugees experience. The hypothesis argued, is that there will be a diversity of patterns, especially between asylum seeker and refugees that marries into the local population and the individuals that tries to maintain their own unique African-ness.

All of the above is interlinked with the auto-ethnography of me, the researcher, as a migrant with some comparative notes using the experiences of being a migrant and also a researcher will be part of the thesis as a reflexive exercise to give the thesis a more creative contribution in presenting it as ethnography. This includes issues of language, which was the same experience for my informants, for English is my second language. Then there is a second layer of communication, which can be problematic from a cultural perspective, for we came from a story telling culture. This means we do not think in a linear and practical way, but the story telling non-linear performance which can be problematic in the communicating terrain, especially with the host community.

## **Theory**

In the field work stage collecting the stories from asylum seekers and refugees the observations made and stories collected indicated towards the double-bind notion. It became evident as the field notes were analysed and therefore the theoretical basis is inducted from the primary observations. The emergence of the double-bind theory lead to the conclusion that the Batesonian double-bind theory sits comfortably in underpinning the outcome of the analytical dissection of the life-stories and other narratives collected from the field. This is discussed in chapter 2 with some observed evidence to support the outcome to use the theory. Grounding the theoretical basis for the thesis in the Batesonian double-bind links to the witnessed and observed situations the asylum seekers and refugees found themselves in. Being stuck and unable to move forward (or even going back), often being returned to the original point of departure after trying to improve their lives and look for a safer socio-cultural environment. Control and communication are two of the complications indicated in the analysis of the field notes and fieldwork. This is followed by the efforts made in the assimilation process to slot in with the host community. Again, it is observed as a difficult time for the asylum seeker and refugee where there is hesitancy in the 'becoming British' process, but important to be able to be part of many groups in the social arena. The inability to remain totally loyal to one's cultural and country of origin for in the assimilation development this might not be part of what is needed to fold into a new group or community. The incoming group has little power to negotiate their stances in the social sphere. To demonstrate I can use the fact that they are not allowed any entering in employment, until they are given refugee status. Even then it is problematic to find employment. This hampers the integration progression for the new incoming group. For employment can assist with the integration and re-establish autonomy and the refugee can then claim independence from the benefit system that be a control tool for many individuals. The re-negotiation of boundaries in the social environment takes place in the public sphere like the Taste for Africa event in the town hall is one of the social issues observed and commented on in the thesis.

## **Ethnography**

In an effort to try and understand the experiences the asylum seeker and refugee when they arrive at the place where they are dispersed to, this ethnography does embrace the idea of not just locality, but the fluid content of being a refugee and fragmentation of

being and experiencing multiple interactions and connections on the move towards safety. As O'Reilly (2009, p.146) states:

“Multi-sited ethnographic research is therefore mobile. The approach pursues links, relationships and connections, follows unpredictable trajectories, and traces cultural formations in its pursuit of explanations beyond borders”.

The mobility element was the trajectory travelled from the refugee camp in North East Kenya to the European Island of Malta. Several conversations, observations and many meals and coffees were eaten and drunk with the people in the refugee camps and centres.

The ethnography starts with the life-stories. The reason for this is that the individuals whose narratives are used are valuable informants and I got to know them very well. They are all men, because few women came close to me over the years of doing fieldwork. There are exceptions like the Half-boat- young Somalia woman, but it was one conversation I had with her and Makin from Sudan in Malta. The chosen individuals had all travelled and arrived into Europe and England, and are trying to establish themselves into the new host community. The tragedy of Osama not being able to see his son growing up is deeply sad, but I decided to present him in this chapter as he was very aware of his identity and I had very informative conversations with him. In a way it is honouring him in a gratitude exercise. Osama understood the dilemma of being in a double-bind, but tried to accommodate it by being a community leader and supporting other individuals in the same situation as he was. Hilaire is an informant who has been very prolific towards the content of the ethnography for over a decade. His importance is reflected in the birth of his children is discussed as part of the assimilation process for him. Ultimately the life-stories are an excellent presentation of the asylum seeker and refugee's journey especially with the arrival and making attempts to move forwards with their lives. The stories of these individuals' lives are a good idea of how they deal with issues. Fay (2002. P.180) puts it succinctly: “Human lives set their own contexts: birth is the beginning, death the ending, and in between there are natural climaxes, denouements and so on”. The life stories shows the frustrations of being trapped between where they from and where they are trying to go to. Some individuals have great ambitions to assimilate as soon as they can, but still find it difficult for the host to accommodate them. The life-stories are archived in Teesside and will hopefully be useful for the future generations.

The next section of the ethnography chapters is exploring two social markers which is important as indicators as to the start and the end of life per se. Birth and death. Hilaire's children have been prominent in his assimilation in Teesside and the same time trying to stay socially connected to his extended family in Togo. Therefore the birth of his son and his daughter is significant to him, and also me. The gift exchange from me to his family as congratulations on the birth took a while to be completed as I was not able to give a gift. It assisted me in understanding the social and cultural importance of giving a gift and gave me insight to the structure of where we are from, and how we value it to stay connected to that as a reality. As Mauss states in his classic, *The Gift* (1954) and 1990, p.103)

“Thus one succeeds in seeing the social ‘things’ themselves, in concrete forms and as they are. In societies one grasps more than ideas or rules, one takes in men, groups and their different form of behaviour”.

With the funeral that I observed had many issues that created juxtaposition in the social and cultural practices for the Zimbabwean community. The burial is where a clash of local and Zimbabwean cultural patterns came to the fore. These two ethnographic events are to demonstrate the constant negotiations by the asylum seekers and refugees on the push-pull of Home and Here.

While the assimilation process is on-going, there are markers that indicate that the asylum seeker and refugee from sub-Saharan Africa is oscillating in a social and cultural way between where they are from, who they are, and where they are resolving to start a new life. Chapter 7 describes three events which highlight the new profile of the newcomers in October as it is celebrated as Black history month. For the asylum seeker and refugee from the Sub-Saharan African continent, these events are a public platform where in the new incoming community to try and showcase who they are, therefore the significance of these events is not only connected to the historic perspective, but an expression of the traditional practises and social markers in the form of dress, food and entertainment, and articulating their social narrative as a community to the local host community. Here the asylum seeker and refugee from sub-Saharan Africa's identity are not questioned and is accepted as an integral part of the event. The event is a vehicle which illustrates not only who they are, but where they are from.

The trajectory report is to give an overview of the area travelled and where the journey starts. Fortunately I could start my observations in a refugee camp and travelled to the north of Africa and then into Europe to one of the prevalent European entry islands. It

was useful to understand the difficulties at borders and trying to move towards a safe future. This includes the contrasting of waiting and moving forward. Agier (2011) describes the border controls as: "...transit zones, waiting areas, centres for the reception and detention of foreigners without the right to stay and asylum seekers" (p. 52). I agree with this description for that is what I witnessed in the Kakuma refugee camp. The camp itself is a large 'camp-city' as described by Agier, (ibid), and the refugees living in the camp operate and function as if in a city. Other experiences by asylum seekers and refugees are also valid in that they are embedded into cities like Cairo where they have to establish themselves as the new incoming group. In some cases there are the combination of the two options, namely, a centre and living in a town or city in the same country, in this case Malta.

## **Conclusions**

In acknowledgement of the people and many informants I came in contact with, observed and spoke to and became friends with in the process of doing the research, I hope to have been able to show some connectedness, with the asylum seekers and refugees. They nurture a relationship not only with where they are from, but also with the host community where they settle. Again I use Michael Carrithers (1992, p.185) to support the rationale in doing the ethnography:

"If the individual incidents are each a pattern, then the ethnography is a pattern of patterns, and the work of ethnographic thinking lies in playing with these meta-patterns. Ethnographic knowledge is indeed an encounter, but it is an encounter which begins in this particular kind of expansive thought".

Becoming British and keeping one's own cultural and social identity, results in an interplay that can be thought-provoking and extensively significant in preserving one's own and an adoptive culture. The observed socio-cultural indicators of memory, language, food and belief (or hope) are in a way the headings that encompass these indicators. They are important as they play a significant role in the assimilation and acculturation that has been observed. These patterns of behaviour in the kind of food that is prepared and consumed, the language that is spoken and the new language being learned and used to communicate, the memories and the narratives that are relayed and risks that are taken is associated with this group of people. The fleeing and seeking safety, a journey that is dangerous and difficult and then an arrival at a place that is

either pointed to (dispersal in the UK) or decided upon within the parameters of the person's goal of safety.

All of the ethnographic detail of the cultural patterns indicates that the asylum seeker and refugee were trying to be seen as a person, and for others to understand how they became asylum seekers. The social events mentioned in Chapter 7 are where Halbwachs (1992, p.47) work on memory can be understood and witnessed in the many narratives collected and listened to by me.

“We preserve memories of each epoch of our lives, and these are continually reproduced”.

This makes use of how the event are remembered and recalled for future references to the formation of the new identity of a refugee. As Fay (2002, p.59) noted when he explained that our culture is and our society is what makes us what we are:

“Human history is in part the story of the ways different cultural groups have rearranged cultural boundaries by expanding contracts, tolerating outsiders, and fashioning interactive arrangements”.

The cultural and social markers noted during the research indicate that memory is important in the theoretical framework of self-identity. Zofia Rosińska (2011, p. 39) encapsulates it in the following:

Memory plays a triple role: it is identity-forming by maintaining the original identifications; it is therapeutic because it helps bear the hardships of transplantation into a foreign culture; and it is also community forming, by creating a bond among those recollecting together. Fourth, the experiences of all the other elements of emigration are intensified by the final shared characteristic: an inability to return.

Language is here being use by the asylum seekers and refugees as the tool used to convey the chronicle of their lives in the in search for safety. This new language is used to assist in the interaction and building a relationship with the people in the new community and new incoming asylum seekers and refugees. This creates a situation where they can claim locality as they are becoming part of the local social scene.

The commensality experience with food was another cultural marker that was obvious in the lives of the asylum seeker and refugee. This is a powerful instrument for expressing and shaping interactions between humans. “Food derives its power from the web of interrelations it evokes” (Barnard and Spencer, 2004, p. 238). Field notes and observation indicted that this powerful act of sharing a meal is pertinent in the



continuation of the cultural connections with, and from, people. This experience recurs throughout the journey and continues at the place of safety.

Hope and belief is part of the asylum seeker and refugee's thinking. The thought of a better life, a better education and a safe place was something they would use to propel themselves forward. As Moltman (1967, p. 269) writes that the history (of eschatology) will be understood from the stand point of their hopes, and were themselves the present and the front-line towards the future.

It is in process of developing in the light of this 'shape of the future', and its success in attaining to it is staked on history.

Ultimately this ethnography documents not only the life-stories of these extremely brave people, but also tracks the assimilation into the new life and community.

Becoming an asylum seeker and refugee is customarily linked to a legal perspective and decisions made by the authority where a legal process classifies the person as an asylum seeker or a refugee. Matthew Gibney (2014, p. 56) supports this by writing that "legitimate displacement requires a just *process* (italics, Gibney) and therefore it is embedded in the law and the legal *process*". This includes the arrival experience where the ambition is to start a new life. The studying of the assimilation process not only advances our own understanding of the asylum seeker's conditions and positions, but also "expand the ability to engage in the policy and political processes that may better promote their rights and welfare" according to Landau (2014, p. 148).

There were also several situations observed by me, which fitted into the double-bind theory described by Bateson (1972, p. 206) where one is caught between two unresolvable complications. According to Bateson (ibid) there are several necessary ingredients for this to constitute a double-bind. They are two or more persons, repeated experience, primary negative injunction, and a secondary injunction conflicting with the first at a more abstract level and like the first enforced by punishments or threats and a tertiary negative injunction prohibiting the victim from escaping from the field. Here the relationship between the local police and the asylum seekers and refugees creates a double-bind. When apprehended, the asylum seeker would not subscribe to the behaviour expected by local police (no direct eye contact by the asylum seeker), therefore misread by the police. Training towards this cultural practice has been proven useful to improve the relationship between the two groups.

There were many scenarios noted in the field work that refer to a difficult social situations where the asylum seeker and refugee struggle to find an easily and smooth solution. They were, in fact trapped by a Batesonian double-bind in that the social pattern needed to solve the problem would go against their practices. This would be outside their cultural habitus as Bourdieu (1990) claimed that meaningful behaviour can only be understood by the people of that culture. Where they now have to subscribe to the English practise and that have them uncomfortable in the social setting. There are examples in the ethnographic chapters that support this. With the inter-subjectivity of trying to settle in a new country, and slotting into the local social package, yet holding on to the self of the country of origin creates the double bind. The burial of Mr N. would be an example to support this difficulty. The time spent at the burial site was longer than normal, as the two cultural traditions were trying to accommodate each other without offending each other. Therefore the 'continuity between past and future is broken' (Rabinow, 2007, p. 18).

Also examined in the thesis is how local integration may occur in some areas. The research focus was roughly directed towards the integration and assimilation into the local community, but also asking the questions related to social maintenance of where they are from, mainly acted out in public events and other social cultural markers like a burial with rituals and traditions committed to a different country. The research has confirmed that assimilation into the host country is difficult, often because of double-bind situations. Despite much contemporary rhetoric of "global citizens" of a "global village" the differences between cultures and nationalities remain strong. The research noted that the new incoming group has obvious cultural difficulties to integrate. They are also ambitious in trying not to forget who they are and where they are from, yet want to be part of the host community. "We are trapped in the system. We cannot escape" Claude from the DRC (2009). From my own experience, for example I can agree with Komter (2005, p.109) where he uses Mauss (1990 [1923]) to support his statement of "By means of giving mutually it becomes possible to communicate with other people, to help them and to create alliances". My own relationships with asylum seekers and refugees were certainly enhanced in this way.

The local host community, and in particular, policy makers, are often unaware of the difficulties faced by asylum seekers and refugees in trying to assimilate. However, they often are aware of, and indeed may be highly critical of, some of the difficulties and problematic communication that result from the double bind situations.

My hope is that this research might be useful in underpinning policy-making, and in the host community being more hospitable and welcoming towards the asylum seekers and refugees. Lucy Hovil (2014 p.1) claims that the literature on local integration is broadly characterised by its neglect: "...local integration is actually not a forgotten solution, but an undocumented one". Hopefully this thesis has begun to document this important issue.

### **Future Potential:**

In 2015, and in the first few months of 2016, there has been an upsurge in people arriving in the UK from the Middle East. These are mainly people from Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan and some Christians from Pakistan. Their narratives given to me are similar to the group of people that is part of this ethnography, yet from a different set of countries and socio-cultural profiles. Hopefully a continuation of this research focus will add to the literature bank of this nature as it is needed in the contemporary western world to assist in the decision making for planning and policy development to support the new incoming group of people coming into Europe and the United Kingdom. This would also assist in the integration and assimilation process to become part of the official policy process and therefore be beneficial to local communities and political initiatives. With the new wave of people coming into Europe from places like the war torn Syria and surrounding Middle Eastern countries there will be interest in the how the social setting is to be accommodated and strategies will be needed to support the settling in process, once they have acquired the refugee status in the United Kingdom.



### “Mediterranean Hope”

Nigerian and Eritrean asylum seekers on the beach, one week after arriving in Sicily.

“Assad’s only hope is to throw himself at chance, courting death each time” (Steinberg, 2015, p.4)

## **Appendix 1**

### **Letter to Participants in field work regarding the rationale and outcome of research:**

To whom it may concern:

I am a PhD student in socio-cultural Anthropology at Durham University planning to do my field work in Teesside in the African asylum seeker and refugee community where I have longstanding connections. This letter is to introduce and explain my proposed research in the community mentioned above. I serve on several associations with regard to asylum seekers and refugees where I am active in either assisting or responding to the community needs. With this research I would like to explore social networking system and study the patterns that emerge in this network system. The main intention would be to look closely at the cultural and identity shifts that may take place and how it is managed by the individuals in their new social environment. This will result in a mapping exercise of the symbolic social boundaries in which the community put together and re-build itself. I would be looking at the following situations:

The new social context are understood and responded to

Social networks are started and the development of the network

The maintenance of networks and how it influences individual identities

The wider social and cultural environment modifies the networks.

The objective of the research would be to provide a critical account of the processes of community forming, and identity shared by African asylum seekers and refugees in Teesside. With the thought to help raise awareness, especially amongst interested professionals and the research participants themselves, of the challenges and opportunities that their long-term presence in Teesside stand for.

The research method I intend to use mainly is participant observation where I would continue to serve on the associations and socialise within the community. I will look at the interaction and network connections and then make notes on them which will be

both descriptive and then try and interpret the action. This will occur on most day-to-day activities as speaking to friends and social events. One of the ways, I would like to investigate is the use of mobile phones. This will take place on a basis where the owner of the phone, with permission, would tell me who is in the phone list, who is phoned regularly and the reason for the call, and who phones them regularly and, why. This will help with the mapping of the social network- pattern.

I will be willing to discuss the process, the exploration of possible outcomes to the participants and hope to guarantee anonymity. As part of the ethical conduct of doing research is confidentiality, I can assure you that I understand this issue very well and hope to have won the trust of the community in the many years I have been active in it.

Thank you for your time and I hope to be of service to you as a community and individual.

Julian Kotzé

## Appendix 2

### Letter to GP Practice

Stockton African and Caribbean Community Association  
13 Princess Avenue  
Stockton-on-Tees

Paul Williams  
Arrival Surgery  
C/O Prime Care  
Stockton-on-Tees

Dear Paul and Fiona

Re: Partnership with the above mentioned group on Health Matters.

We would like to thank you and your colleague Fiona for introducing yourself and talking to us on Health Matters. This is a very serious matter and it was clear to us that you have only our best interest at heart. We are grateful for that and would like to strengthen the communication between you and the community. We understand that this would benefit the community in on a whole, especially when it comes to HIV/AIDS.

One of the ways forward that was mentioned by you was the voluntary testing programme and we would like to pursue this, as a way that the community can make a start in changing the attitudes towards the issues around HIV/AIDS. We are in the process of appointing a representative in this exercise. He/She will then be responsible for the communication between you and the community and any other statutory body who would like to work with us. In the cultural understanding of the role, this person then can only be the person making sure the communication lines are clear and open between your team and the community. This also includes the African and other refugees that are working in official posts. Hopefully this will be a positive step towards a more open relationship between the different faculties working in the Health Services.

As soon as this person is named you will be contacted by the individual and a meeting arranged to start working on a programme to benefit the community. Thank you again for the time you and Fiona took to come and speak to us.

Yours in peace

Rahma Shariff and Herbert Dirahu

## Appendix 3

### Living History Questionnaire

#### *Introduction*

Name of the interview  
Time and place of the interview  
Name of the interviewer  
Brief description of the project  
Appreciation of the time given to take part in the project

#### *Interview*

##### **Life back home**

When and where born  
Physical description of the locality (province and districts)  
Ethnic background including religion  
Family background discussion (marital status, dad, mother, brother and sisters and relatives)  
Community (life in the community and the country ex traditions, cultures, believes...etc)  
General spectrum of the country (Economy, politic, social)  
Education and occupation

##### **New life in the UK**

When did you live your country?  
Why did you live and why England  
What were your expectations, dreams, hope, fears and emotions while leaving your country?  
Have these expectations changed ever since  
What have been the biggest difficulties you have encountered since moving here?  
What are the differences and the similarities between life here and back home?  
Social, cultural economical  
Do you feel part and attached to the community? Why?  
Have you been able to keep your identity here?  
What are your occupation and your achievements?  
How have you contributed to life in the UK?  
Have you realized any of your expectations and dreams?  
What are your future plans?

##### **Reflex ions**

Do you miss home? Why?  
If you could remake the choices, would you still have moved here?  
Do you think about going back to your country one day?

End



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