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# **The experiences of refugee creative writers: An intersectional feminist study**

**Melissa Rae Chaplin**

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Durham



**School of Education  
April 2019**





## **Abstract**

### **The experiences of refugee creative writers: An intersectional feminist study**

Melissa Rae Chaplin

This qualitative narrative study adopts an intersectional feminist approach to investigate the refugee authors' experiences of the creative writing process. The study is significant because it highlights the multiple axes of marginalisation these authors can experience, and considers the ways that negative stereotypes of refugees in the UK might be resisted.

Several key findings arose from the study. Primarily, the refugee writers interviewed expressed that their feelings about the creative writing process may fluctuate between frustration and/or release from cultural dogma. Second, it was found that refugee writers can experience feelings of pressure to conform to a 'native speaker' style of expression in English, both in creative work and in daily life. Third, the complexities of different cultural conceptions of creative writing sometimes resulted in feelings of alienation for participants from their work in English. Fourth, some participants viewed their writing as a means of processing their experiences personally, but also of communicating their narratives to a wider audience. Performance of creative work was highlighted as a key way of engaging with others about their experiences. The group setting of the creative writing workshop played a significant supportive role in the lives of participants, both in terms of their creative development and as a social space. Fundamental to this support were: the relationships participants formed with others in the group; the system of mentorship in place; and the establishment of the workshop environment as a 'safe space'. Finally, this study has demonstrated opportunities presented by an intersectional feminist framework for research involving multilingual and/or refugee participants. This framework contextualised participants' experiences within wider structures of systematic oppression; and facilitated effective development of rapport between researcher and participant.

This research has important implications in for researchers in the areas of refugee studies, comparative literature, and intersectional feminism. The findings offer insight for policy makers and facilitators of creative arts projects for marginalised people, highlighting effective ways to meet the needs of those taking part.

**Title Page**

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**Abbreviations**

AHRC: Arts and humanities research council United Kingdom

CS: Code switching

EU: European Union

RQ: Research Question

UK: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## **Declaration**

This thesis is my own work and no part of the material contained in it has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

## **Statement of copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Overview

This qualitative, social constructionist study employs an intersectional feminist theoretical and methodological framework to explore the experiences of refugees taking part in a creative writing group. In particular, the study aims to understand how working in English, as opposed to using their other language resources, influences the refugees' feelings about the writing process, and how these feelings are connected to the wider sociocultural context of refugee experience in the UK.

In its focus on refugee experience, this study is significant because it resists the negative dominant stereotypical narratives about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK that have been prevalent in some media and political coverage. By exploring the emotional lives of the participants, this study advocates greater compassion and empathy for minorities, in particular those who have been through involuntary migration. This is underscored by the exploration of the context of the creative writing group, which demonstrates the ways that society can provide support and comfort to people who have been displaced from their country of origin. The first section of this chapter (1.1) considers the context of this study, in particular the attitudes to refugees espoused in the UK media in recent years, and how that has informed this research. Moreover, contextualises this study within the wider 'Researching Multilingually at the borders of language, the body, law, and the state' project, of which this work is a part. The following section (1.2) considers the rationale for this study, after which the research aims will be set out (1.3). After this, there will be a discussion of researcher positioning and the origins of my interest in the study (1.4). Thereafter, there will be a

section clarifying the key terms in this study (1.5). Finally, an outline of the thesis structure will be provided (1.6).

## **1.1 Context of the study**

To consider the experiences of refugee creative writers in the UK, it is imperative to explore the socio-political context in which they are writing. In order to do so effectively, we must explore both the media discourse surrounding refugees and immigration in the UK, and also the aftermath of the Brexit vote.

Although their comments do not directly refer to the current situation of refugees in the UK, Miles and Cleary's (1993) work on the topic of the contextual factors influencing the admission of refugees to the country remains pertinent. They note that: 'The admission of refugees to Britain is inextricably linked to broader economic, political and ideological concerns on the part of the state about immigration and settlement' (p. 73). They expand on this assertion, commenting:

These concerns have been articulated in terms of 'overpopulation', shortages of state resources such as housing and welfare services, and the 'problem of race relations' or 'integration'. The history of state responses is marked by the categorisation of selected groups of migrants as 'immigrants' and the signification of these groups as being physically and culturally distinct. In this respect, refugee admission does not take place in a politically or ideologically neutral context. (p.73)

Here, the element of racism in UK state responses to refugees is underscored by Miles and Cleary drawing attention to the way that only certain groups of migrants are highlighted as 'immigrants' and that this is on

the basis of physical and cultural factors. Moreover, Miles and Cleary outline the themes in the discourse surrounding refugee admission to the UK, noting the way that the discussion has been centred on the notions of scarcity and difference.

Recent studies of the media coverage around the 'Refugee Crisis' that began in 2015 also shed light on the current position of refugees in the UK context. Holmes and Castañeda (2016) note that, whether the term 'crisis' is a factual representation of the situation of increased numbers of refugees entering Europe, 'These current events are framed and experienced as a crisis...entering the daily media, capturing worldwide political attention, and producing diverse and contradictory discourses and responses' (p. 13). This diversity of response, however, does not mitigate the overall trends in the UK media narrative surrounding refugees that have been documented.

Kyzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak (2018) noted that this overwhelmingly negative narrative has its foundations in the historical othering of migrants:

the media-based and mediated political discourses on the Refugee Crisis frequently did not forge any "new" ways of perceiving and interpreting migration and otherness. Instead these often rested on both national and cross-national recontextualization of historical patterns of talking about "the other" as well as on the national discursive traditions of highly politicized exclusionary thinking. (p. 2)

Central to this media discourse was the representation of refugees as being dangerous. An example of this can be found in the media coverage focusing on the refugee camp at Calais. Bhatia (2018) highlighted that, in the lead up to the demolition of the camp, the British 'media cranked up the coverage of

Calais, with racism inherent in the reporting' (p. 182). She goes on to describe this racism in further detail:

The tabloids and right-wing press published articles and images of refugee torment, mostly blaming them for their own pain, suffering and deaths. The articles legitimised policing and border control tactics, deploying the language of war, victory and defeat, and further dehumanising, demonising and 'othering' refugees. (p. 182)

Bhatia underscores the impact of this media representation of refugees as dangerous in contributing to wider structural inequality: 'By portraying (unprotected, vulnerable and at-risk) people of colour in this manner media circulated, reproduced and maintained the dominant racial frame.' (p. 182)

Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti's (2016) comparison of media discourse around refugees in the Greek, German, and British press is revelatory about issues specific to the UK context. They noted a point of divergence in the British media from its Greek and German counterparts:

the articles studied in the Greek and the German press did not include in a percentage worth mentioning the words 'terrorists', 'terrorism', 'ISIL', 'IS' or 'ISIS'. This contrasts with the British press, where the above-mentioned terms emerged in 17% of the articles examined. The authors of this article can only assume that the almost complete absence of any reference to terrorism in the German and Greek media is part of the wider effort of (opinion) leaders to tackle the spike in hate crimes in the two countries. (p. 276).

There has, however, as Burnett (2017) notes, been a surge in the number of reported hate crimes in the UK following the result of the referendum on

European Union membership on 24 June 2016. Burnett draws a connection between this and political policy:

the spike in racial hatred has had a direct impetus from the divisive approach to race, religion and migration which is now official policy. To put it simply, if a hostile environment is embedded politically, why should we be surprised when it takes root culturally? (2017, p. 86)

Similarly, Virdee and McGeever (2018) associate the outcome of the referendum with the increase in hate crime:

If confirmation were needed that the case for Brexit was intimately bound up with questions of race, it was to be found in the wave of racist hate unleashed against migrants as well as the long-established black and brown British...more than 6,000 racist hate crimes were reported to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) in the four weeks after the referendum result was declared. Incidents ranged from physical assault and property damage to verbal abuse (p. 1808).

It is notable that both of these studies (Burnett, 2017; Virdee & McGeever, 2018) highlight the impact this has had not only on immigrants but also on ethnic minority British people. Both studies also highlight the real physical danger to those on the receiving end of this racism and xenophobia. Virdee and McGeever (2018), give the following illustration of the risk to individuals targeted in the wake of the vote to leave the European Union:

In 51 per cent of the incidents, perpetrators referred specifically to the referendum in their abuse, with the most commonly involved phrases including "Go Home" (seventy four stories),



“Leave” (eighty stories), “fuck off” (fourty five stories). They were followed up by statements such as “we voted you out”, “we’re out of the EU now, we can get rid of your lot”, “when are you going home?”, “shouldn’t you be packing your bags?” And then in August 2016, six teenage boys were arrested in Harlow, Essex, for a brutal street attack on an eastern European migrant after he was heard speaking Polish in the street. The man subsequently died. (p.1808)

It is important to highlight that these disturbing events are not an aberration, but rather a direct result of the current political climate with regard to migrants in the United Kingdom. Burnett (2017) contextualises this violence within the wider picture of the political campaign to leave the EU and more general state-sanctioned violence against immigrants:

much of the racist abuse that has followed the referendum result has had its gestation within policy measures which express the same aim. There is a parallel, of course, between the ‘leave’ campaign’s unofficial slogan of ‘taking the country back’ and the racist abuse that urges the same. But there is also a parallel between the racist assault of a homeless migrant, who is not deemed to be economically productive, and the public spectacle of the police, immigration authorities and other agencies rounding up homeless migrants and ‘removing’ them for the same reason. (p. 89)

This section has brought together studies on the media discourse surrounding refugees in the UK, and on the vote to leave the European Union and subsequent increase in racist and xenophobic hate crimes, in

order to highlight the precarious position occupied by refugees in this country at this moment in time. The following section will explore the rationale for this study.

## **1.2 The rationale for this study**

As outlined in section 1.1, refugees are subject to discrimination and prejudice in the dominant media narratives in the UK, as well as being vulnerable to potential hate crimes in the current political climate.

Those studies that have focused in detail on the phenomenon of refugee creative writing, (Anyidoho 1997; Li, 2007) have not been located in the UK context, nor have they had a group element to the writing process. This study would synthesise elements of these approaches in order to fill a lacuna in the literature. Numerous studies have explored the benefits of creative writing in a group setting more generally, and have asserted the ways it can be a supportive space for the development of ideas and texts (Bertolini, 2010; Cain 2010; Perry, 2010). This study will explore these ideas in the context of a writing group specifically aimed at refugees. Previous studies have considered the potential benefits of creative writing groups for refugees, (Baraitser, 2014; Stickley, Stubbley, Baker & Watson, 2018) but have not focused on the way that these are situated in relation to the wider socio-political context of oppression and prejudice. Moreover, these studies have not provided a detailed exploration of the creative work produced as part of the writing workshops.

Studies on the relationship between language and emotion (Dewaele & Costa, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005) have not explored in detail the ways that the experience of refugees might diverge from other multilinguals in this area.

Dewaele and Costa (2013) indicated that this was an area for further research, noting that:

More research is needed on multilinguals who have experienced traumatic migration and for whom language differences are not seen as benign but may have been part of the traumatic experience (for example the languages in which torture or political strife may have been conducted). (p. 46)

It is this gap in the literature which this study seeks to fill, through a detailed exploration of the emotional experiences of refugee writers, and how this is related to their linguistic resources.

Having explained the rationale for this research and its importance in the current context, I will now delineate the core aims.

### **1.3 Research aims**

This study is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing upon intercultural communication, comparative literature, and feminist studies. The research approach is from a social constructionist perspective. I have used qualitative narrative research methods to explore the way that participants conceptualise the experience of creative writing and participating in a creative writing group. The intersectional feminist framework used has allowed me to contextualise and understand these narratives as part of wider systemic structures of oppression that impact the participants' daily lives.

This study uses data from a long-running creative writing group for refugees located in England. The data includes: my observations from attending the sessions; pieces of the participants' creative writing; and interviews with 6 of the writers.

The overarching aim of this study is:

- To explore the way that refugees experience the process of creative writing in different languages within the context of a writing group.

Within this aim, these are the component parts:

- To consider the way that the experience of creative writing is affected by the writer's identity as a refugee.
- To investigate the way that multilingual writers negotiate between their linguistic resources when working creatively.
- To explore the role that a creative writing group can play in the lives of refugee participants.

With these aims in mind, I will now describe how I came to be interested in this topic of research.

#### **1.4 Researcher positioning: My interest in this topic**

As described in section 1.1, the position of refugees in society is a topic that has received a great deal of media attention during the time I have been completing this study. This was, however, not the reason behind my personal interest in the topic of refugee creative writing.

Prior to beginning my PhD, I was a teacher of English language and literature. Both in this role, and previously as an undergraduate student of English Literature, I found myself reflecting on the nature of which writing was considered 'literary' and received acclaim, or acceptance into the canon of texts deemed worthy of study. Whilst postcolonial literary criticism gave me an outlet to explore these feelings, I remained troubled by the fact that ultimately, what was most often praised as great literature, and indeed on the syllabus when I was teaching, was the work of relatively privileged white men, writing only in English. This is not to say that there are not beautiful works in this category, but rather to express my concern that texts that did

not conform to this pattern were not receiving the attention they might deserve. During my teacher training, I researched postcolonial approaches to teaching the work of William Shakespeare, in the hopes of dismantling some of the hegemonic structures that underpinned literary scholarship.

In my work as an English teacher I also taught a number of students for whom English was not their first language, and witnessed the obstacles they encountered in creative writing as a result. This led me to consider research around second language creative writing.

When I became embedded in the 'Researching Multilingually at the Borders of language, the body, law, and the state' project, I began to consider the way that these issues intersected with wider themes of social justice. This project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as part of the wider 'Translating Cultures' theme. The focus of the project on the way that languages respond to pressure and pain, along with my experiences as a teacher of English, influenced my decision to research the phenomenon of refugee creative writing.

I hope that this research will raise awareness about the experiences of refugees in the UK and also resist negative stereotyping perpetuated by the media. I hope that in centring the voices and interpretations of the participants, this study can promote positive engagement with their narratives, and enable a wider audience to learn from their expertise on the matter of creative writing.

Before providing an outline of the overall structure of the thesis, in the following section I will identify and define key terms used in this study.

## **1.5 Key terms**

There are a number of key terms that appear in this study that must be clarified due to their ambiguity in general use. These are: refugee, social justice, intersectional feminism, native/non-native speaker, creative writing, and linguistic/cultural resources.

### **1.5.1 refugee.**

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who 'owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'

<http://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.html> 1951 United Nations Refugee

Convention, Article 1A. Shacknove (1985) explores the moral limitations of this definition, arguing that persecution and alienation are not necessarily the only possible reasons one could become a refugee. Thus, in this study, I use the term not strictly in reference to its legal definition, but rather more generally to refer to any individual who has undergone migration under duress.

### **1.5.2 social justice.**

In referring to the emphasis in the literature around promoting values of equality and equity, I often use the terms 'social justice' or 'social justice movement'. Bell (2016) provides a comprehensive summary of the meaning of these:

*Social justice* refers to reconstructing society in accordance with principles of equity, recognition, and inclusion. It involved eliminating the *injustice* created when differences are sorted and ranked in a hierarchy that unequally confers power, social, and economic advantages, and institutional and cultural validity to social groups base on their location in that hierarchy. (p. 4)

I have chosen to use this term for several reasons, in particular its focus on actively working towards implementing these values in society, which is in line with the intersectional feminist framework of this study.

### **1.5.3 intersectional feminism.**

Owing its origins to the work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991), this term is used to describe a strand of feminism that seeks to take into account the multi-layered oppression experienced by people. Although initially designed to describe the experiences of black women, who are marginalised on both the axes of race and gender, the term has broadened to incorporate other elements of identity, including sexuality, (dis)ability, religion, and nationality. For a more in-depth discussion of this term, please see section 3.2 in the chapter on methodology.

### **1.5.4 native speaker/non-native speaker**

The term 'native speaker' and its counterpart 'non-native speaker' are both deeply problematic in the way that they categorise users of a language. They are, however, appropriate for this research in that they highlight the way that language users can be oppressed by the social privileging of the concept of a 'native speaker'. This draws on Holliday's (2005, 2015) concept of 'native speakerism'. This originates from work in the field on English

language teaching. Holliday himself highlighted the difficulties surrounding the term:

This is a difficult subject to write about because there is the necessity to use terms, 'non-native speaker' and 'native speaker', which should not be in use at all...The label is highly disquieting, but has to be used in order to seek to undo it. Cumbersome though it may be, I therefore continue to place 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' in inverted commas both to signal 'so-called' and to indicate a burden that has to be undone. The other thing that I have tried to do throughout is to remember that these labels are labels and not actual groups of people. (2015, p. 12)

This study would seek to emulate Holliday's approach to this matter. In using these terms, I hope to problematise and dissect them within the context of systemic structures of oppression. Holliday's work is also influential in this regard, as he demonstrates the alignment of the term (and the privilege it affords those it deems 'native speakers') with racist ideology:

That 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' are *constructed* is clear because they are not self evident on technical linguistic or even nationality grounds They are instead professionally popularised categories, often with skin colour as a determining characteristic...Native-speakerist cultural disbelief is therefore neo-racist. Even though race is not an explicit agenda in the minds of the people concerned (2015, p. 13)

Thus, it is with an acknowledgement of the troubling implications of the term, and an awareness of the need to deconstruct the concept, that this study self-consciously refers to 'native' or 'non-native' speakers.



### **1.5.5 creative writing**

To attempt to define the limits of what constitutes creative writing is something of an impossible task. Its very nature means it is constantly evolving, changing and pushing the boundaries of any definition that could be applied. It can encompass poems, novels, plays, film scripts and countless other forms. These can be combined and constructed in countless ways, and can include other formats. It is more pertinent, perhaps, to establish what creative writing is not. Namely, creative writing is not concerned with the establishment of an empirical truth. That is not to say that it cannot reveal truths. As Allende (2007) points out: 'What is truer than the truth? A story'. For this study, I have used the term to apply to the pieces of work selected by the participants for discussion, and produced as part of the group I observed. I have left the decision to them as to which pieces constitute creative writing, so these include autobiographical episodes, in addition to fiction and poetry.

### **1.5.6 linguistic/cultural resources**

In this study, I frequently refer to the linguistic or cultural resources drawn upon by participants. The term linguistic resources refers to the languages and vocabulary within those languages that participants have at their disposal. Cultural resources refers to the broader cultural knowledge from their home countries that participants bring to the writing process, and can include proverbs, culturally significant imagery, and events of historical significance that they include in their work. The reason for applying the term 'resources' to both of these is to keep this study in line with an appreciation for the richness that participants bring to the writing process, rather than any

conceptualisation that would suggest deficit (see Frimberger, 2016 for more detail).

Having defined the key terms as they are used in this study, I will now give an overall outline of the chapters of the thesis.

## **1.6 Outline of the chapters**

This chapter has provided an introduction and background to the study, in addition to its rationale and aims. In Chapter 2, a review of the literature surrounding the topic of refugee creative writing will be presented, identifying the limitations and lacunae in existing studies in this area.

Chapter 3 begins with a presentation of the research questions that emerged from the literature review, and goes on to present the methodology used in this study. It sets out the qualitative, social constructionist approach that has been employed. Moreover, it explores the reasoning behind the selection of intersectional feminism and narrative as theoretical and methodological frameworks for this research.

Chapter 4 is the first of three findings chapters. In it, the overarching theme of language that emerged from the data is investigated, and the ways in which participants negotiate the process of creative writing with regards to their rich linguistic resources.

Chapter 5, the second findings chapter, is an exploration of the theme of performance that arose from the data. In it, the way that participants discussed the performance of their work is considered within the wider context of creative performance by refugees.

In Chapter 6, the final findings chapter, the theme of (dis)comfort is explored.

Chapter 7, the last chapter in this study, presents the conclusions of this work, describes the limitations of the study, and gives directions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of some of the key ideas in the literature on the issue of refugee creative writing. It highlights the concepts and writing which have shaped and formed this study, and places it in context of the significant debates within this field. It demonstrates the process by which I came to form this research, and the gap in which my study fits. Moreover, it examines other studies of displaced writers and how these studies have been approached in different contexts. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this work, literature has been drawn from diverse areas, including: anthropology; literary studies; and intercultural communication. This chapter will draw these varied approaches together and explore how they connect to this research. In keeping with the intersectional, feminist standpoint of this research, effort has been made to include texts in the literature review from non-Western perspectives.

Section 2.1 highlights the literature concerning artistic responses to displacement. In section 2.2, studies on second language creative writing are explored, examining different disciplinary approaches to this subject matter. Section 2.3 highlights the studies around the role of creative arts groups for those taking part in them. Finally, section 2.4 discusses the literature surrounding how social justice agendas address issues of multilingualism.

### **2.1 Artistic responses to displacement**

This section highlights key studies (2.2.1) relating to artistic responses by people such as asylum seekers and refugees to forced displacement. The

research discussed relates to creative work by people from varied ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds. Due to its prominence in the literature surrounding creative work by refugees, a section has been dedicated specifically to studies focussing on the genre of Holocaust literature (2.2.2), and how this might inform this study.

### **2.1.1 displacement in literature.**

The literature surrounding writing by displaced persons is extremely varied, since, as Gulddal (2015) points out: 'Mobility served as a major source of narrative for most of the novel's history' (p. 131). The theme of displacement runs through literary history, and has been explored from multiple perspectives. In this section, some of the key texts regarding writing by displaced persons will be considered. Not all of these texts use the term 'refugee'; some refer to exiled or imprisoned writers. Nevertheless, due to similarities in the circumstances of the writers described, these texts have bearing upon the way writing by refugees is approached. This section will explore key themes from the literature, including the extent to which displaced writers occupy a liminal cultural space and the emphasised significance of socio-political and cultural context when discussing refugee writers.

A theme in the literature about creative writing by people who have experienced involuntary migration is the extent to which such writers exist 'in-between' their former and current cultural contexts. With the creative possibilities afforded by this liminal space also come challenges for writers who have been displaced. This is highlighted by several studies as being the cause of creative and emotional tension for authors in this position.

Tötösy de Zepetnek (2010), working from a comparative literature

perspective, developed a framework for approaching literature of diaspora which focuses on the way in which such work occupies a liminal space in cultural terms:

the diaspora author and text is “in-between” the original culture and literature the author and his/her text emanate from and both are “peripheral” with regard to the original culture and literature and their location. (p. 87)

Li (2007) explores the experiences of writers affected by forcible displacement, to whom she assigns the term ‘souls in exile’ (p. 260). She defines this group as those who have crossed national borders involuntarily, and contrasts them with those for whom learning an additional language is a ‘natural, painless acquisition’ (p. 259). In so doing, she establishes the connection in her view between language and pain for refugee writers. Li discusses the reasons why some such writers opt to use their second or additional language for their creative work. For Li, language is a ‘symbolic resource’ (p. 261) inherently connected with the identity of the writer: ‘[b]ilingual writers not only have wounds in their memory about their lost mother tongue, they may also be faced with the awkwardness of being in-betweeners’ (p. 271).

Several studies underscored the heightened significance of the socio-political and cultural context when discussing work by writers who are asylum seekers or refugees, or working in a language other than their first. Zhao (2015) asserts strongly the importance of exploring the context from which a multilingual creative writer is working, stating:

I am in fundamental agreement with the position that the manner in which L2 [second language] writers idiosyncratically engage in a present creative writing activity is importantly

mediated by the writers' own understanding of their particular life histories – in other words, their autobiographical identities.

(p. 5)

This approach is, however, not universally accepted. Arguably the most iconic text addressing issues of authorial autobiography as a significant element of analysis is Roland Barthes's (1968) 'The death of the author'. This short essay has proven to be both influential and controversial in the field of literary criticism. In it, Barthes made assertions as to the position of an author (or lack thereof) in relation to their texts. Barthes's position is that the figure of the author is irrelevant to the text they produce, and that focus on the author is to the detriment of the reader and the meaning of the work. He states, unequivocally, that 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but its destination' (1968, p. 148). He illustrates this position with examples from literature and art, drawing upon classical texts and surrealist work. This assertion has been hotly contested since its publication, including by Foucault (1969), Lamarque (1990) and Burke (1992). Criticisms of Barthes include that his approach can render the very concept of language meaningless. Lamarque is dismissive of Barthes's attitude to authorship. In his view: 'Writing, like speech, or any language 'performed', is inevitably, and properly, conceived as purposive...Barthes's view of *écriture* and of texts tries to abstract language from the very function that gives it life' (1990, p. 330).

Another focal point for criticism of Barthes's ideas is that of the 'Author' character itself. Burke argues that Barthes's conception of an omnipotent and dictatorial author is too narrow, and offers as an alternative Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic author (1992, p. 17). In fact, Burke goes so far as to assert that the 'Author' is a character entirely of Barthes' own

creation, constructed as a straw-man to be knocked down, but not truly representative of the state of authorship at any time, including that of Barthes. Larmarque (1990) is also of this view, calling the figure a 'fiction' (p. 331). Both criticisms place Barthes himself into the position of Author, deliberately turning the language of narrative and writing against him to highlight the hypocrisy of his position. In an ironic twist, Burke applies a biographical reading of Barthes's life to undermine *La mort de l'auteur*, commenting that the essay 'grew out of the early stages of Barthes's struggle with Balzac' (p. 21).

Some of the key critiques of 'The Death of the Author' come from postcolonial feminist positions. Intersectional feminist theorist, bell hooks discussed a 'deep emotional investment in the myth of "sameness"' she encountered on the part of white students (1992, p. 167). The suggestion that we collapse all producers of texts into one all-encompassing deified 'Author' figure, who must be destroyed, is viewed by some scholars as part of this myth of sameness which feeds into inequality. Olaoluwa (2007) explicitly rejects the applicability of authorial assassination in postcolonial contexts, emphasising that due to 'the historical consciousness of a literary text in the postcolonial world, such tutelary efforts as Barthes's, which recommend an interdiction of the filiations of the author to history and all the other considerations its mention suggests, cannot hold water'.

This position of acknowledging and appreciating authorial intent and context is prevalent in discussions of literature by displaced persons. Tötösy de Zepetnek (2010) noted that 'the contextual approach allows us to take into account extra-literary factors which often mark, indeed, designate, the perception of diaspora, migration and ethnic minority literature' (p. 88). This is to say that particularly when one is discussing literature written by people



who have crossed international and cultural borders, one must recognise the specific social, political and cultural position from which they are writing, even if this is not explicitly referenced in the text. Tötösy de Zepetnek expands on this theory, stating 'the contextual/systemic positioning of diaspora, migration, and ethnic minority writing with reference to what appears to be the criticized historical and autobiographical element, becomes, evidently, multi-layeredness and creative sophistication.' In this framework, the contextual historical and biographical information about the author are key components in enabling the reader to understand and analyse the text. He goes on to explain:

In other words, the tenets of the contextual and systemic approach to literature and culture which proposes to observe and to describe the extra-textual factors of a literary text in a specific manner are appropriate as well as advantageous for the study and legitimization of diaspora, migration, and ethnic minority writing (pp. 88-89).

This position refutes the framework applied by Barthes, particularly in the cases of writing by people who have crossed international and cultural borders.

Anyidoho (1997), in his work exploring the experiences of imprisoned and exiled writers, illustrates the way in which the context of exiled authors can be of particular importance when studying their work. He highlights that 'Somali writer Nurudin Farah suggests that the artist in exile is often simply one of the most visible members of an entire community. His assertion provokes considerations of how exile functions as an implicit critique of the nation-state' (p. 3). For Anyidoho, the very act of being a writer in exile is in and of itself political, before the content of the texts produced is even

discussed. Anyidoho does, however, also note the tensions for such writers that result from being in a state of exile from their home country, commenting that '[i]n exile, the very nature of oppression and the identity of the oppressor are harder to define, and therefore more difficult to confront' (p. 4).

This section has outlined some of the major work relating to creative writing by displaced persons. The emphasis on socio-political context and cultural background of these authors indicates that these are areas to explore in this study. The following section (2.2.2) will expand on this area through discussion of literature relating specifically to artistic responses to the Holocaust by those who survived it, many of whom were writing from the position of being refugees. Using this field gives insight into writings by refugees more generally, and provides some frameworks for their consideration.

### **2.1.2 artistic responses to the Holocaust by survivors.**

When looking at narratives of trauma and displacement, it is pertinent to consider Holocaust literature. As Norridge (2013) underscores, 'In the twentieth century, the overriding focus of academics working with literatures of suffering was the spectre of the Holocaust' (p. 4). Whilst this area of study represents a specific type of refugee experience, it can shed light on approaches to refugee writing more generally. This section considers: the extent to which texts in this area are considered to be a form of witnessing or giving testimony about the Holocaust; the extent to which fictional texts still address historical events and traumas; and the extent to which languages not present in the texts can be deemed to have influenced these authors.

This area of research underscores the role of artistic responses to such circumstances as a form of bearing witness and giving testimony. In his

work on literary writing by refugees who fled the Holocaust as children, Berger (1992) discusses the complex relationship for refugee writers with their cultural background and identity, noting that '[w]riting is simultaneously an act of witnessing and penance' (p. 84). Here he alludes to the guilt felt by survivors of such events. Berger comments that 'these writings [by Jewish refugees] also serve to enlarge the reader's awareness of the manifold dimensions of the Holocaust. The issue is of somehow combining the writer's memory and the reader's present experience in a manner that elevates awareness that culture is frequently a mask for evil' (1992, p. 84). The desire and sense of urgency on the part of such writers to communicate their experience to readers is an ongoing theme in the research relating to Holocaust literature.

In a similar vein, Felman and Laub's (1992) work on literary and cinematic responses to the Holocaust is a significant contribution to the field of research relating to artistic interpretations to displacement. In it, the concepts of testimony and witnessing in relation to the traumatic events of the Holocaust are explored. In particular, the discussion of the film *Shoah* in this study highlights the specific importance of artistic response to the Holocaust as an effective means of giving testimony to those who did not experience it directly. Felman and Laub comment 'the truth does not kill the possibility of art - on the contrary, it requires it for its transmission, for its realization in our consciousness as witnesses' (1992, p. 205). This is to say that creative arts can be an extremely effective way of engaging with traumatic historical events, and conveying these events to an audience who are at a distance from the lived reality of such tragedies as the Holocaust.

Literature in response to the Holocaust also sheds light upon the complex relationship between language, emotion, and trauma in instances of

forced relocation across national and linguistic boundaries. A survivor of the Holocaust, Hoffman (1989) writes in her memoir about a painful period of linguistic transition between Polish and English in her new home in Canada:

Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shrivelled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences; they're not coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the day-time. In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed. (p. 107)

Hoffman's linguistic experience (of detachment) reinforces the situated nature of second language creative writing, particularly in cases of traumatic, involuntary migration. The emotional relationship Hoffman describes with her languages here is one that is dictated by her current context. The profound effect upon her of this experience is that she did not feel she had any language in which to carry out her internal dialogue with herself.

Another recurring theme in the writing around Holocaust literature is that the texts need not be directly factual or autobiographical in order to still be considered a form of response to the traumatic event of the Holocaust. Adams's (2011) study of the genre of magical realism in Holocaust literature examines the way that even as the event becomes more distant in history, literature adapts to deal with the trauma, using 'displacement of traumatic representation backwards from an impossible aftermath', which 'creates a space for the enactment of a healing process denied the Holocaust's victims in their deaths' (p. 110). Adams explores the way that fictional Holocaust narratives, with elements of magical realism, can still be considered a 'working through' of trauma. This highlights the way in which elements of texts that are not purely autobiographical, or even completely fictional, can

still be explored and examined in the socio-political context of displacement.

Crownshaw (2014), writing about Holocaust literature, comments that:

The heteroglossic nature of the novel dislocates a series of memories from their original social and historical contexts and recombines them, such is the aesthetic freedom of the form, for the reader's participation and remembrance. (p. 220)

This emphasises the role that fictional, or partly fictional, texts can play in addressing real world events and traumas. The identity of the text as fiction does not necessarily decouple it from the real, lived position from which the author writes it.

Garloff's (2005) study of postwar German Jewish writers who chose to write in German underscored the importance of postcolonial approaches to work by these authors. Garloff commented: 'the most important conceptual shift accomplished by postcolonial critics is their redefinition of diaspora not merely as a place of dwelling but as enunciative position and mode of articulation' (p. 3). This emphasises the way in which writings by people who have been involuntarily displaced are deeply affected by the context from which the authors create them. Garloff goes on to explain the way in which this experience can manifest in the texts themselves, noting:

Yet however traumatic these crises were, bringing back painful memories of exile and expulsion they did not silence these authors. Rather, the figures of exile and dispersal that proliferate in their literary texts of the time demonstrate how a sense of irredeemable displacement contains the potential for a productivity marked by critical acuteness. (2005, p. 173)

It is within the study of Holocaust literature that some detailed discussions regarding the issue of language in texts by displaced authors can also be

found. Garloff's (2005) work is notable in this area because of the decision to focus specifically on Jewish writers in the postwar context who chose to write in German. He comments on this unusual nature of this decision and its impact, saying:

In contrast to this idea of a direct contact between survivor and witness, the authors examined in this study write not only from a peculiar distance to their readers but also in a language experienced as a vehicle of violence. (p. 174)

Not all writers considered in this section will have made the decision to use language in their creative writing that is shared with the regime that persecuted them. What this does reveal, however, is the extent to which language choice becomes a deliberate element of these texts, to be considered and analysed. Garloff also notes the way in which this can be a hindrance to writers in this area, stating that in using German these writers:

return to a scene of split identity. This does not mean that their texts lack the force of address that characterizes testimony but that the passage of their words to their addressees is fraught with additional complications. (p. 175)

Felman and Laub (1992) also emphasise the significance of the multiple languages in the film 'French, German, Sicilian, English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish' and the fact that 'the character of the translator is deliberately not edited out of the film – on the contrary, she is quite often present on the screen...because the process of translation is itself an integral part of the process of the film' (p. 211). This visible manifestation of the varied linguistic landscape across which the trauma of the Holocaust took place is an example in the literature of the way that forced displacement and language can interact in artwork. Discussing the work of Birkenau survivor Primo Levi,

Gramling (2016b) comments that he was one of 'scores of canonical Holocaust survivor memoirists who found it of primary importance in their writings to intervene in structuralist presuppositions about what it means to use, not use, or be used by (a) language' (p.45). Multilingual writers affected by forced displacement are in a position where not only the act of writing, but also the choice of language in which to write, are politicised decisions with which they must grapple.

In this section research surrounding Holocaust literature has been drawn upon as an example of studies of displaced authors. It is through this that we can examine works by wider groups of refugees, applying some of the same frameworks used by the scholars cited here. The main areas of focus have been: the role of literature as a form of witnessing or testimony following involuntary migration and associated trauma; the ways in which fictional texts can be considered to address historical realities; and the politicisation of language choice in texts by multilingual refugee authors. This exploration has highlighted that in this study, it will be important to investigate the way that writers feel about their choice of language in their work, and how this relates to their experience of involuntary migration.

## **2.2 Second language creative writing**

This section will expand on the discussion of language begun in section 2.2.2 on artistic responses to the Holocaust by survivors. It will explore the research surrounding second language creative writing more generally, before focusing specifically on the issues of language choice in writing by displaced people. As Hoffman (1989) notes of her own experience as a refugee writer: 'we want to be at home in our tongue. We want to be able to give voice accurately and fully to ourselves and our sense of the world'

(p.124). In order to explore the experiences of people in this position, it is pertinent to discuss the body of literature relating to the relationship between language choice and emotion for multilingual writers.

Zhao (2015), in a study focusing on the experiences of second language creative writers, highlighted the significance of considering this process not only in terms of language learning, but also in terms of writer identity, commenting: 'we need to improve our understandings of how creative writing is employed by L2 [second language] learners, not only for language or literacy acquisition purposes but also as a self-empowering tool to achieve particular social positioning' (pp. 170-171). The choice of language in which a multilingual author works is a deliberate decision, which could be made for a number of possible reasons, ranging from the artistic to the practical; from an imagined desired audience to a desire to improve their skills in that language. As Zhao notes, second language creative writers who opt to write in English 'for particular purposes (e.g. linguistic, literary, professional, or self-empowerment) are making their voices heard in widespread social settings' (p. 1).

Dewaele and Costa (2013) explore in depth the way that multilingual people experience emotions in the context of psychotherapy, emphasising the role that code switching (CS) between languages can play in enabling clients to distance themselves from events, particularly those of trauma and shame. They note that for some people, using a language other than the one in which they experienced a trauma might help them to discuss it without feeling the immediate emotional discomfort of reliving the event. They acknowledge, however, that:

More research is needed on multilinguals who have experienced traumatic migration and for whom language



differences are not seen as benign but may have been part of the traumatic experience (for example the languages in which torture or political strife may have been conducted). (p. 46)

Although this work does not explicitly address the field of creative writing, it is relevant in that it explores the way that multilingual people might experience emotions across their language resources. In the literature considering the role of language choice in emotion for writers, the work of Pavlenko is highly influential. She comments on the emotional sway of languages learned in infancy, particularly for use in creative writing, noting that:

the traumatising power and primeval emotionality of the first language may also affect language choices for fiction, the inherently emotional written genre...Many bilingual writers acknowledge the language of childhood has remained for them the language of the heart. (2005, p. 179)

This connection between emotion and creative writing is key in consideration of work by refugee authors. Expanding on this, Pavlenko notes that whilst some writers opt for their first language, for some writers the converse is true:

translingual writers point to the freedom of using new 'clean words' of the second language, which are not imbued with memories, anxieties and taboos. The 'stepmother tongue' creates a distance between their writing and memories and allows them to gain control over their words, stories and plots. (p. 183)

Here, Pavlenko posits a similar dichotomy to the one described by Dewaele and Costa (2013). That is to say, that multilingual writers may find themselves feeling more emotionally connected to their language, or

languages, from childhood than ones learned later in life. She also highlights, however, the way in which this might be deemed an advantage of using other languages by some authors, in that it can allow them to feel free of the burdens of cultural connotations with which they may associate their earlier languages. The Bosnian refugee writer Adnan Mahmutovic (2015, February) echoed this sentiment when being interviewed about his choice of English as a language for creative writing:

For years I felt I didn't have a language I could call my own, so I thought of trying the famous lingua franca. It worked so well because I could write honestly and make fun of my history without feeling this bondage to the nation implied in Swedish and Bosnian. I understand that for postcolonial peoples English is not a neutral language, but for me it is. For me it's liberating exactly because I have no historical connection to it.

Here Mahmutovic asserts in his lived experience the same idea theorised by Pavlenko (2005). He also highlights the significance of the social, political, and historical context of the writer as an individual, noting that whilst for him English can feel neutral, this may not be the case for many people who are from countries that were colonised by the British Empire.

Zhao (2015) also asserts the need to consider socio-political factors when exploring the reasoning behind the decision to use, or not use, a particular language on the part of a multilingual creative writer:

We need to problematise the connection between language and emotion by examining, for example, bilingual individuals'/writers' proficiency in and allegiance to particular languages during certain phases of their lives, the political system and turbulence they find themselves in, bilingual writers'

power and legitimacy in society, their family relationships or even (if relevant) their sexuality and how it is positioned against the mainstream values of a specific culture or regime. (p. 16)

Going beyond Mahmutovic's position, which encompasses issues of political tension, Zhao expands this analysis to extend to many more elements of identity. Like Mahmutovic, Zhao considers types of oppression experienced by multilingual writers and how it might influence their feelings about their linguistic resources. In addition to this, Zhao considers the extent to which a writer's sense of proficiency in a language might sway their choice in a creative context.

The issue of confidence about one's proficiency in a newer language is a factor mentioned by some second language writers. Hoffman (1989) highlights the struggles she encountered when initially trying to express herself in English following her family's relocation to Canada to escape the Holocaust:

My speech, I sense, sounds monotonous, deliberate, heavy – an aural mask that doesn't become me or express me at all. This willed self-control is the opposite of real mastery, which comes from a trust in your own verbal powers and allows for a free streaming of speech, for those bursts of spontaneity, the quickness of response that can rise into pleasure and overflow in humor. (p. 117)

Phipps (2013) explored this concept of mastery and power dynamics with regard to her own linguistic resources:

For me, this triple challenge of scholarship, poetry and authenticity has meant stepping into the turbulence of social action and change. I have moved to "Occupy multilingualism."

This has meant unmooring my own languages. I love to speak French and German. I worked hard to learn the languages in which I am fluent and have earned a living as a professional teacher of these in universities, I worked hard to more or less “pass,” when I speak them... But these are all languages implicated in the oppressing of millions of people, they bear the marks of the violence that has been inflicted in treaties and laws passed, in documents signed, and speeches made which have taken land and languages from peoples. These languages belong to a different understanding of the possibilities of multilingualism. (p. 101-102)

Here, Phipps clarifies the tension in the literature surrounding issues of linguistic imperialism. Relinquishing the position of power and privileges associated with speaking more powerful languages, the languages which have been associated with many global atrocities and inequalities, can feel painful and fear-inducing. In so doing, however, the dialogue is opened up to new conversations and ways of seeing language and the world. She elaborates on these opportunities, particularly in the creative arts, noting that:

Literature as a moving performance or event; multilingualism from below, involve us in the linguistic activity of changed perception, of newly elaborated subjectivities. It is here that new currents of multilingualism can emerge and be felt through the temporalities and experiences of unmooring. (p. 113)

Wirth-Nesher (2014) considers the charged position of Yiddish in creative writing following the Holocaust, suggesting that the language exists as a sort of undertone even in texts in English, provided they were written by authors who spoke Yiddish. She asserts: ‘From the moment that Yiddish-speaking

immigrants to the United States began to write in English with mass migration in the 1880s, Yiddish words, idioms, syntax, and accent were woven into their poetry and prose'. (p.400). Notably she highlights that 'Yiddish has been a felt presence in contemporary Jewish literature written in other languages' (p. 399). She connects this explicitly with the socio-political context of Jewish American writing following the Holocaust, emphasising that the 'demise of Yiddish culture in Europe that resulted from the Nazi genocide, however, profoundly affected how the language has been represented in Jewish American writing' (p.400). Wirth-Nesher also emphasises the considerable linguistic skill of those authors who opted to use Yiddish in their creative writing: 'writers who chose to write exclusively in Yiddish were all multilingual. Self-conscious language choice, interlingual wordplay, representation of accent, and translation strategies were ubiquitous in their writings...the authors' thematics were mirrored in their linguistic strategies' (p.405).

Gramling (2016a), however, is critical of Wirth-Nesher's position regarding languages existing only in the sub-text of a piece of writing. He notes:

Though Wirth-Nesher and other kindred readers delight in shoring up such communication between present and absent languages in manifest text, the cultural politics of such projects are often somehow ambivalent. Finding solace in the present absence of another language (say, Yiddish) in a monolingual (say, English) text is cold comfort for those who might like to be reading new literature in Yiddish instead. (p. 7)

Here, the political tensions in the field are made explicit. Whilst absent languages may leave traces in texts written in another, there are still global

political power dynamics at play that make this exchange inequitable. The privileging of English over other languages can mean that opportunities for creative writers working in those other languages are at a disadvantage, or pressured to use English. The implications of this for this study are that it will be necessary to consider the extent to which writers feel compelled to use English in their creative work due to the privileged position of English globally.

### **2.3 Writing groups and communities of practice**

Bolton, Howlett, Lago and Wright (2004), note that: 'Writing is different from talking: it has a power all of its own...It can allow an exploration of cognitive, emotional and spiritual areas, otherwise not accessible, and an expression of elements otherwise inexpressible' (p. 1). Baraitser (2014, p. 102), echoes this sentiment, calling for creative writing to be utilised more for therapeutic purposes in the UK. Beyond the act of writing itself, however, the context of the writing group and how this can impact wellbeing bears consideration. The refugee writer Jack Mapanje commented that: 'The other memory of academic life that helped my survival [in prison] was the Writers' Group which I had cofounded and once directed at the University of Malawi' (1997, p. 35). That he credits this memory with enabling him to cope with his period of imprisonment goes some way to demonstrate the powerful effect participation in a writing group had on him. This section explores the body of literature relevant to the concept of the creative writing group. It considers the following areas: communities of practice for refugees; literature around creative writing groups in general; and previous studies of creative writing groups involving marginalised people.

### **2.3.1 communities of practice for refugees.**

One of the frameworks through which creative writing workshops can be viewed is Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice. They describe a community of practice as being a group of people who meet regularly to practice and develop a skill. Creative writing workshops meet all the requirements to be considered a community of practice. Zhao (2015) applied the concept more broadly to the global community of second language creative writers. Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen (2009) found that for Somali refugees in the UK and Denmark, belonging to a community of practice (in the instance of their work, a community of Somali people practising their Muslim faith) contributed positively to feelings of belonging and stability for participants. In applying this theory to a creative writing group, it would be important to consider whether this remained the case.

Lewis (2010) writing about events and parties for refugees in the UK, noted that:

the central argument emerging from analysis of these events is that such 'community moments' are a significant space for negotiating relationships between and affiliations to 'here' and 'there'. This finding challenges the notion that migrant spaces or 'community' inhibit integration or, the converse (commonly made) assumption, that integration is chiefly concerned with activities or spaces attributed to the 'host' society. (p. 572)

Here there is an emphasis on the possibilities and opportunities for integration that are accessible by organising social spaces for refugees with one another. The extent to which this also applies to smaller, ongoing events such as writing groups can be explored further in studies that focus on

refugee creative writing workshops.

### **2.3.2 literature on creative writing groups.**

The format and efficacy of creative writing groups and workshops have largely been researched from a pedagogical perspective by academics who run such groups themselves. These studies offer insight into the opportunities and pitfalls of this type of learning environment, highlighting the extent to which they open up creative possibilities for participants, but also the emotional vulnerability experienced in so doing. Perry (2010) underscores this tension, noting that: 'At its best, the workshop can facilitate dynamic, effective, independent learning', but also acknowledging 'experiential learning...is potentially the most risky and least easy to control and manage, resulting in possibly increased vulnerability for students, teachers and institutions' (pp. 126-127). The emotional openness needed to facilitate a successful creative writing workshop also potentially exposes the participants to painful feelings.

Vandermeulen (2011) notes the supportive social aspect of a writing group: 'What writers' groups can do from the start is offer good company for finding potential in early drafts,' (p. 69). He posits that the best way this can be achieved is through participants 'offering their questions and describing their responses as good readers who are becoming writers' (p.69). Here, he emphasises the unique type of support that writers can offer one another, in that they are invested in developing the same skill and thus the ideal sounding board for each other.

Zhao (2015), in a study focussing on second language creative writers, noted the extent to which a creative writing group influenced one of the participants. This was highlighted as a key element of the participant's



writing biography: 'Finally, during Maggie's university years in Germany, she co-founded a creative writing interest group' (p.131). Zhao explored the way that this social element impacted Maggie's experience of writing:

In this little creative writer community, Maggie's social relations with the other members had to be negotiated based on her selecting what work of hers should be read out in front of the group and predicting the audience's reception and her own role as a supportive member of this community. (p. 131)

Ultimately, Zhao concluded that for some authors such as Maggie, groups like this could be a fundamental component of their identity as a creative writer, commenting: 'Maggie's construction of her creative writer identity has more explicitly suggested the shaping effect of the social context on her writing practices – for example...her participation in this creative writing group made of friends' (p.131). This is demonstrative of the capacity of writing groups to shape the participants' views of writing and of themselves as writers.

Bertolini (2010) notes the efficacy of a creative writing project in the form of a series of workshops designed to help students work through their grief following the sudden deaths of four of their classmates in an automotive accident. She found that the act of writing and sharing alongside others who had experienced the same tragedy was reassuring for the students who took part:

Students who participated...experienced relief both from writing their own narratives and reading those of others. Reading others' narratives helped students locate their own experience in a larger pattern of grief and recovery. Writing their own narratives helped participants heal the pain of losing friends

and lessened, as one student told me, 'the hole in my heart'.

(p.160)

In this instance, the sense of solidarity and mutual grief amongst the participants enabled them to support one another through their writing. It is not only the act of creative expression, but also the unity of the group which provides comfort to those involved. She noted the potency of the writing workshop setting as a means of building rapport between participants: '[s]haring our stories binds us together in empathy and experience and prepares us for the more intimate workshop moments. Students begin to face their demons, some more slowly than others' (p.162). This sense of closeness and compassion amongst those in the writing group is, in Bertolini's view, essential for the process to help in dealing with painful topics.

Bertolini (2010) also emphasised the importance of a degree of public engagement in the workshop she ran:

The project culminated in the publication of a commemorative booklet honouring the four students who had died and other losses our group had suffered... Students who helped create the booklet thought it was not only a wonderful tribute to the young women we had lost but a rewarding endeavour on its own. (p. 160)

The booklet they produced was presented to the families of the deceased on the anniversary of the accident. This process has echoes of the sense of witnessing and testimony following a trauma that was discussed in the context of writers who have been subject to involuntary migration. Another aspect of this sort of engagement with others, both within and outside of the group itself, is that of the participants publicly claiming the identity of 'creative

writer'. To an extent, identities can be viewed as a type of performance. Like any performance, it is in the eyes of an audience that it truly becomes concrete. Creative writing groups can offer a testing ground for budding writers to try on the identity of writer, to let it sit comfortably on them in a space where they know others are in the same position.

Perry (2010) notes that even within the context of a writing group this sort of performative identity can be emotionally exposing for participants:

Essentially, in requiring students to practise writing on the spot in class and to share that writing with others, I am asking them to perform writing. I am allowing and even encouraging them to enter vulnerable spaces, because in class they have little opportunity to edit what they write before sharing it with others and discussing it. (p.122)

It is this same vulnerability, however, that in Perry's view gives the writing workshop format such power and opportunity for development:

When a writing workshop is working, and real, and when creative work is performed by writers, it is as if they are conducting experiments, and nobody can predict the outcomes because the components and materials are different and to some degree unknowable until they are put together and the experiment put in motion. In the workshop, each participant brings the components of the personal and the materials of the specific to the classroom. The outcomes may be explosive, or toxic, even lethal. They may also be exciting and inspiring, even rewarding. (p. 126)

Here, Perry's praise for the workshop environment is tempered by the knowledge that it can also be hazardous for participants. Although the

explosions are metaphorical, the possibility for emotional hurt for participants in a writing workshop, particularly when dealing with sensitive and personal topics, is undoubtedly very real. For this study, this theme in the literature raises the issue of the overall emotional experience of being in a writing group for participants.

### **2.3.3 creative writing groups for marginalised people.**

In exploring the ways that creative writing groups have been used as a means of empowering marginalised groups of people, it is helpful to contextualise this in the history of creative writing as an academic discipline. Cain (2010) highlights the way in which it has traditionally been aligned with challenging hegemonic power structures:

One aspect of creative writing's academic history that is rarely, if ever, discussed is its debts to social justice movements of the 1960s. These movements, including civil rights, Black Power, women's liberation, and gay rights, along with massive student-backed protests against the Vietnam War, ushered in a wave of political and social consciousness that the academy had not seen before. (pp. 220-221)

Not only did the wider political context emphasise social justice, but the developments in the academic sphere at the time also underscored the potential for creative writing in this way. Cain (2010) explains that:

As women's studies, multicultural and ethnic studies, gay and lesbian studies, and other programs gained a foothold, in large part due to student demands, creative writing offered potentially radical spaces from which to question the cultural, social, intellectual, and aesthetic assumptions that shaped academic

disciplinary and professional life. (p.221)

The very nature of creative writing groups is such that they can enable participants to express things that are difficult. This can include, as Bertolini (2010) highlights, emotionally painful topics such as trauma. Cain (2010) adds to this the way that the writing workshop can be a space in which participants can confront oppressive structures that they encounter in their lives. This history of radical thinking and social justice is the backdrop against which many creative writing projects for marginalised peoples have been conceived.

There are several studies from different perspectives that address the practice of running creative writing groups with marginalised participants. Kagan and Duggan (2011) wrote about a number of non-traditional ways for academics to engage with marginalised communities, including creative writing groups. Commenting on a writing group for isolated young women, they noted that the:

workshops gave the women a different, safe space to be themselves and 'do' culture. This space was one that was free from responsibility and encouraged reflection. The women enhanced their literacy skills, critical thinking and practical writing skills. In addition, this form of engagement built cultural capital (understanding, awareness and knowledge), enabling the participants to look at themselves and their communities differently. (p. 398)

The empowering nature specifically of creative writing is emphasised here, as Kagan and Duggan highlight the skills that participants were able to develop as a direct result of being part of these workshops. They also noted the importance of a degree of public engagement for the women involved:

In this project, creative writing and sharing of fictional or autobiographical stories was the tool of engagement... a book art exhibition was held in the library at the centre of the local regeneration area, thus promoting wider engagement. (p. 398)

This echoes the comments of Bertolini (2010) on the public engagement following the workshops she ran for grieving university students. This combination of engagement with the outside world and opportunity to develop useful skills in a safe space seems to be, in Kagan and Duggan's (2011) findings, central to the facilitation of a successful creative writing group for people who are marginalised in some aspect of their life. The elaborate on the importance of this combination of things for the participants they interviewed:

engagement and involvement was facilitated by the storytelling process. As a result of participating in the storytelling, those involved not only contributed to community cohesion and regeneration processes, but they also acquired skills: of story production, refinement, listening, feedback, narrative production and reproduction. Many of the participants have also talked about their experiences to other community and academic audiences and this has added an additional dimension of engagement and skill...what these examples illustrate is the importance of creating safe and alternative relational spaces; that is, of physically departing from familiar places and people and meeting with others in a new space, with a new reason to develop relationships around creativity and storytelling. (p. 399)

Thus, for Kagan and Duggan, the writing group functions as an insulated, protective environment in which participants can develop their skills and

ideas before taking them to the outside world. Kagan and Duggan are very positive about the potential of this method of engagement. They list possible benefits for those involved as: 'a shared future vision and sense of belonging; a focus on what new and existing communities have in common alongside a recognition of the value of diversity; and strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds' (pp. 402-403). Stickley, Stubbley, Baker, and Watson (2018) studied creative writing workshops with refugees in the East Midlands, and were also extremely positive about the impact of such programmes, stating:

A place where people feel safe to express themselves is imperative (the term 'sanctuary' is extremely apt). The groups offered a creative and enjoyable experience, enabling self-expression and confidence building. Creative writing groups therefore may offer one way to enable people who have experienced trauma and displacement to move-on, grow, and envision a brighter future. (p. 16)

In a similar way to Kagan and Duggan (2011), Stickley et al.'s (2018) findings underscore the importance of a secure and emotionally safe workshop environment (a 'sanctuary') in order for a creative writing group with marginalised people to be effective. They did note, however, that: 'Future programmes could benefit from being closed groups where a sense of belonging could be greater and opportunities for friendships could be greater. This might enable the positive outcomes to be more sustainable' (p. 16). This indicates a lacuna in the literature in terms of studies of such closed groups that have been running for long periods of time, in which participants have had the opportunity to develop close relationships with one another and the course leaders. For this research, it would therefore be valuable to consider

not only the impact of participants being included in a writing workshop, but moreover to explore the sense of community amongst the participants and group organisers.

## **2.4 Political context, social justice, and language**

Also prevalent in the literature surrounding refugee creative writing is the theme of social justice. As has already been noted, the political context in which writers operate is especially important when that author is a refugee (2.2). Moreover, the way that relationships between languages are frequently imbalanced with regard to power dynamics in the global political context has also been discussed (2.3). Further to this, the social justice roots of creative writing as an academic discipline have been acknowledged (2.4). The issues of social justice that repeatedly come up, however, go beyond these facets of the literature. Mapanje (1997) reflected on his own socio-political position and lived experience in the context of being a refugee writer, commenting:

But exile brings its own problems. Writing from exile does not necessarily mean writing from some cozy environment far from one's home. Leading the life of an exile has not always been a happy affair. My family and I live in one of the friendliest parts of England, North Yorkshire. But even here, as European refugees mingle with African exiles who mingle with other foreigners, and as local unemployment figures rise, it is not unusual to find tempers among the locals rising and racism manifesting itself in a myriad of unsubtle ways. (p. 41)

Refugees often experience discrimination and racism in their 'host country'. This section will consider the myriad of ways in which social justice and inequality were discussed in the literature surrounding refugee writers. In so



doing, the following areas will be covered: the political context of refugees and migrants in the UK; linguistic prejudice against 'non-native' speakers in general; the framework of epistemic injustice; and suggested approaches for moving forward.

#### **2.4.1 political context of refugees and migrants in the UK.**

A recurrent theme in literature around refugees in general is that of political climate and media discussion around issues of immigration. There are structural inequalities at play here. As Pavlenko (2002) points out 'narratives – in particular what is salient to individuals and what is tellable where the audience is concerned – are also shaped by race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality' (p. 76).

The recent history of attitudes to immigration and languages other than English in the UK is one that has been addressed extensively in the literature. A particularly revealing incident is one which has been analysed at length by Blackledge (2004), in which he considers the implications of a speech made in parliament by MP Ann Cryer. Speaking about the comments of Cryer following race-related riots in the North of England, Blackledge (2004) notes the way in which languages other than English were pathologised in her speech to parliament:

linguistic features are iconically associated with elements of Muslim Asian cultural, moral, and social characteristics which are to be 'remedied'. A lack of 'good' English is iconically linked to the cultural practices of intercontinental arranged marriages and extended holidays to the sub-continent, and to the importation of poverty. Linguistic poverty depicts the essentially poor moral and cultural traits of those who engage in these

practices. Linguistic features represent cultural features, and both are to be remedied. Similarly, monolingual (or at least non-English-speaking) speakers of Asian languages in the home are positioned as deficient. The linguistic ideology expounded here is one which does not accept non-English speakers. This ideology erases the possibility of monolingualism in an Asian language in Britain, insisting that such speakers transform themselves into bilingual, multilingual, or monolingual speakers of English. (p. 84)

Using Ann Cryer as an example, Blackledge summarises the problematic attitude sometimes taken towards speakers of languages other than English in the UK. Speaking another language is connected implicitly in Cryer's speech to poverty, crime, and otherness. She renders the possibility of individuals who do not speak English to what she deems a 'good' level living in the UK as completely out of the question. This conceptualisation can be deemed a 'deficit' view of such language speakers.

Frimberger (2016) explores the implications of the deficit approach to immigrant language learners in the UK. She highlights the systemic prejudices underpinning a great deal of the discussion around these issues, explaining that:

deficit views of immigrant learners might be caused by more structural problems and biases located within the UK education system itself, in which not only monolingualism, but a class-specific monolingualism is the presupposed linguistic norm against which all other language practises are judged. (p. 2)

The expectation placed upon learners of a particular way of speaking English are described by Frimberger (2016) as being detrimental to the language

learning process. She emphasises the inadequacy and narrowness of cultural perceptions of acceptable language use, noting the inherent classism that also factors into such implicit biases in the education system:

The notion of competence bound up in the deficit argument is thus solely located within the individual's capacity to attain, in the UK's case, (middle-class) English native speaker fluency, but hides the special, environmental factors which set the conditions for this specific type of English language competence in the first place. (p. 2)

These attitudes did not, however, only spring into being in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain. Considering how the wider origins and implications of linguistic prejudice have been discussed in academic research is pertinent in approaching this issue.

#### **2.4.2 linguistic prejudice.**

There is discussion in the literature of a generalised prejudice on the part of some 'native' speakers against some language learners. Sommer (2003) links this to racial discrimination, underscoring the similarities between the two types of intolerance:

"How does it feel to be a problem?" white people are always asking under their breath, says W. E. B. Du Bois. Monolinguals ask it of new-comers, too, sometimes less discreetly but in a strange language. By the time immigrants or conquered people can answer, some deny being a problem anymore, having managed to forget the home language. Others will admit living in two or more languages can make them difficult, which isn't a pleasant feeling. (p. 6)

This concept of systematically privileging 'native' speakers over all other language users is dubbed 'native speakerism' by Holliday in the context of English language teaching (2006). Sommer (2003) posits some of the reasons behind this type of hegemony, commenting that: 'In top-down systems, bilingualism is a dangerous supplement that signals lateral codes and cagey moves in and out of them. More than one language per person means more than one way to eat, dress, pray, cure, dance, think' (p. 10). This is to say, multilingualism is harder to predict and control than monolingualism. Blackledge (2004) expands on this notion, stating that:

When a language is linked to national identity, the symbolic status of a language can create identity and discontinuity, and can both unite and divide, as it can become a battleground, an object of oppression and a means of discrimination. (p. 71)

This can have real life consequences for the people on the receiving end of native speakerism. As Blackledge (2004) underscores: 'while nations are imagined as cohesive monolingual communities, speakers of minority languages or varieties may be unable to gain access to membership of such communities' (p. 72). People who are not deemed the 'correct' type of language user may struggle to integrate into their communities, maybe less likely to be hired for jobs, and could even be subject to racist attacks, such as those described by Mapanje (1997), because of their language. As Hunsaker & Frasier (1999) indicate:

although multiple linguistic and cultural proficiencies should be seen as representing an advantage in the current international and domestic marketplace...they often are not. Instead, monolingual and monocultural views...may have contributed to limited recognition and use of the cultural-creating capacity of

significant segments of the population. (p. 208)

This is to say that in spite of the many benefits multilingualism could represent to employers and cultural pursuits, these voices are instead stifled by a prevailing attitude that there is only one 'right' way to be a speaker of English, and it is a monolingual, monocultural way. Hunsaker & Frasier rightly indicate the dangers of this kind of thinking, not only denying the multilingual speakers opportunity, but also denying society as a whole from the advantages of these people providing their full input into the culture.

Valentine, Sporton and Bang Nielsen (2009) also note the adverse impact of these outlooks on the lives of immigrants in the UK. They explore the side effects of misplaced concepts of nationalism, commenting that:

Ill-defined notions of Britishness also risk potentially having the effect of legitimising negative attitudes by the majority population towards migrants and their cultures rather than promoting its responsibility for fostering integration by recognising the presence of, and need to respect and accommodate the needs of, minorities. (p. 247)

This reveals the potential political policy effects of views that prioritise only monolingual speakers of English and hold that up as a barrier to the identity of Britishness. It results in a deterioration of resources and goodwill for minorities, which in turn prevents their participation in many aspects of society.

Phipps (2013) uses the term 'pass' to describe a 'non-native' speaker being fluent enough in a language to be mistaken as a 'native' speaker, noting: 'I worked hard to learn the languages in which I am fluent... to more or less "pass," when I speak them' (pp. 101-102). Gramling (2016a) also applies the word 'pass' to this concept, noting that 'This project [the act of

passing as a monolingual, 'native' speaker] often takes the form of critical doubling, monolingual drag, or an otherwise performative divestiture from the unmarked doxa of literary monolingualism' (p. 152). That Gramling alludes to drag highlights the origin of the term 'to pass' in this sense, its roots being in race, gender, and queer theory. Drag has a history of being aligned with critiquing societally established ideas of 'fixed' identity. As the drag queen RuPaul has commented: 'Drag is really about mocking identity. Drag is really about reminding people that you are more than you think you are – you are more than what it says on your passport' (RuPaul, 2015). Here, with his reference to passports, RuPaul explicitly draws comparisons between drag as a form of resistance to dominant narratives surrounding gender to wider resistance to geopolitical and national boundaries. This association of 'passing' linguistically with drag aligns the discussion about languages with the literature around social justice.

Ginsberg (1996) offers a comprehensive investigation into the history of the term passing in this context:

The genealogy of the term passing in American history associates it with the discourse of racial different and especially with the assumption of a fraudulent "white" identity by an individual culturally and legally defined as "Negro" or black by virtue of a percentage of African ancestry. (pp. 2-3)

Here, the origin of the term as being reflective of racist structural oppression is evident. Ginsberg highlights that originally passing was seen as some sort of violation of the natural order of things: 'As the term metaphorically implies, such an individual crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary- indeed trespassed- to assume a new identity' (p. 3). The advantages for a person capable of passing as a less marginalised identity are made clear, as

they would be: 'escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other' (p. 3).

Although the term originated in discussions of race, Ginsberg notes that the definition has broadened to include other facets of identity: 'By extension, "passing" has been applied discursively to disguises of other elements of an individual's presumed "natural" or "essential" identity, including class, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as gender' (p.3). In the work of Phipps (2013) and Gramling (2016a), the term also applies to 'non-native' users of a language passing as 'native' speakers, either in writing or speech. Using this term places the discussion around language in the context of social justice movement and acknowledges the power structures that are in play when we discuss the reason why writers may select one language over another, or choose how to express themselves within that language.

### **2.4.3 epistemic injustice.**

A framework that is useful as a means of understanding prejudices against 'non-native' speakers of English is the philosophical theory of Epistemic Injustice. Fricker (2007) describes epistemic injustice as a kind of objectification, wherein the speaker is denied the ability to be a subject and to convey their knowledge, and are instead, because of the hearer's prejudices, relegated to the position of object. This conceptualisation also underscores the way that the 'deflated level of credibility' (Fricker, 2007 p. 1) afforded to certain speakers because of prejudices on the part of the hearer are damaging to both the speaker and hearer. The speaker is denied the possibility of sharing their knowledge, and the hearer fails to receive it.

Testimonial injustice occurs when the socially shaped prejudices of the hearer cause them to deflate testimonies of a person or group of people.

The first example provided by Fricker (2007) is that of accent, which can impact the perception of a speaker in the ears of the hearer such that it bolsters or undermines their credibility (p. 17). Although Fricker indicates that such prejudice can cut both ways, assigning either too much or too little credibility to the speaker, she emphasises that it is the latter which does the most harm.

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a 'hermeneutical lacuna' (Fricker, 2007, p.151) means that speakers are unable to fully understand or articulate their experiences. This is specifically when 'collective forms of social understanding' (p. 148) conspires to prevent the person or group from having the means to communicate their experiences. The example Fricker gives is of women being sexually harassed in the office, prior to a vocabulary existing to describe such treatment. Social forces would disadvantage these women by denying them the ability to express what has happened to them. They are thus, in Fricker's terms, hermeneutically marginalised. This is different from testimonial injustice, as rather than the hearer being prejudiced, it is the hermeneutical landscape which is weighted against the knower of information. So, in Fricker's example, the creation of the term 'sexual harassment' works towards negating this hermeneutical injustice. Although Beeby (2011) questions whether this is an injustice of an epistemic nature, or simply the wider injustice of sexism, the role of hermeneutical injustice in marginalising groups of people has been reasserted by scholars in the field (Carver, Morely and Taylor, 2016; Jenkins, 2016). Mason (2011) also critiques this form of epistemic injustice, asserting that just because there is not a widely recognised term for an experience, it does not necessarily follow that those who have gone through it do not understand it. This is an important caveat to the assessment of hermeneutical injustice, as



to assume a lack of understanding on the part of those with first-hand experience risks veering into the patronising. Hermeneutical injustice is, however, relevant to the situation of refugee writers in the UK. Not only might appropriate terminology to describe the experiences of refugees (for example in their application process) not exist in common parlance due to the dense legal nature of many of these discussions, but moreover, it may not be accessible to many refugees for whom English is not a first language. Thus, as a group they could be considered hermeneutically marginalised in the UK context.

Dotson posits that the third category of epistemic injustice is contributory injustice, and it takes place when one party engages in 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance' (2012, p. 31). This means that they deliberately refuse to obtain the needed hermeneutical tools to engage with the testimony of another. Mason (2011) proposed a similar understanding in her discussion of the 'epistemically irresponsible and ethically reprehensible practices of misinterpretation, misrepresentation, evasion and self-deception' (p. 303) displayed by powerful groups in society. Dotson highlights that this is exceptionally significant in relation to marginalised communities, who often develop their own 'alternative epistemologies, countermythologies, and hidden transcripts' (2012, p. 31). If hearers of these narratives will not engage with them because they have decided to lack the resources to interpret them, then this, too, is a type of epistemic injustice. Dotson's work is applicable to refugee authors who may find that audiences are not receptive to their work, either because it takes the form of literature and they do not engage with it or because it is a type of literature with which they will not engage. An example of this can be found in bell hooks's comment that 'creative writing I do which I consider to be most reflective of a postmodern

oppositional sensibility--work that is abstract, fragmented, non-linear narrative--is constantly rejected by editors and publishers who tell me it does not conform to the type of writing they think black women should be doing' (1991, p. 367). Here, the epistemic injustices hooks faces are twofold. She is subjected to testimonial injustice, in that the editors' prejudices against her as a black woman allow them to deflate her credibility. She then also suffers a contributory injustice, because the editors are being wilfully hermeneutically ignorant about the form her creative writing has taken. The bearing of this category of epistemic injustice on the experiences of refugee authors is substantial, as their ways of writing may draw upon resources unfamiliar to a UK audience. If the audience then also rejects the opportunity to engage with the work, then they are taking part in the wilful hermeneutical ignorance described by Dotson. The implication of the theory of epistemic injustice in this research is that it emphasises a sense of moral duty on the part of those who are privileged to resist participation in these wider social inequalities. Thus, it will be important for this research to adopt a theoretical and methodological framework that allows for the analysis of structural social power dynamics with regard to refugee writers.

#### **2.4.4 suggested approaches for moving forward.**

A final theme in the literature around the issues of social justice and language was that of ways to improve the situation of 'non-native' speakers in the future. Pavlenko (2002) emphasised the importance of not only analysing stories that are available, but also looking at which voices are not represented in research, stating that: 'narrative study in the TESOL field should go beyond what particular narratives are saying and examine whose stories are being heard and why, and whose stories are still missing, being

misunderstood, or being misinterpreted.’ (p. 76).

Frimberger (2016), explores the potential, and limits, of an approach to language learners which deliberately resists the implicit social power structures revolving around language use. The example she uses is one of shared multilingual singing involving language learners and teachers. Although she explains that such an approach can be helpful, she also emphasises that the usefulness should not be overstated: ‘The momentary reversal of learner-teacher power-relationships during Language Fest must not deflect from the overall realities of institutionally ingrained, discriminatory tendencies towards non-dominant language use’ (p. 14). This is not to say, however, that the attempt is not worthwhile in her view: ‘Shared multilingual singing can’t subvert these power dynamics but might be seen as a momentary, context-specific rupture in deficit discourse in relation to our language Fest participant group, that built on the anti-assimilationist pedagogical practice of their educators’ (p. 14). The wider implications of such ruptures in traditional power dynamics can be far reaching. Crawshaw and Fowler (2008) consider the impact of narratives of migration upon public perceptions, emphasising how the ‘iconic status of...Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Andrea Levey’s *Small Island* and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* [has] brought into sharper relief the ambivalent relationship between fiction and reality in literary texts which focus on contemporary society.’ This applies in particular to the experience of migration and the ‘longstanding question of how the symbolic representation of subjective experience is to be read and understood’ (pp. 455-456). O’Neill (2008) notes the potential in this arena of creative writing with refugees and asylum seekers, stating that it: ‘may feed in to cultural politics and praxis. It may help processes of social justice via a politics of recognition, thereby countering the mis-recognition of the asylum

seeker, refugee, migrant - the Other' (p. 19).

In summary, this section has explored the current political context in which creative writing projects for refugees in the UK exist. In order to do so, the attitudes in the UK towards minority language speakers have been explored, in addition to wider prejudice in the form of native speakerism (Holliday, 2005). The framework of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and its potential as a means of understanding the oppressive structures that affect minority and refugee creative writers has been described. Finally, the emphasis in the literature on the potential of a social justice approach to this topic has been illustrated. In this study, it will be necessary to formulate a theoretical framework and methodology that allows for a holistic investigation into the layers of injustice participants might encounter in their lives in the UK.

## **2.5 Summary**

This literature review, in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of this topic, has comprised of diverse perspectives on a number of facets of creative writing groups for refugees. The literature surrounding authors subject to displacement has been explored (2.1), as has work focussing on the experiences of writers working in a second or additional language (2.2). Following this, the nature of creative writing groups was investigated, with particular emphasis on their affiliation with empowering marginalised peoples (2.3). Finally, the recurring theme of social justice in the literature was detailed, acknowledging the potential and limitations of creative writing groups in this context (2.4). The research questions which have emerged from this review of the literature are discussed in chapter 3, on methodology.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Following the context and theoretical background laid out in the two preceding chapters, this chapter will describe the methodological approach of this project. In section 3.1 I will explore the selection of a qualitative research strategy. 3.2 contains discussion of the intersectional feminist framework of this research. 3.3 elucidates the data collection methods used, and 3.4 focuses on the fieldwork procedure. Section 3.5 delineates the data analysis process. Subsequently, section 3.6 highlights ethical issues associated with this research. Following this, in section 3.7 I examine the topic of trustworthiness and how it relates to this study. Finally, in section 3.8 I consider researcher reflexivity as it relates to this project.

### **3.1 Qualitative research strategy**

The use of qualitative methods is central to the development of this study. As a result of the focus on subjective, co-constructed narratives and their context, a qualitative, social constructionist standpoint is appropriate for this research. Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the motivations and experiences of people. Qualitative researchers do not aim to generalise, but rather to elucidate specific experiences. Due to the sensitive and personal nature of the topic being explored, it is fitting that the methodology used should be cognisant of individual differences between the narratives of participants. Moreover, qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings people assign to their experiences. In this instance, the experience being explored will be that of the creative writing process. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) point out that this type of research is not

preoccupied with measuring statistical variables, but rather it provides tools for investigating the way that social experience is constructed and designated meaning. The research questions that emerged from the literature review encourage the adoption of a qualitative method of research, due to their emphasis on subjective individual experiences and the meaning ascribed to these.

### **3.1.1 research questions.**

**RQ1** What resources (e.g. linguistic, cultural) of refugee writers influence their experience of the creative writing process?

This question addresses the participants' subjective experience of the creative writing process, and how their life narrative, including their cultural and linguistic background, impacts upon their experience as a writer. It arose from the complexity demonstrated in the literature relating to writers affected by displacement and second language creative writing.

**RQ2** How do participants view their own work produced as part of the creative writing process?

This question underscores the participants' own views of the work they produce and how they understand its purpose. In so doing, it implicitly highlights the importance of the meaning ascribed to the work by its creators. This question was developed as a result of the themes which emerged from the literature of the significance of the context from which a displaced author is writing, and also of the potential for such work to have an impact on the efforts of the social justice movement. I did not want to assume, however, that participants had any particular view of their work in terms of purpose, nor did I wish to project a specific goal onto them, so I tried to keep the phrasing of this question open to different interpretations.

**RQ3** How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of refugee writers?

The emphasis of this question is on the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships that affect the participants' view of the creative writing process. As this study focuses on writers who are part of an ongoing group, this is a significant element of the experience for the refugees taking part. This question will direct the research to explore the socially constructed reality of the writing workshops. It arose from the literature surrounding the history of creative writing workshops and groups, and how these can affect experiences of the writing process.

**RQ4** What feelings do refugee writers have about performing their writing, and how do linguistic and cultural factors influence these feelings?

This question acknowledges the social construction of meaning with regard to the creative writing, and how this might be altered in differing contexts. It was born from the literature surrounding creative writing groups and also from having observed participants performing their writing to the group as a whole.

**RQ5** How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?

This question invites analysis of the research framework itself and its appropriateness for the study at hand. It implicitly acknowledges that there may be other appropriate methods, in keeping with the qualitative position of finding an answer, rather than a quantitative approach that would suggest there is only one definitive answer. This question was stemmed from the emphasis within intersectional feminist studies on researcher reflexivity, discussed further in section 3.2.4.

Further to the research questions, the topic of research itself led to the location of the work in a qualitative framework. As the work seeks to foreground the experiences and interpretations of those participating in creative writing workshops, a qualitative study is the most suitable way to explore this.

Within the qualitative framework, the research will adopt a social constructionist standpoint. The term social constructionism was introduced into the social sciences by Berger and Luckmann in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Although vast quantities have been written on the topic since the publication of this text, there are some key underpinnings that remain extremely pertinent to this work. In particular, the concept of 'symbolic universes', which suggests that cultural forms of collective knowledge, such as proverbs or other wise sayings, order history. As these symbolic tools are linguistically and culturally situated, this work will seek to examine how working separately from these could affect the way participants conceptualise their experiences of the creative writing process. Furthermore, the concept of identity as suggested by Berger and Luckmann is that it is shaped and formed by the society in which one is situated. This is particularly significant for refugees, for whom their social context has completely and traumatically changed. This research seeks to explore the way that participating in a creative writing group can help refugees to negotiate issues of identity in their new contexts.

Burr (1995) defines social constructionism as being directly in opposition to positivism, in that it emphasises the necessity of questioning the concept of empirical, neutral data. Moreover, Burr discusses the way that, in a social constructionist framework, the role of language in creating realities is brought to the forefront. Rather than a descriptive tool used to



measure, categorise and express an immutable, quantifiable reality, in social constructionism language itself shapes the world and the people within it. This is especially important for this research, which seeks to explore the way refugees might find a change of language affects their sense of self and wellbeing within the world following trauma and displacement. Burr further highlights the way that in a poststructuralist social constructionist view, language can shape and reshape identity. This relates to the aim of this research to explore the way that participants' views of themselves and their work might be reshaped through creativity in the wake of the life changing experiences that lead to individuals becoming refugees in the United Kingdom.

### **3.2 Intersectional feminist framework**

In light of the emphasis on social justice that permeated the literature surrounding this topic, I decided to carry out this research using an intersectional feminist framework. This section will discuss: the history of this term (3.2.1); the reasons behind the decision to apply it to this study (3.2.2); the challenges associated with this approach (3.2.3); and the components of an intersectional feminist methodology (3.2.4).

#### **3.2.1 the history of intersectional feminism.**

Intersectional feminism as a framework owes its origins to the work of black feminist scholars. Collins and Bilge (2016) point out that the concept existed before the term, noting that 'Intersectionality as an analytic tool is neither confined to nations of North America and Europe nor is it a new phenomenon' (p. 3). They consider the work of Savitribai Phule, a nineteenth century Indian feminist, in confronting 'several axes of social

division, namely caste, gender, religion, and economic disadvantage or class' (p. 4). The term 'intersectionality' in this sense, however, was first used by Crenshaw (1989) as a means of describing the way that black women are marginalised both because of their race and because of their gender. It was from this need for a vocabulary to describe these dual layers of discrimination that the term intersectionality was born. As Crenshaw highlighted: 'With Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis' (1989, p.140). Crenshaw explains that the prevailing attitudes at the time effectively erased the experiences of black women, due to the underlying assumption that individuals only experienced marginalisation on one axis. Her work focuses on the real harm this supposition did to black women, by revealing the way it resulted in inadequate anti-discrimination legislation. Crenshaw illustrated her argument by highlighting the experiences of black victims of domestic violence at that time in the United States. She went on to further illuminate the possibilities and opportunities presented by an intersectional approach, noting that:

This process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of African Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others. For all these groups, identity-based politics has been a source of strength, community, and intellectual development. (1991, pp. 1241-1242)

Crenshaw explores the importance of three facets of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational. Structural intersectionality explores

the way that black women are located at the intersection of race and gender and how this renders their experiences different from those of white women. Political intersectionality focuses on the way that antiracist and feminist policies can erase the struggles of women of colour. Representational intersectionality analyses the way that women of colour are depicted in popular culture, and how this can further their disempowerment (1991, p. 1245). This demonstrates the variety of areas to which intersectional analysis can be applied in order to deepen understanding of marginalisation.

Although initially designed to specifically focus upon the experiences of black women, intersectional feminism as a theoretical and methodological approach has broadened to include other axes of oppression. Valentine (2008) highlights that a common thread throughout the development of an intersectional feminist framework is that it seeks to 'expose the ways that power operates in and through particular spaces to systematically (re)produce particular inequalities' (p. 19). Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) note some of the other identities through which we might consider an individual's experience of marginalisation: 'intersectionality proposes that gender cannot be used as a single analytic frame without also exploring how issues of race, migration status, history, and social class, in particular, come to bear on one's experience' (p. 5). Other categories that might be explored through an intersectional feminist lens include sexuality, disability, and religion.

Whilst intersectional feminism has come to explore identities beyond its original remit, it has consistently been focused on issues of social justice and equality. Fotopoulou underscores the potential of an intersectional feminist approach for research with an emphasis on social justice:

As an approach it may be the most fruitful and political, since the engagement of feminists of colour with intersectionality emerged, as previously mentioned, from a critique to feminist theory and research precisely because single-axis analysis failed to account for the multiplicity of subordinate positions. (2012, p. 22)

Thus, intersectional feminism can be a thoughtful and rigorous approach for research that is concerned with the ways in which people experience marginalisation in their lives.

### **3.2.2 why use intersectional feminism for this study?**

The intersectional feminist framework and qualitative approach of this study complement one another well. There is a strong tradition of qualitative research methods within intersectional feminist studies because, as Shields (2008) notes: 'One methodological solution [to the issues presented by intersectional feminist frameworks] is to rely more heavily on qualitative methods because they appear to be more compatible with the theoretical language and intent of intersectionality' (p. 306). Alexander-Floyd (2012) emphasises that the prevalence of qualitative methods employed by intersectional feminist scholars is not coincidental, noting that:

It is not merely a matter of preference or availability of methods; intersectionality scholars in different fields have been keenly aware of and co-participants in feminist debates about the nature of knowledge production. They have chosen disciplines that allow them greater latitude and/or refashioned them in ways that press against received standards of inquiry. Their efforts to create new or to adapt existing hermeneutical

methodologies bring into play sensibilities that, when taken together, reflect new forms of knowledge unable to be captured by quantitative methods. (p.13)

Beyond this, intersectional feminism is suited to the content of this study. As was highlighted in chapter 2, there is a strong theme of social justice in the literature around refugee writers and second language writers. Intersectional feminism is an appropriate way to consider the multiple ways in which writers in this position might experience marginalisation, without oversimplifying their layers of identity. As Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) highlight:

intersectionality theory avoids essentializing a single analytical category of identity by attending to other interlocking categories. In a nontraditional way, intersectionality enables us to stretch our thinking about gender and feminism to include the impact of context and to pay attention to interlocking oppressions and privileges across various contexts. (p. 5)

As a theoretical and methodological approach, intersectional feminism can allow the researcher to gain a holistic view of participants' experiences. The thoroughness of intersectional feminism as a means of exploring lived experiences is appropriate to this study, which focuses on the complex emotional phenomenon of refugee writing in a language other than the mother tongue.

Intersectional feminism also lends itself well to exploring the creative writing group as a space, as it emphasises the situational aspect of identity. Valentine (2008) underscores this element of intersectionality, commenting: 'an appreciation of intersectionality as spatially constituted and experienced offers feminists a way of addressing the tension between the fluidity and multiplicity of individual identities and the continued importance and

necessity of group politics' (p. 19). Thus, this is a framework that would mesh well with an investigation into experiences of writing within a specific workshop setting, in which there are established relationships and group dynamics. Further to this, the intersectional feminist framework is well suited to analysing elements of everyday life, such as the writing workshops, because as Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen (2012) indicate: 'Another methodological argument for using everyday life as a point of departure in intersectional analysis is that it makes it possible to ask about categories such as gender, class, and ethnicity indirectly, and not as abstract categories' (p. 118). The topic of this research is therefore an appropriate entry point for intersectional feminist analysis.

The themes emerging from the literature review also indicate that an intersectional feminist framework would be fitting for this study. It is particularly applicable to the discussion of the term 'passing', arising from race and queer theory, being applied to matters of language. Intersectional feminism aligns well with queer theory, particularly when an intercultural approach is taken, as is noted by Fotopoulou (2012): 'Through deconstruction, ethnography, self-narratives, case studies or other creative methods, multilingual and multicultural hybridity may facilitate the common values underpinning queer studies and studies of intersectionality' (p. 29.). These shared values make intersectional feminism a helpful lens through which to interpret the experiences of participants in reference to the idea of 'passing' in an additional language.

From an ethical standpoint, intersectional feminism can be an effective way to ensure the needs and narratives of participants are consistently prioritised within a research project. Fotopoulou, (2012) underscores the opportunity presented by intersectional feminism in this regard: 'For the

research participants, this type of study can be beneficial because they can negotiate existing power structures and can become empowered by critically reflecting in their everyday lives' (p. 23). It is important, however, not to overstate these possibilities. Whilst participants in intersectional feminist research may find the process empowering, this outcome should not be assumed. Moreover, the researcher should not presume to be the catalyst for critical reflection in the participants' life, which implies that they were not reflective in this way of their own volition. That being said, intersectional feminism as a framework does seek to acknowledge and prioritise participants' experiences and narratives.

Another theme emerging from the literature review that indicates the viability of an intersectional feminist approach to this study was that of emotions and 'emotional labor' (Hochschild, 2003, p. 148). Intersectional feminism offers opportunities to explore the significance of emotion, because:

"emotion" is a term that has long been associated with the personal, the body, the feminine. As the constitutive other of "reason" (as well as the objective, the mind, the masculine) in Western, binary modes of thinking, "emotion" has been (and still is) a political strategy keeping women and the feminine out of politics and political spheres. (Åhäll, 2018, p.37)

Fraser and MacDougall (2017) also highlight the way that intersectional feminist research can engage with emotion, commenting: 'Narrative feminist researchers pay attention to what happened in the stories but also how the participants felt about it; the emotions they experienced at a particular time, and those elicited in the retelling...Emotions are important sources of embodied knowledge' (p. 245). Not only does this study's concern with the

emotional experiences of participants support the use of intersectional feminism as a theoretical approach, so does the applicability of the theory of emotional labour. The concept of emotional labour was born from Marxist feminist theory, and is an effort to recognise the work of 'women as emotion managers' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 164). Categorising this as a form of labour ascribes it with value and acknowledges the effort involved in performing the tasks that can be considered emotional labour. Hochschild underscores the negative impact of this social norm on women, commenting that:

Once women are at work in public-contact jobs, a new pattern unfolds: they receive less basic deference. That is, although some women are still elbow-guided through doors, chauffeured in cars, and protected from rain puddles, they are not shielded from one fundamental consequence of their lower status: their feelings are accorded less weight than the feelings of men.

(1983, p. 171)

As discussed in the literature review, the concept of emotional labour as a means of systematic oppression can be applied to the work done by 'non-native' speakers to 'pass' in a language that is not their mother tongue. In this context, intersectional feminism is a useful way to engage with this process of systematic marginalisation of 'non-native' speakers on the axis of language.

Although there has not been a great deal of exploration from an intersectional feminist standpoint of the concept of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005), some scholars have sought to understand the experiences of non-native speakers within this framework. Lykke (2010) includes 'mother tongue' in her list of 'discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed socio-cultural categorizations' that intersect to create



inequalities. Johansson and Śliwa (2016) explore the idea of language as an axis of marginalisation examining the discrimination faced by Polish speakers in the UK:

While gender, class and race, for example, are seen as embodied processes, the acquisition of a second language might be considered a disembodied, flexible skill. In contemporary discourses of globalization and mobility, language is seen to facilitate the successful integration of migrants. The ability to improve one's situation by learning a language is subsequently put down to the initiative and skill of the individual regardless of their other characteristics. However, becoming more fluent in English, for example, does not provide a linear correlation with advancing one's social status, as this is affected by other intersecting processes. Understanding this intersecting dynamic enables the repositioning of an assumed 'free-standing' skill as intertwining with multiple processes of differentiation. (p. 306)

With this in mind, the experiences of participants being 'non-native' speakers in the UK can be considered an intersecting layer of their identity, which influences the degree to which they experience marginalisation and oppression in the UK context.

### **3.2.3 the challenges of intersectional feminism.**

As a theoretical and methodological framework, intersectional feminism is not without its complications. Some of these challenges arise from the developing nature of the field. As Villesèche, Muhr, and Śliwa (2018) highlight: 'scholarly work about intersectionality is still very much in its

infancy. A rough analysis of data from Web of Science indicates that about 70% of articles on the topic of intersectionality were published in the last five years' (p. 2). As it is a field experiencing a surge in growth and development, there is not a particularly prescriptive theory or method to apply, but rather a philosophical position from which those both grow. This lack of dogmatic rigidity is both exciting and intimidating. As Schurr and Segebart (2012) explain:

it is the ambivalence and vagueness of the concept of intersectionality that makes it a productive tool to decolonise development research and practice in alignment with feminist postcolonialism. This vagueness opens up possibilities for a creative engagement with the concept in order to identify inclusions and exclusions along intersecting identity categories. (p. 153)

Whilst such openness embodies the potential of this framework, it also underscores one of the ways in which it can go awry. Mohanty (2013) explored the way in which her work had been removed from its original context and (mis)interpreted, noting that: 'examination of divergent receptions of my work in hegemonic and counterhegemonic sites makes clear, there is a threshold of disappearance of intersectional, systemic antiracist feminist projects within these neoliberal intellectual landscapes' (p. 986). Thus, it is necessary for researchers applying this framework to remain cognisant of its origin in the work of black feminists. Alexander-Floyd (2012) criticises the rhetorical device that is 'the universalizing tendency' which:

occurs when activists or other political actors suggest that a particular issue goes beyond the experience of women of color

and is relevant to a broader community of women, the effect of which is to typically highlight the plight of white women and not that of black women. (p. 8)

The risk of centring the experiences of white women is one of which I must be particularly aware, as in this project I am a white researcher working primarily with participants who are people of colour. Moreover, Fotopoulou (2012) asserts the importance of maintaining awareness of one's position in society as a researcher:

Not accounting for the privilege provided by belonging in academia can lead to research that looks from 'above' rather than 'below'. As researchers, we need to define where we stand, whom we speak for and how we relate to them (p. 24).

Alexander-Floyd (2012) also emphasises the importance of avoiding an approach that allows the intersectional focus of the research to drift, commenting: 'intersectionality research must focus on illuminating women of color as political subjects and the gender, racial, class, and sexual politics that impact their lives' (p.19). This is not to say that the only participants in a study with an intersectional feminist approach can be women of colour, but that such research must not erase or generalise the experiences of marginalised people. In her foundational work on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) identified the erasure of difference as a potential hazard of the broad application of this approach. Fotopoulou (2012) similarly asserts the importance of this resistance to generalisation, noting that 'Apart from a constitutive approach to intersectionality then, feminist research needs to avoid generalised conclusions and assumptions about what social divisions mean for the participants of specific studies' (p. 22).

Alexander-Floyd highlights that intersectional feminist research must acknowledge its roots in the work of black women academics:

scholars can disrupt the (neo)colonization of intersectionality by centering the voices of black women and other women of color in their research and classrooms. Doing so is critical in recognizing the scholarly authority of women of color who have forged intersectionality both ideographically and ideationally (2012, p. 19).

The above challenges are not obstacles to the use of intersectional feminism, but rather emphasise the importance of recognising potential pitfalls of this approach while conducting this study. Whilst it is clear that intersectional feminism presents a number of opportunities as a theoretical and methodological framework for this research, it is important that I work to remain true to the spirit and intention of the black feminist scholars such as Crenshaw who first conceived of intersectionality in this way.

#### **3.2.4 what does intersectional feminist methodology entail?**

As has been mentioned in 3.2.3, intersectional feminism is not a prescriptive set of rules for academics to follow when conducting research. There are, however, common threads in the literature around intersectional feminism that can act as guiding principles in applying this framework to a study. These are: use of narrative analysis; an emphasis on researcher reflexivity; and working towards social justice.

Alexander-Floyd (2012) underscored the affiliation of intersectional feminism with research that focuses on narrative:

it is worth noting that it was not coincidental that there was a certain assiduousness with which scholars across different

camps of black feminism embraced the production and/or analysis of narratives. Narrative production and analysis is a well-worn method for intersectionality scholars, and with good reason: it affords an opportunity to make women of color's experiences visible in complex ways, opposes the devaluation of subjectivity in research and evaluation, and provides a means of disentangling the myriad forces that work to maintain hegemonic understandings of politics and culture (pp.19-20)

This makes evident the synergy between research focusing on narrative and an intersectional feminist theoretical and methodological framework. Lykke (2010) also documents the prevalence of narrative analysis in intersectional feminist research, particularly within postmodern studies, commenting that:

in an (anti-)methodological sense, postmodern feminist research is often characterized by a strong tendency to carry out linguistic experiments and explore narrativity as an analytical tool apt to criticize the master narratives of hegemonic power, as well as to articulate alternative – non-essentializing – approaches to analyses of resistance and subjective agency (p. 149)

As a result of this resonance between intersectional feminism and narrative, methodology that employs narrative analysis can be particularly useful for intersectional feminist research. Alexander-Floyd (2012) notes the efficacy of this approach:

Indeed, a focus on the production and assessment of narratives is a way of taking up part of the legacy of intersectionality both ideographically and ideationally by advancing its defining elements—namely, producing liberatory

research centered on the lives of women of color and positively transforming dominant modes of knowledge production. (p. 20)

This highlights the extent to which narrative research is in alignment with the values and philosophy of intersectional feminism, and the way that the two complement and amplify each other.

Another commonality in the literature around intersectional feminist methodology is that the need for researcher reflexivity is often emphasised. Åhäll (2018) argues that being emotional and reflecting on that reaction is inherent to effective feminist methodology. This is a process that can be uncomfortable and difficult, as Vervliet, De Mol, Broekaert, and Derluyn (2014) indicate: 'an intersectional framework invites researchers first to move beyond their own research comfort zones, pushing them to accommodate the perspectives of 'the other' instead of only considering their own standpoints' (p. 2036). This discomfort is, however, an essential part of the intersectionality's appeal as a theoretical and methodological approach. It is precisely because intersectional feminism can make researchers uncomfortable that it is imperative academics engage with it as a framework. Shields (2008) underscores this, stating: 'Intersectionality is urgent because it gets us as researchers to go beyond the individually informed perspective that we each inevitably bring to our scholarship' (p. 309).

It is from this perspective of researcher discomfort that the valuable possibilities of an intersectional feminist framework become visible. As a theoretical standpoint, and as a methodological approach, intersectional feminism offers a way for researchers to name and understand the multitude of ways that inequality is created in social interactions. It is through this recognition of the origin of disparity that researchers can work to resist dominant hegemonic narratives. There is great potential for intersectional

feminist researchers to contribute towards social justice. Schurr & Segebart (2012) emphasise the potential of intersectional feminist research for this purpose:

We call for an engagement in critical globalisation research, which should be informed by interregional entanglements and a critical assessment of the researcher's own position and role in them. Reflections on research practices can and should result in new forms of partnership between researchers and those researched, and be steeped in mutual solidarity and collaborative political action. (p. 152)

As this highlights, intersectional feminist research has potential to be a propellant for social change and an important element of the social justice movement.

This section has considered intersectional feminism as both a theoretical and methodological approach for this research. In so doing, the history of intersectional feminism has been explored (3.2.1), detailing its origins in the work of black feminist scholars such as Crenshaw (1989) and the major developments in the field after that point. The suitability of intersectional feminism as a framework for this study, considering the topic being researched, has been assessed (3.2.2). It was found that intersectional feminism complements the multi-layered subject of refugee creative writing, and resonates with the qualitative approach of this project. Following this, the possible challenges presented by an intersectional feminist approach were considered, (3.2.3), including the lack of prescriptive 'rules' for researchers to follow, and the need to avoid overgeneralising the experiences of marginalised groups such as women of colour. Finally, possible features of a feminist methodology were reviewed (3.2.4). These

include the use of narrative analysis, and an emphasis on researcher reflexivity, and contribution to social justice.

### **3.3 Methods of data collection**

The following section will detail the types of data used for this study and the means used to gather this data. First, the research context will be outlined in detail (3.3.1). Next, the different types of data used will be described (3.3.2), then the process of preparation of an interview guide will be discussed (3.3.3). Following this, the issue of interview language will be considered (3.3.4).

#### **3.3.1 research context**

This research took place in a long running creative writing group associated with a charity for refugees who are survivors of torture. The writing workshop is one of many services offered by the charity, which provides counselling and support for their clients across a number of different facets of life. Usually around 10-15 participants attended each workshop.

The participants in the writing workshop came to join the group through a variety of different routes. They were always referred from within the charity, usually by their counsellor. Some participated alongside their counselling sessions, whilst others began after they had finished counselling, using the creative writing group as a replacement activity.

The writing group was run by mentors, one of whom was the overall leader. These people were not refugees themselves, but rather came from a variety of writing backgrounds. Some had been teachers, others were published authors. Each refugee who joined the group would be assigned to a particular mentor, who would have one on one meetings with them outside



of the fortnightly group sessions. The mentor would help the group member to develop pieces of writing, reading through drafts and providing feedback.

The group sometimes engaged in outreach through public performances. These were held at a variety of locations, including large music venues and literary festivals. The audience for these performances would be made up of members of the public who had taken an interest, and who would purchase tickets to attend.

### **3.3.2 types of data in this study.**

Data collection in qualitative research seeks to gain a thorough and rich understanding of the phenomenon being explored. The primary source of data in this study is the interviews with participants. Where appropriate, the study includes extracts from creative work by the participants. This allows for an in-depth examination of the process of creating specific texts. Further to this, I have drawn upon my field notes from the creative writing groups sessions I attended, as well as informal conversations with the participants and mentors. Some background for this study has been provided through the use of news sources discussing the perception of asylum seekers and refugees in the current political climate. This contextualises the study, giving the reader a more entire picture of the reality within which these classes exist. This material has been offered in Chapter 1.

The use of interviews as the primary source of data is typical of qualitative research. Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) note that interviews allow the researcher to examine experiences far removed from the present, by speaking to a person who experienced them firsthand. Moreover, and more significantly for this project, they indicate that interviews can grant a sort of access to the subjective experience of the interviewee. As this work

is concerned with the experience of creative writing, interviews were the most direct way of gathering data. That is not to say that other data cannot accompany these, as indeed the creative writing by the participants fulfills an illustrative role, providing examples of the challenges of writing that participants discuss. The interviews, however, are the primary source of data.

In keeping with the focus on narrative and language in intersectional feminist methodologies, this study draws upon the ideas espoused by Bakhtin (1981) and Vološinov (1986) that the social situation of an utterance defines its meaning. Bakhtin (1981) elaborates:

All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (p. 293)

Thus, the narratives created in interview are not a 'truth', but are rather situated in the epistemology of social constructionism. Vološinov (1986) notes that 'A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another' (p. 86). In this way, any narratives which emerge from this study are not absolute truths, but rather a co-construction between the researcher and participant, thoroughly situated in their temporal and geographical context. Eakin (2004) comments on the 'teller-effect' (p. 129) by which selfhood is 'a kind of 'music' we perform' (p. 130), making the process of narration much more about the moment of storytelling than an inherent truth about the biography of the teller. This concept is reiterated by Erdinast-Vulcan (2008), who warns that any attempt to narrate the self must be accompanied by the knowledge that,

once authored, these texts remain in flux, continually changed by their context.

### **3.3.3 preparation of an interview guide.**

Once the research questions had been established, and the method of interview had been selected, it was necessary to prepare an interview guide. The purpose of the guide is to help with the process of conducting interviews. The guide was drafted with reference to the research questions and in discussion with my supervisor, along with reference to existing research. I adopted an unstructured format of interview, with a general interview guide listing topics to be covered. This type of interview was selected for a number of reasons. Primarily, as Turner (2010) indicated, this method allows for a greater degree of flexibility than a structured interview, and can provide a more natural, conversational tone. I felt this would help to put the participants at ease during the interview process. Moreover, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicate, this approach acknowledges and celebrates the way that individuals interpret the world and their experiences differently. Fraser and MacDougall (2017) also note the way that a more relaxed interview style is appropriate in narrative intersectional feminist research highlighting that by using 'flexible research designs, accessible language, and friendly interviewing or group facilitation styles, we can design research that provides opportunities to participate in research that (also) disrupts power relations and allows participants to present themselves as agentic people' (p. 247). Finally, this interview style allows the researcher to adapt easily to difference circumstances, and for this project, to account for the different creative works being discussed.

### **3.3.4 interview language.**

The issue of interview language was a thorny one for this study. As this research is situated within the larger Arts and Humanities Research Council project, 'Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State', I was encouraged throughout forming the research framework to consider issues of language and multilingualism. In so doing, I was presented with a number of quandaries, and I have tried to approach these with a combination of realistic expectations of what is achievable and compassion for my participants.

The practical considerations when selecting an interview language for this project were many. My own linguistic background is largely monolingual. I studied French for seven years, and can converse casually in the language, but would not consider it to be at the level needed for conducting effective research. Moreover, there was no guarantee when planning my fieldwork that any of the participants would be French speaking. As I would be working with refugees from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, I could not anticipate which languages might be helpful. The only thing that I could predict was that each participant would have some grasp of spoken and written English, as the creative writing workshops are carried out in English.

It is not without reservations that I considered the use of English for the interview process. Keeping my intention of being compassionate towards the participants in mind, I sought to determine in my initial observations of the workshops at the research site whether it seemed as though conducting interviews in English would be comfortable for the participants, and if not to investigate the possibility of hiring an interpreter. When I observed sessions, I noted that the participants could converse

comfortably in English with their mentors and the other attendees of the workshop. In the creative writing produced, however, there were some words and phrases from other languages used. I decided, therefore, to primarily use English, but to embrace the possibility that words and phrases from other languages might occur during the interview process. This presents the opportunity, in interview, to ask for the individual's own interpretation of the language used. This is particularly significant when considering words used in creative work. As Maltby (2003) comments, 'One of the defining qualities of poetry is that it defies paraphrase or a complete rendering of its significance in any other form than through the poem itself' (p. 50) and gives the example of W. H. Auden's poem 'Night Mail', in which there is a clear connection between the sound and rhythm of the words and the content of the poem (p. 63). By conducting interviews primarily in English, with discussion of words in other languages as they emerge, this allows the participants to define terms as they use them, rather than a separate translator determining meaning.

### **3.4 The fieldwork**

Having outlined the data collection methods for this study above, this section will discuss the stages of fieldwork. The first stage (3.4.1) involved negotiating access to the field. Following this, I will discuss the pilot study (3.4.2). Subsequently the establishment of rapport and trust with potential participants will be considered (3.4.3), and then the next section (3.4.4) will explore participant recruitment. Finally, there is a discussion of the formal interview process (3.4.5).

### **3.4.1 access to the field.**

The process of negotiating access to the field began after the research questions and methodological approach had been determined. The first thing needed was permission from the organiser of the workshops for me to attend and observe sessions. In order to facilitate this, I first contacted the larger organisation within which the classes are situated, and obtained the contact details for the leader of the sessions. From this, I was able to arrange a meeting in to discuss the aims and practicalities of the research. My ideas and plan were received well, and the discussion with the group leader gave me increased confidence that this work would be valuable and appreciated. I began attending sessions in January 2016. Each session began with a shared meal and introductions, even if everyone present had met before. This meant that I had the opportunity to explain and reiterate the aims of my research, and to develop relationships with the regular attendees.

### **3.4.2 the pilot study.**

The pilot study was conducted in June 2016, after a first draft of the literature review and methodology chapter had been completed, as well as a draft of the interview guide. Having attended the sessions for six months at this point, I had developed a strong rapport with the other attendees. Due to the small scale of a narrative study, I invited one participant to take part in the pilot study. After conducting the interview, I transcribed the data verbatim and analysed whether the data would effectively address the research questions. I also did some thematic analysis, although this was limited by the small amount of data available. This did, however, allow me to refine the interview guide and research questions.

### **3.4.3 establishing rapport and trust.**

The issues of rapport and trust are central to this study. This is in keeping with the social constructionist standpoint adopted by this research, which acknowledges that the narratives created are shared co-constructions of the participant and researcher. Without a rapport, it would be impossible to effectively establish a connection from which a narrative could be created.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) discuss a number of ways that one can build rapport and trust with your participants. One of these is having someone closer to the participants vouch for your trustworthiness. I was able to do this by first making contact with the organiser of the creative writing sessions. This person had known the participants for years and was able to make them feel more at ease with my presence. Another way that rapport and trust can be established is through shared background or experience. Now, it is impossible for me to share with the diverse backgrounds of the participants in this study, as they come from a range of different cultures and countries, and have a wide range of ages. It was possible, however, for me to share in the experience of the creative writing workshops. I attended several sessions and participated in the activities there over a period of six months. By sharing my feelings and my own creative work, I was able to build trust with the participants.

### **3.4.4 participant recruitment.**

Due to the small number of people who regularly attend the creative writing sessions, and also for the avoidance of causing offence, I decided to invite everyone at the sessions to participate in my study. The organiser of the sessions identified suitable people based on her knowledge of the participants' other time commitments. She asked those people if they would

be prepared to take part in the study. Six people agreed. For the purposes of this study each participant is referred to be a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity. I gave my participants the option to choose their own pseudonym, and several of them chose to do this. The table below details the participants' wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

**Table 1: Participants**

Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Languages
Roj	Iraqi Kurdish	Male	Kurdish, Arabic, Farsi, English
Lutendo	Zimbabwean	Female	Shonas, Swahili, Nyanja, Ndebele, English
Nadia	Iranian	Female	Farsi, English
Ruby	Ugandan	Female	Swahili, Luo, English
Sara	Iranian	Female	Farsi, Kurdish, English
Ruth	Iranian	Female	Farsi, English

### **3.4.5 formal interview procedures.**

This section will detail the process of interviewing followed in this project. The interviews took place from June to October 2016. Each participant was interviewed twice, with the second interview focusing on issues raised or lacunae found in my first round of analysis. Before beginning the interview



process, I asked participants to select a piece of their creative work for us to discuss. They sent this to me by email ahead of the initial interview.

### **Stage 1**

Prior to beginning the interview process, while attending the creative writing workshops, I introduced myself to participants as a doctoral student at the University of Durham and also explained the research project and its aims. Following participant selection, each participant was supplied with the information sheet and consent form. The participants were then asked to read the consent form and sign it. This was done under the supervision of the writing mentor. This was to ensure that informed consent was achieved, by using the established relationship between the mentor/teacher and participant to ensure participants were comfortable and understood the documents. At this point, the next stage of the interviews could begin.

### **Stage 2**

Having finalised the list of who would be interviewed and obtained the signed consent forms, I asked for each participant to send me a sample of their creative writing for us to discuss. I did not attempt to influence their choice of piece in any way, but rather encouraged them choose the work they most wanted to talk about. The pieces sent were in a variety of forms. Some participants (Lutendo, Nadia, and Ruby) sent short stories, whilst others (Sara and Ruth) sent poems. Roj sent two pieces: one poem and one short story. I read all of the creative writing sent to me and made notes on the themes and any parts about which I particularly wanted to ask the participants. This could include a particular metaphor, use of imagery, or the narrative content of the piece.

### **Stage 3**

The next stage, the first formal interview, took place in the building where the creative writing sessions were held. The participants and I would sit in a separate room while the creative writing workshops were being held in a room nearby. This meant that the interviews took place in a familiar environment for participants, and that the creative writing mentors were available for support if necessary. I used two recording devices for each interview. This was done for two reasons. Primarily, it ensured that if one device failed, the data from the interview would not be lost. Furthermore, I would place one device closer to myself, and the other near the participant. This meant that if one recording lacked clarity at any point, I could listen to the other one to gain a better understanding of what was being said.

The first set of interviews began with the discussion of the creative work. At the beginning of each interview, I invited them to explain why they chose it for discussion. I then asked about the process of creating the piece, for example whether they wrote initially in English, or in one of their other languages and then translated the work. I would share my notes on the piece with them, and ask any questions I had about the work. After this, we would talk about the creative writing classes more generally, and their experiences of them. Following this, the interview would turn to the issue of language and writing in and using English. It is notable, however, that the interviews were flexible in order to account for the fact that participants might link these topics in different ways, depending on their perspective. Following each interview, I would write up notes of my thoughts in order to begin considering emergent themes in the data.

#### **Stage 4**

Following the first face to face interview with each participant, I transcribed the interview data and carried out some initial analysis. I drew upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis and Wells's (2011) concept of the construction of a shared narrative in order to identify the emergent themes in the data. This is described in more detail in section 3.5.3, on the process of data analysis. It was this analysis which helped me to form an interview guide for the second set of interviews. That interview guide consisted of clarification on themes and comments from the first set of interviews, and addressing any lacunae that seemed to be present in the data.

The rationale for working in this way draws upon the work of Harvey (2015), which provides a detailed exploration of this form of member checking, member checking being ensuring that the participants are in agreement with the research that is produced. Member checking is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Cresswell and Miller (2000) as a means to determine the trustworthiness of a study. Harvey comments that this strategy was borne from:

concern with representing their [her participants'] language-learning stories in such a way that they recognise and feel ownership of their stories, at the same time my treatment of these stories is sufficiently interpretive and academic to satisfy research rigour. Furthermore, I feel that if as a researcher I am to genuinely acknowledge the people I am working with are responsible agents of their own lives, I have a responsibility to give them the opportunity to theorise their own experiences.

(p.23-24)

This rationale resonated with me and my researcher positioning. As Harvey (2015) describes:

Regarding what I would actually ask my participants, I only had a clear idea of questions for the first interview. My expectation was that as I transcribed and analysed the data, additional questions would arise for each participant for me to ask in the next interview. (p. 25-26)

Thus, when I came to plan my second round of interviews, I used the themes that had arisen from the first interview as a basis for the topics I chose to ask about. For example, in the first interview, Roj referred to the sense of safety he felt in the workshop environment. When I transcribed the data for that interview and the others, I noticed the supportive atmosphere of the workshops was a topic that had been touched upon by multiple participants, but not in great detail. Thus, this became the basis for a line of questioning in my second interview with Roj, in which he expanded on the relationships within the group and how they led to this feeling of security. I hoped that this procedure would result, as Harvey (2015) suggests, in 'a more collaborative, more ethical alternative to member checking in particular, and as an approach to qualitative interviews in general.' This substitute for member checking, based around a dialogue between myself and participants, means that the ownership of the narrative was shared. The data was thus a true co-production between myself and the participants, and the interpretations I applied were subject to their comments and discourse.

For a detailed worked example of the data analysis and how the first interview became the basis for the second, please see 3.5.3.

## **Stage 5**

Most of the second set of interviews took place in the same location as the first ones. Two interviews, however, had to be conducted elsewhere for logistical reasons. One participant (Sara) had other commitments that were preventing her from attending the writing workshops at that time, so she and I met in a coffee shop in a convenient location for her instead. Another participant (Ruth) had moved house since the research began, so we conducted our second interview over the phone. I began the second set of interviews by discussing my analysis of the initial interviews directly with participants, to give them an opportunity to clarify and correct any misconceptions I had as a form of member checking. The purpose of this second interview was to discuss the initial analysis of the first set of interview data, gaining the participants' thoughts and insights. This gave the opportunity to reflect on the co-constructed nature of the interview, as well as a chance for participants to voice their opinions on the conclusions I had drawn. Further to this, we spoke about any gaps in the initial interviews. This included discussing topics that had been raised in my field notes and informal discussions with participants, but perhaps had not been addressed fully in the first interviews. One such topic was performance of the creative work, as was the significance of the shared meal at the beginning of each writing workshop.

## **Stage 6**

Finally, I transcribed all the data from the second round of interviewing. I completed analysis on this, incorporating the data from the second set of interviews and using it to interrogate and expand on my original analysis. I went through the same process of thematic analysis as I did with the first set of data. I established which parts of the second interviews might contribute to

the themes that had emerged from the first round of data analysis, and which might warrant the creation of a new theme. Following this, I created separate documents for each major theme, comprising of the related extracts from the data that contributed towards it. Repeated reading allowed me to identify key subthemes.

## **Stage 7**

Following the completion of the thesis, I returned to the research site to discuss my overall findings with the participants. In addition to providing a brief summary document of my findings, I also shared a poem I had written reflecting on the research themes and my own positionality within the intersectional framework.

## **3.5 Data analysis strategy and procedures**

I began my data analysis during the fieldwork. During this time, I completed the pilot study and data transcription, and also wrote up notes after each interview. Following the first and second rounds of interviews, I carried out more detailed data analysis, as described below. In this section, I will discuss: my methods when transcribing my data (3.5.1); the decision to use thematic and narrative content analysis (3.5.2) and the process of data analysis (3.5.3).

### **3.5.1 data transcription.**

The process of data transcription is extremely important in this study. In transcribing the data, one begins the close examination necessary for thematic analysis (described in further detail below). When transcribing the data, I opted to transcribe verbatim, except for any identifying information,

which was omitted to preserve anonymity. Before transcription, I listened to each interview once in full, without transcribing, to get a sense of the entire piece. Following this, I began the process of transcribing the data in small sections. This sometimes entailed listening to the same short clip several times in order to ensure it was correctly transcribed. Finally, I would listen to the interview in full again, whilst reading my transcription, in order to check for errors.

### **3.5.2 The decision to use narrative analysis.**

As discussed in section 3.2.4, research that prioritises narrative complements an intersectional feminist theoretical and methodological framework. Narrative Research can prioritise the voices of those whose experiences are marginalised by society. Moreover, it can be particularly appropriate for those who have suffered trauma. Chase (2011) draws our attention to Langellier's (2001) work on breast cancer survivors as an example of this, in which she states 'The wounded storyteller reclaims the capacity to tell and hold on to, her own story, resisting narrative surrender to the medical chart as the official story of the illness.' (p. 146) It is possible that the stories of refugees could similarly reclaim a narrative from the legal process which determines their right to remain. The way in which the process of seeking asylum can disempower the participants, specifically through the loss of control over their narrative has been discussed in depth by Blommaert (2001), who explains that there 'is a general recentering of the biography of the asylum seeker: the procedurally relevant biography of the applicant...can be rewritten in the shape of a travelogue' (p. 442).

Such research has, in the past, resulted in policy changes that ameliorate the lives of many. For example, Chase (2011) draws our

attention to the work of Bales and Trodd (2008), the narratives from which were 'instrumental in getting the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act passed into U.S. Law in 2000' (p. 428). While it is an ambitious goal to have influence on public policy, these comments nonetheless demonstrate the appropriateness of Narrative Research for this field, as this research is concerned with socially marginalized individuals in this country. This is not to say that I have embraced Narrative research without any misgivings. Sinclair Bell (2002) makes it clear that it is not suited to all research:

The time commitment required makes it unsuitable for a large number of participants. It also requires close collaboration with participants and a recognition that the constructed narrative and subsequent analysis illuminates the researcher as much as the participant. (p. 210)

However, the proposed methodology and philosophical background take these limitations into account.

While forming my methodology, I drew primarily on Harvey's (2014) study, also using Fowler and Mort's (2006) considerations for working with authors of creative texts. Commenting on working with authors of creative texts, the authors state:

Our purpose is to promote in a significant way the agency of this constituency of writers as co- authors on matters Mancunian. This kind of approach goes beyond interviews with writers that are simply restricted to a focus on the processes of writing and the socio-literary contexts in which particular creative texts were produced. (p. 3)



Thus, any interviews I undertook required more engagement with the participants than just consideration of the writing process in isolation. I also needed to consider the cultural and linguistic resources that participants draw upon throughout the process and the themes they felt emerged from their work, as well as the context in which they were writing.

Wells (2011) divides narrative analysis into two main categories. These are analysis of narrative structure and analysis of narrative content. For the purposes of this study, I decided to focus upon the latter of these methods. This was for a number of reasons. Primarily, I felt that the structure of my interview process, consisting of two sets of interviews for the purpose of member checking, had influenced the structure of the narratives presented. Moreover, in order to examine the participants' experience of the creative writing process as fully as possible, I wanted to synthesise the data from the first and second set of interviews.

### **3.5.3 the process of data analysis.**

In narrative research, before answering the question of how to analyse one's data, it must first be considered whether one ought to analyse it at all. As Sinclair Bell (2002) indicates: 'when researchers take peoples stories and place them into a larger narrative, they're imposing meaning on a participant's lived experience' (p. 210). This brings to the forefront a tension within the field, explored by Smith and Sparkes (2006), namely, the divide between 'story analysts' and 'storytellers' (p. 185). The former group are those who:

in thinking about a story, they [subject] it to technical scrutiny, [reduce] it to content, and then [analyse] that content, hoping to find larger categories, themes, or patterns without letting

practical, ethical, or moral concerns 'interfere' with the analysis or theorization. (p. 185)

Whilst the latter consider that:

Stories are...themselves analytical...stories of the self are told for the sake of others just as much as for themselves. Hence, the ethical and heartfelt claim is for a dialogic relationship with a listener (including the researcher), that requires engagement from within, not analysis from outside, the story and narrative identity. Consequently, the goal and responsibility is to evoke and bear witness to a situation the researcher has been in or studied, inviting the reader into a relationship, enticing people to think and feel with the story being told as opposed to thinking about it. (p. 185)

Initially, I had considered it to be more appropriate to use the latter framework, in keeping with the aforementioned goal of privileging the interpretations of participants, rather than forcing them to fit my own views. I later came to the view that close analysis of the narratives does not necessarily exclude foregrounding participants' experiences. In fact, avoiding thorough analysis of the data would fall into the trap of assuming, as Atkinson and Delamont (2006) warn, 'that the testimony of the powerless and the testimony of the powerful' do not 'equally deserve close analytic attention' (p. 202). Thus, having settled the matter of whether to analyse my data, attention must then be focused on how to approach this task.

To understand the prominent approaches to narrative analysis, it is necessary to reflect upon the background of the tradition. The foundations of this area owe much to the work of Vladimir Propp in the Russian formalist tradition. In his 1928 work, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), he identified

patterns in various traditional stories. He dissected these tales into 31 basic functions and 7 character archetypes, such as the donor, helper, villain and hero. This work was not translated into English until 1958, but it has been influential in narrative analysis, in that it was one of the first works to assert the idea that stories have identifiable commonalities and patterns. Another major influence in the field is Joseph Campbell's work, originally published in 1949, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004). Campbell, too, discusses commonalities between myths and legends, creating the term 'monomyth' to describe this phenomenon. A prelude to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) 'symbolic universes', Campbell maintains that it 'has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward' (p. 10). Notably, he also consciously links these to experiences in the real world, interweaving the everyday with the fantastical throughout. For example, Campbell draws attention to the trope of the call to adventure and the refusal of this call: 'Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered' (p. 54). Most significantly, Campbell underscores the way that we use stories to make sense of human experience, declaring that the 'happy ending...is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man. The objective world remains what it was, but, because of a shift of emphasis within the subject, is beheld as though transformed' (p. 26). Here, Campbell makes a direct link between stories and one's perception of the 'objective world', such that it exists.

Following these works, academic interest turned to applying these ideas to the lived experiences of individuals. Frequently this would be an analysis of the whole life story, which Wells (2011) identifies as holistic content analysis. This application is not an uncomplicated one, as it brings

to the forefront the question of the distinction between fiction and reality.

Although for the purposes of narrative research, we examine lived experiences as 'stories', it is important to retain awareness of and respect for the boundary between these categories, however distorted it may sometimes appear. One must reiterate, therefore, that this field seeks to explore narrative as a sense making process whereby individuals structure their lived experience.

One of my chief concerns in selecting analytical approaches and tools was how best to emphasise respect for the participants as narrators. Central to this was the distinction between Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and 'hermeneutics of faith', as applied by Josselson (2004) to the process of narrative analysis. In an analysis influenced by hermeneutics of suspicion, the narrative is seen as something to be decoded by the researcher, deliberately obscuring its meaning. By contrast, examining narrative through the lens of hermeneutics of faith is 'categorised by a willingness to listen' (Josselson, 2004, p. 3). It is here that the boundary between narratives of lived experience and fiction becomes particularly substantial. Within the realms of literary interpretation of fiction, it is entirely acceptable to approach a text from a position of suspicion, interrogating its meaning and seeking to expose hidden truths. One example of this type of approach to a lived experience is found in Franzosi (1998), in which a very brief narrative is subjected to intense scrutiny. Franzosi analyses the text from a linguistic and grammatical standpoint, exploring the way that the use of the past or future tense on the part of the storyteller can reveal obfuscated truths about the narrative. In this instance, some short sentences about a man making use of the services of the charity, Shelter, led to speculation about this man's race, age, employment status and guilt in the events leading up to his

homelessness. For this project, this approach would be wholly inappropriate and disrespectful of my participants. It implies an inherent distrust of their account, which, in the context of participants who are refugees, would play into the wider hostile political landscape seeking to discredit these individuals. Furthermore, the literary tradition has a history, established by Barthes (1968), of disregarding writers' own interpretation of their work. This project seeks to defy both of these traditions, instead adopting a hermeneutics of faith. Here, symbols and language are respected as a means of comprehending our lives, rather than a disguise for a true hidden self. Although this division may seem subtle, it is central to the intersectional feminist approach to analysis taken in this project. It informs the spirit in which I undertook the entire process of data collection and analysis, as well as the fundamental outlook adopted within this study. That is to say, that the participants are being honest, and one of the most powerful ways to affect change for the better in our society is to listen to them, openly and willingly, unclouded by suspicion. It is with this in mind that I considered methods for analysis of the data.

I decided to use the construction of a shared narrative methodology, as described by Wells (2011) and exemplified by Shay (1994). This is a type of content analysis in which the researcher draws together interviews on the same topic, finding commonalities and themes within them. It shares a great deal with the method of thematic analysis espoused by Braun and Clarke (2006), except that rather than coding the data according to recurring concepts, it looks for more developed narrative similarities. In this method, it is emphasised that one must listen to narratives carefully, prior to engaging with any kind of analysis and that the researcher must resist the urge to

categorise narratives too early (Wells, 2011). This is in keeping with the aforementioned hermeneutics of faith.

As I have commented above, narrative analysis as applied to lived experience initially focused upon the entire life story of the teller. As this is not the intention of this research, the analytical tools used in these instances were not entirely pertinent in this work. Instead, this study seeks to explore the narratives categorised by Georgakopoulou (2006) as 'small stories'. In this paper, Georgakopoulou underscores the significance of the social and cultural context when examining such data. In the interests of this, I attended the workshops for a number of months prior to initiating the interview process, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the atmosphere within which the creative writing process took place. Moreover, I took detailed field notes that allowed me to reflect upon the 'experience' of the workshops, and the way that stories are told within them.

My process of intersectional feminist narrative analysis is similar to that described by Fraser and Macdougall (2017):

Narratives with similar plots, events, and/or characters may be clustered together for analysis. From these clusters, a shortlist of narratives may help deepen the analysis. The ways that power operates in participants' lives may show up in the plots of the stories or the roles characters are expected to play. Participants' stories may show agreement with and use of dominant discourses and/or resistance to and rejection of dominant discourses. (p. 245)

Following the first round of interviews and transcription, I made notes on the emergent themes in the data. The following is a worked example of my process of data analysis.

## Extract from interview 1 with Roj

Melissa: Could you tell me a bit, I mean, you've mentioned this before about the atmosphere in the classes and things. There's a community I feel of writers and mentors here. Could you tell me a bit about, does that influence your writing?

Roj: Well yeah, a lot of times, for example. It's different for people like us, like me. Difficult life. In particular, you've had a difficult life, in Iraq, lots of problems. There are a lot of images in my head. That, er, I can't write. But, it's very difficult. You have somebody like, open your door, the door of your head. In this situation, sometimes the mentor gives you the picture, a new idea, and makes you say, for example, you have to write, give you ten minutes to write, you have to think, because you are part of the group. You, you forget sometimes, you change out of your reality, and you jump from your past. Sometimes you live in the past, because you live alone, and I can't you know, mix with society very, because it's difficult to, you know? For that reason, the situation in the workshop, it's very helpful for someone to give you idea, give you picture, give you something to write about. And, it makes you relaxing.

Melissa: Can you tell me a bit about how the workshops kind of fit in with the rest of your life? Does it kind of, does what happens in the workshops influence the rest of your life outside the workshop, and does your life outside influence how you write as well?

Roj: Well, yeah. It's not much affecting, but erm, I think with the workshop there's something like, good about this. Something is, you belong. You belong there. Because for me it's like, I don't have a friend much in here, a relative or people. When I think sometimes, I believe it's some

people you know...In my language they say some people outside of the history. Maybe in English it does not make sense. But if life is like this, if something, if you're outside of your life...but when you come to workshop, somebody takes your hand and says come to the life. Because you are like, you are, you are here. You are also human. Because you are a friend, in communication with the people. And, it's very nice to mix people, people talk, people are asking about. This one is, for me, it's like, erm, it's yeah. It affect, it affects the life, because my life is just. It's lonely. In my situation physical movement is not stable and I'm not mixing with a lot of people. For that reason, it's, yeah, it's very affecting to my life in this way. To have a friend and to talk and to mix with people.

Melissa: Finally, could you tell me about the story of how you came to join the workshops?

Roj: Oh yeah, I, had, because I was, I come to this country, I went to GP and someone referred me on to here and here I had counselling, two or three times. They say there is a writing group, and because you are a writer, and you can help yourself and maybe change your life, it's maybe useful. For that reason, I came and I found out it's very useful, yes. Useful for, for me, um, there is, two places very relaxing. Two, three places in my life. One is, home, my home. Home mean house, not country. I don't feel safe in any country. But when I stay in my home, my house, I feel safe. I feel comfortable. And when I go to, there is a hospital called, just for, just for um, for leg, because I have an artificial leg. When I go there I also feel very comfortable, very safe, because I, because of people like me. I like to stay when I go to hospital. The hospital sometimes changes my leg, there are a



lot of technical things, of physiotherapy, of things like this. Now the third place is [workshop], I feel safe as well. I feel very comfortable.

### Colour Coding

#### [Importance of social connection]

Roj repeatedly mentioned the social function of the workshops, and how he often felt isolated and lonely in his life. That he brought this up multiple times indicated its importance to him as part of the experience of being in the group.

#### [Writing as calming]

Roj highlighted the function of the writing itself as a means of reducing his stress and taking his focus away from negative thoughts.

#### [Physical comfort and discomfort]

Roj brought up his physical disability and how this related to his feelings of isolation and dictated where he was able to feel comfortable and safe. He indicated this part of his identity shaped his interactions with others. (Intersectional concept of identity, disabled as marginalised group). He does not separate the emotional and physical sense of comfort. (Embodied language, Phipps 2007).

Following my analysis of the first set of interviews, the sense of comfort and safety was a theme that emerged strongly from the conversation I had with Roj. He also indicated that his disability affected the way that he experienced interactions and situations. I wanted to ask him for clarification on what he meant by this, and what about the workshop environment created

this sense of safety. Accordingly, I made a note of this in my interview guide for the second interview.

### **Extract from interview 2 with Roj**

Melissa: One of the things you mentioned last time briefly we were talking about places you felt safe. You said your house, here and the hospital where they deal with your leg. I've been looking at people's interviews and a few people mentioned physical things like needing to go to the doctors or back pain or things like that. I wondered do you feel like your physical experience affects your writing at all?

Roj: Well I am not sure about that but the things is – I'm disabled. I never felt people talked to me my entire life – like people talk to me like a normal person. Because you feel people see you as a disabled. For that maybe affects you – you don't like to go to a lot of place. Because people in particular now if you have lost a leg in war and you're Middle Eastern and you're Muslim man. Can't people hide those things. But they can't hide it. For that reason maybe I don't like to go to a lot of place to meet people. So then I just stay in writing, maybe [laughter].

Melissa: Do you find that it – I mean one – I think it was Sara who said that she finds she writes a lot about pain and discomfort and painful topics. Do you find that it's the same for you? Or different for you?

Roj: Maybe she talk about that emotional pain – something not physical. But I have a physical pain always. That makes me – I don't like to listen to other people... Because I have seen a lot of torture and a lot of things. You always live in pain. Particularly myself – I have a lot of pain - a

physical pain as well. When you've lived in war all your life it affects you.

Yeah. You feel always you have a pain. I think it's true that one.

### Colour Coding

#### [Importance of social connection]

Here, Roj expresses the ways that his disability and identity as a Middle Eastern Muslim man make him feel more isolated. In particular, he talks about the visibility of his disability and ethnicity (tie to 'passing', Gramling, 2016)

#### [Physical comfort and discomfort]

Roj underscored the significance of his physical pain in how it affects not only his writing but also his day to day life. He connected this to his experience of torture and the way that those memories remain with him.

Throughout both of these extracts, the concept of feeling 'comfortable' was reiterated and emphasised by Roj. It was this, along with similar passages in my interviews with other participants, which led me to the creation of the umbrella topic '(dis)comfort', which would become the theme of my final findings chapter. This was the only word I could find which, for me, combined the physical and emotional experiences described here. It also highlighted the way that the experience of participating in the workshops was described a comfort to the participants.

These large 'umbrella' themes, or overarching narratives, would eventually form the topics for two of my findings chapters (language and (dis)comfort). Following this, I began to categorise the data into these themes. I created separate documents for each major theme, in which I gathered all relative excerpts from the transcriptions. I refined the umbrella themes following the

second round of interviews, adding 'performance' as a major theme in its own right, and repeated the process of categorising and organising the data into these large groups. Finally, I went through each theme in detail, separating the data into smaller sub-narratives and/or subthemes that revealed a more nuanced story of the participants' experiences. These were then considered through the lens of intersectional feminism, in terms of the way that they relate to wider social narratives of marginalisation.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

There were a number of ethical considerations when designing and executing this study. These are: issues surrounding confidentiality (3.6.1); ownership of the narrative (3.6.2); the vulnerability of participants (3.6.3); multilingual issues (3.6.4) and researcher wellbeing (3.6.5).

#### **3.6.1 confidentiality.**

The issue of confidentiality was a particularly pertinent one in this research. In discussing participants' creative work, if they were to decide to publish this work later, it could make them identifiable. Moreover, if their work were in the body of this thesis or other publications, then that could affect their ability to publish it later. There are a number of measures I took to ensure that participants remain as anonymous as possible.

Primarily, I kept data with any identifying information secure, uploading it to a password protected location, that could only be accessed by myself. It was uploaded promptly from the recording devices, which were then cleared, so as to minimise the risk of their being lost. I transcribed the interviews myself from the recordings, so I could guarantee their security. Additionally, I have used pseudonyms for all participants involved.

Moreover, I have avoided transcribing data that could have identifying information (such as strong regional accents and names of people or places). Furthermore, I have avoided naming the research site specifically in any of my writing. Finally, I requested that participants only bring work they have not published and do not intend to publish so as to minimise the risk of this being an identifiable factor. Obviously, the participants retain the right to change their mind about this, but the steps outlined above, along with this request, should ensure the possibility of participants being identified through this project is minimised.

### **3.6.2 ownership of the narrative.**

In any study involving participants' lived experiences, it is important for the researcher to consider ethical implications relating to ownership of the narrative. As discussed above, this research acknowledges that the narratives produced are a co-construction between the researcher and participant. It is necessary, however, to remain aware that the ownership of a narrative ultimately belongs to the participant. This is especially significant when conducting research that involves participants who are refugees. Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman (2010) explore the reasons for this, emphasising the need to ensure that the participants retain their agency, given that the process of seeking asylum, and the conditions that led them to do so, are likely to have caused feelings of powerlessness.

I took several steps in the interests of maintaining a sense of agency for the participants. Primarily, I decided to use member checking. It is worth considering the process of member checking as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Cresswell and Miller (2000) as a means to determine the trustworthiness of a study. Doyle (2007) describes this as a process of

verifying data, possibly by returning transcripts to participants as a way to determine their authenticity. Harvey (2014) comments that this is problematic as it is rarely 'a process that generated any deeper opinion or reflection' (p. 103). Carlson (2010) and Doyle (2007) both reiterate this idea that member checking frequently doesn't impact greatly on the results. This is at odds with the principles of intersectional feminist narrative research, in which the participants' interpretation of experience should be at the forefront of the research. Thus, I would seek to ensure my participants had the maximum opportunity to engage actively with the process by carrying out the member checking in person during the second round of interviews. This would give participants the opportunity to clarify or correct any misconceptions I had after the initial interviews.

### **3.6.3 the vulnerability of participants.**

Silverman (2015) includes working with vulnerable participants as one of the most ethically complex elements of qualitative research, and certainly it was an issue pertinent to this work. Perry (2011) provides a comprehensive review of the literature and some of the institutional policies surrounding multilingual participants, focusing in particular on the situation of refugees. In her examination of the documents provided by Institutional Review Boards at 32 different American universities, she found not one of them identified refugees specifically as a vulnerable population. Although, as Perry acknowledges, some of the criteria for vulnerability could be applied to refugees, it is significant that this is not tailored to account for their unique situation.

There are numerous studies explicitly exploring the ethics and best practice for researchers working with refugees. Notably, Hynes (2003),

considering the issue of trust between researchers and refugees in the UK, cites the conditions that led refugees to flee their home country and the all too frequently isolating reception of refugees in the UK as contributing factors to refugee mistrust of researchers. Pittaway et al (2010) consider the ethical issues associated with conducting research with vulnerable groups, highlighting work in refugee camps. This is markedly different from this project, which will be dealing with refugees who have been successfully resettled, and therefore do not suffer from the same uncertainty and living conditions as refugees still in camps. There are however, some points which remain applicable to this research. Pittaway et al (2010) underscore the dangers of retraumatisation of participants in the research process. They draw attention to the example of women refugees in Thailand who were asked by researchers to describe their feelings about having been raped. Understandably, this left the participants feeling deeply uncomfortable with participating in further research and with a lasting distrust of researchers.

Guus Van Der Veer (1995) describes some of the ways that the refugee experience differs from other types of trauma, in particular emphasising that their traumatisation is almost always over a prolonged period of time and is not related to an isolated incident. He categorises the traumatic experience of refugees into three stages. These are:

1. The phase of increasing political repression.
2. The phase of major traumatic experiences, including experiences like detention, torture, terror, combat experiences, the disappearance of relatives or friends, and hardships suffered during escape or in refugee camps. These experiences are connected with a variety of emotional reactions, including guilt and self-blame, mortal fear,

disgust, bereavement, the feeling of having been deceived, and anger.

3. The phase of exile, including stressful experiences such as receiving bad news from the native country, difficulties in cultural adjustment, language problems, social isolation, uncertainty related to the request for political asylum, and problems in finding housing or work. (p.155)

Although the refugees involved in this project are not currently experiencing the first two stages, it is important to remember that they may still be undergoing some of the aspects of stage three, for example receiving bad news from their native country or difficulties in cultural adjustment.

Moreover, the impact of the trauma from phases one and two will continue to affect the participants.

This project sought to avoid retraumatisation in a number of ways. Primarily, the topic about which the participants were interviewed was not their trauma, but their creative writing. No participant was asked at any time about the circumstances that led to their becoming a refugee. It was important, however, to be aware of the possibility that in discussing their creative writing and involvement in the group, some participants might bring up traumatic past events. In this instance, it was important to allow the participant to maintain a sense of agency over their narrative, divulging only the details they choose and not pressing them further. Moreover, I drew upon the support system in the organisation, including the creative writing mentors, to ensure that all participants felt safe and in control throughout the interview process. All of the participants have worked with qualified clinicians to address their trauma as part of the organisation in which the creative writing sessions are situated. This provided the reassurance of a comprehensive support system available to the refugees involved. Hynes



(2003) and Perry (2011) both note that some refugees are happy to discuss their experiences and find the experience empowering. Participant agency is central to this, and is prioritised by this study in two ways. Primarily, the unstructured interview format gave participants space to discuss topics freely. Further to this, the involved form of member checking in the second interview ensured that participants had control over the narrative at each stage of the process.

Darling (2014) describes in detail his experience of doing research with asylum seekers and refugees and the ethical and emotional issues associated with this. Darling worked as a volunteer at a drop-in centre in order to carry out ethnographic research about asylum seekers' experiences of the city of Sheffield. There are several distinctions to be made between this work and Darling's. Primarily, due to the association between the organisation that was my research site and clinical psychological counselling, I felt it was imperative that it be clear I was not there as a counsellor or therapist, but as a researcher. Moreover, the creative writing group has a number of established mentors and so it was important I not appear to be encroaching upon their role and relationship with their mentees. It would not, therefore, be appropriate in my case for participants to 'forget or ignore' (Darling, 2014, p.7) my role as a researcher. Darling's work was, however, influential in terms of exploring some of the ethical challenges and considerations when working specifically with refugees. In particular, I took on board his emphasis upon researcher flexibility and the need for relationships during fieldwork to be continually developing and evolving throughout the research process. He also underscored that the necessity to build trust and rapport with asylum seekers and refugees must be balanced

with the risk of developing emotional entanglements which can take a toll on the researcher.

#### **3.6.4 multilingual issues.**

Stelma, Fay, and Zhou (2013) discuss the significance of researchers developing intentionality when conducting research with multilingual elements. That is to say, the act of research itself is a deliberate, intentional act, therefore it follows that researching multilingually is doubly so. Holmes, Fay, Andrews, and Attia (2013) highlight the necessity for researcher awareness of four multilingual spaces. These are: the researched context or phenomenon; the research context (i.e. the situation of the PhD); the researcher resources; and the representational possibilities. Thus, when designing and conducting this research I tried to be cognizant of these factors, particularly with regard to ethics.

The researched context for this study is linguistically rich, and as Frimberger (2016) indicates, it is essential that this is considered a richness rather than a deficit. I was aware that my participants are from a variety of backgrounds, with a wide range of linguistic repertoires. As Silverman (2015) points out, the concept of informed consent is fundamental to ethical qualitative research. In order to be assured that this was possible in English, I needed to observe the creative writing group and assess whether participants would be able to give informed consent. Although the creative writing sessions are carried out in English, the participants frequently incorporate words and phrases from their first language. Having observed several sessions and observed that the participants communicated comfortably, I decided to conduct the interviews in English, but with space to discuss words and phrases used from other languages. By doing this,

participants had the opportunity to provide their own definitions and reasons for a word choice, rather than having it defined separately by an interpreter. This is significant in the case of creative writing, where individual word selection is key to the meaning of the piece. Moreover, it helps to ensure that participant agency in word choice is not undermined. This is only possible, however, because these are refugees who have been in the country and attending sessions at the research site for quite some time. In other work involving refugees, this might not always be achievable.

The research context is significant in the case of this work because of the situatedness of the PhD within a larger project. The PhD is part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council large grant, 'Researching multilingually at Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State'. This grant is part of the wider 'Translating Cultures' theme. Being part of this project helped to develop my awareness of issues surrounding working with multilingual participants. I have been fortunate enough to be able to draw upon the support other academics conducting multilingual research as a resource when designing and executing this work.

The issue of researcher resources is noteworthy with regards to ethics in that I was conscious that I should not allow it to overly sway my decision to use English in the interview process. This was an area that required a great deal of reflection, and which was informed greatly by my preliminary visits to the research site. As noted above, the participants were able to converse comfortably in English. Ultimately, I decided that using interpreters would be unnecessary in this instance, and might have even alienated my participants by preventing us from speaking to one another directly after having built up a rapport in the classes.

Representational possibilities with regard to this work were rich. As part of my participation in the creative writing sessions, I decided that in addition to a summary of the research findings, it would be appropriate for me to compose a poem about my own linguistic position and the themes arising from the data to present back to my participants. The participants and group organisers were enthusiastic about this, and the poem I composed can be found in Appendix A. Fraser and MacDougall (2017) highlight the significance of this type of return to the research site for intersectional feminist researchers:

From an Indigenous perspective, reciprocity in research—the act of giving back to the participants and communities involved—justifies it taking place... and may involve providing access to the written academic work, as well as creating and providing other means for sharing the knowledge gained, as requested by the participants and communities with which researchers are involved. (p. 250)

By sharing my own creative work, I hoped not only to convey to my participants what the experience of carrying out this research had meant to me on a personal level, but also to resist the stereotypical power dynamics between researcher and participant. In the field of creative writing, my participants are all experts and I am a novice. In sharing this personal work with them, not only was I returning the trust and vulnerability they had shown me during the research process by sharing creative work on my own language history, but moreover I was submitting to them in a form in which they are authorities in their own right.

### **3.6.5 researcher wellbeing.**

Guus van der Veer (1992) considers the consequences of working with refugee clients for counsellors. Although the role of researcher is markedly different from that of counsellor or therapist, this was informative in terms of necessary considerations when potentially being exposed to stories of trauma. In particular, there is the possibility of vicarious traumatisation of the person listening to these stories. As indicated in section 3.6.3, none of the refugees involved in this research were asked about their trauma. The interviews concentrated instead on the creative writing process and experience of the classes. It was essential however, to be aware of chance that the participants might relay stories of trauma in the process of describing the inspiration for their creative work, or how they came to be part of the writing group. I did my best to be prepared for the possibility of this, and indeed such traumatic narratives did occur during the interview process. Following the interview process, I attended weekly counselling sessions myself for a period of several months in order to better process some of the more troubling elements of the data.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness**

The term reliability with regard to research owes its origins to quantitative studies. It embodies positivist notions of result repeatability and the possibility of generalising principles to an entire population. This would fly in the face of the social constructionist standpoint of this study, which seeks to emphasise the unique experiences of individuals, rather than to create a one-size-fits-all analysis. The term validity is likewise rooted in positivist notions of accuracy and replicability. Although some qualitative researchers, such as Silverman (2015), defend the use of the terms reliability and validity, they seem inappropriate to this work. Loh (2013), argues similarly, with

specific focus on narrative research. He argues that in order to be taken seriously, narrative research must produce 'empirically sound' findings. Inherent in this language is the assumption of a positivist notion of truth, which in itself is at odds with the social constructionist model of reality. Golafshani (2003) underscores the unsuitability of these terms with regard to qualitative research, explaining that qualitative researchers must conceptualise them differently in order to account for an epistemology in which truth is subjective. Stenbacka (2001) goes further than this, suggesting that using this terminology at all is damaging to qualitative research, unnecessarily limiting the work by imposing a positivist paradigm. Polkinghorne (2007) outlines the reasons why it is particularly challenging for these terms to be applied to narrative research, which concerns itself with individuals' stories of their personal experience. These are:

- i) That the limitations of language prevent participants from ever giving a full articulation of their experience as they understand it.
- ii) That the full extent of our lived experiences is not accessible for our conscious selves to access. A degree of the experience will have occurred in the subconscious and we may not be aware enough of these elements to put them into words.
- iii) People tend to resist revealing honest self-reflection to others, especially those they do not know well. To an extent, this is related to the bond of trust that develops between the researcher and participant, and the length of time in the field. Nonetheless, it remains a limitation when one applies concepts such as 'empirical truth' to narrative data.
- iv) Any text created as the result of an interview is produced as an interaction between the interviewer and the participant, not by the

participant alone. The interviewer will inevitably have, to an extent, swayed the outcome of the discussion, even if this is through factors outside of the spoken words such as tone of voice or even the clothes worn to interview.

This project would, rather than attempting to present an immutable truth, seeks to show a snapshot of a moment in the lives of the participants. Eakin (2004) comments on the 'teller-effect' (p. 129) by which selfhood is 'a kind of 'music' we perform' (p. 130), making the process of narration much more about the moment of storytelling than an inherent truth about the biography of the teller. This concept is reiterated by Erdinast-Vulcan (2008), who warns that any attempt to narrate the self must be accompanied by the knowledge that, once authored, these texts remain in flux, continually changed by their context. With this in mind, I have sought to avoid presenting the constructed narratives as an objective truth about the participants and their experiences, but rather a co-constructed interpretation of their view of their experience at one moment in time.

Influentially, Guba (1981) dissected the rationalistic, positivist terminology and suggested alternative methods for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Primarily, he argues for extended exposure to the research site, 'thick' description of the research context and a process of member checking. The reason for prolonged exposure to the site is to minimise the impact of the researcher's presence upon the phenomenon researched. 'Thick' detailed data and description of the research site allows for the possibility of judgement about transferability to similar contexts.

Wells (2011) discusses some of the specific ways that a piece of narrative research can be validated as trustworthy. She stresses the need to

create exact transcripts of the interviews, and also to describe the methods used in detail. She also emphasises the role of the researcher's analysis in the assessment of validity and that all researcher interpretation must be alongside the language used by the participant. Wells does not support the concept of returning a transcript to the participants, commenting that it can be disheartening for the participants and result in feelings of objectification, or disappointment that they did not express themselves as clearly as they wanted. Moreover, Wells argues that the participant disagreeing with an interpretation does not necessarily mean that interpretation lacks legitimacy. In this research, however, I decided that it was important to include member checking for trustworthiness. This would not take the form of simply returning transcripts to the participants, but would be an involved second interview with them to discuss my interpretations, as described in section 3.4.5. This would allow participants to engage with the interpretive process, honouring the co-constructed nature of the narratives involved.

Fraser and MacDougall (2017) consider the way that intersectional feminist narrative research can resist traditionally positivist notions of validity:

Beyond neoliberalism or traditional notions of objective science, we might reflect on the meanings we can draw from our studies...Why are some stories taken up, and in what ways? What makes a testimony convincing and relevant? Which stories resonate with others, how and with what effects? Using our own criteria of honesty, transparency and accountability we can assess whether they are trustworthy (pp. 248-249).

In carrying out this work, I have sought to remain true to these values. I have endeavoured to be consistently honest, both with my participants about the research and in the descriptions of the research process here. In my



discussion of the data collection and analysis, I have been as transparent as possible about the strategies I employed and why I chose them. I have also made effort to remain accountable for my research practice, particularly to my participants. As part of this, at the end of the second interview I spoke to participants about their experience of taking part in the research project, so that they could offer their thoughts on the efficacy of the method used. The results of these conversations are discussed in detail Chapter 6.

Furthermore, in an attempt to remain as transparent and accountable as possible, I have consistently reflected on my own positioning regarding the research topic and the power dynamics between researcher and participant.

### **3.8 Reflexivity**

Wells (2011) highlights the significance of reflexivity with regard to narrative research. As she comments, while in the positivist tradition researcher influence is considered a source of bias to be controlled against, in qualitative research paradigms it is impossible to eliminate the effect of the researcher upon the research. Thus, the issue of reflexivity and transparency becomes central to the trustworthiness of narrative research. When considering how best to apply reflexivity to this work, I considered the work of Finlay (2002) in identifying five types of reflexivity, in order to determine which elements were most appropriate to this research. The types outlined are: introspection; intersubjective reflection; mutual collaboration; social critique and discursive deconstruction. Ultimately, I decided to draw upon all of these.

Introspection refers to self-examination by the researcher of their own positioning with regard to the research, and the way this has shaped the research process. There were a number of ways in which this affected this

work. Primarily, as discussed in 3.6.4, I reflected upon my own language resources and the way to approach the linguistically rich research site. This reflective process occurred over several initial visits to the site, observing the creative writing sessions and becoming familiar with the way language was used there. I was conscious that the limitations of my own linguistic repertoire were not, in itself, reason to conduct the interviews in English. I did, however, upon observing the site, conclude that English would be appropriate, for reasons outlined in 3.6.4. Introspection was also significant in examining the things that might influence my observation of the research site. Prior to beginning the PhD, I worked as a teacher of English Language and Literature in secondary schools for two years. I was aware that this could shape my view of the creative writing classes by leading me to focus on elements of the pedagogy, rather than the phenomenon of second language creative writing. In order to guard against this tendency, I made notes during each observation, ensuring I included detail unrelated to the teaching, such as information about the interpersonal relationships in the group. I would later review these notes alongside the research questions to confirm the emphasis was on the appropriate elements of the sessions. Moreover, following interviews I would make notes about my feelings during the interview process, in order to reflect upon the way this might have impacted upon the data generated. This was helpful both for reflexivity but also for researcher wellbeing, enabling me to guard against any feelings of distress I encountered in the process of listening to some of the refugee narratives.

Intersubjective reflection refers to the research relationship between the researcher and participant. To this end, following each of the first set of interviews, I would transcribe them myself and then read through the data

with this in mind. I would read the data as a co-construction, analyzing not only my participants' words but the way that I might have, even unconsciously, influenced them. When completing my first set of analyses, I considered this in my interpretations. Moreover, by having a second set of interviews dedicated to discussing this initial analysis, I was able to give the participants a chance to discuss things such as the influence the interview had upon their responses and their experience of the process.

The concept of reflexivity as mutual collaboration is closely connected to the idea of intersubjective reflection. This means that the participants should be involved in dialogue with regard to the data analysis. As outlined above, this was built into my methods in the form of an enhanced version member checking, during which participants were invited to discuss my analysis from the first set of interviews.

The social critique element of reflexivity involves close consideration of the power imbalance between researcher and researched. This was particularly significant in this work, due to the vulnerability of refugee participants, as examined in depth in section 3.6.3. I had to contemplate carefully my arrival at the research site as a white British researcher from a relative position of privilege studying refugees. In order to minimise the power imbalance, I drew upon the existing structures within the organisation to ensure participants were empowered throughout the process. This included the support network of creative writing mentors, who had pre-established relationships of trust with the participants.

### **3.9 Summary**

In this chapter, the methodological orientation for this study has been delineated. The reasons and justification for each decision taken, from the

use of qualitative research strategies to the types of data collection implemented, have been explored. The intersectional feminist framework and its appropriateness for this work has been discussed, along with its implications with regard to the notions of a social constructionist viewpoint. The chapter has also included contemplation of the ways the quality of the research has been ensured, including the need to build rapport and trust at the research site. The influence of the pilot study has also been considered, and the way that this added rigor to the interviewing process, and aided in the choice of methods of data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter has considered the ethical issues with regard to this study, including those surrounding: confidentiality; ownership of the narrative; the vulnerability of participants; multilingual issues; and researcher wellbeing. Following this, the chapter explored the concerns surrounding trustworthiness of qualitative research. In so doing, positivist notions of validity and reliability were discussed with reference to the literature, and the unsuitability of these terms for this qualitative study was addressed. The alternative concept of trustworthiness as a more appropriate way of judging the quality of the work was proposed. Finally, the issue of reflexivity has been discussed, and several different approaches to reflexivity have been examined with regard to their applicability to this study. I have described the ways that I have used these perspectives to inform my work and to surmount the potential limitations of this research.

The subsequent three chapters will present the findings of this work, revealing how the participants articulated their experiences of second language creative writing and their participation in the sessions.

## Chapter 4: Language

This is the first of three findings chapters. Each chapter focuses on one of the major themes emerging from the data. The first is language, and is followed by performance, then (dis)comfort. Within each of these, sub-themes within the major, 'title' theme are explored. Within language, for example, the sub-themes are: frustration and/or liberation (4.1); 'make it more English' (4.2); and poetical puzzles (4.3). Each section addresses the way that the sub-theme in question occurs in the data and how it relates to the theory and research questions.

This chapter highlights the data drawn from my analysis of the interviews with participants and the themes in their creative work, relating to: experiences of writing as a multilingual refugee; participants' relationship with their languages; and the peculiarities of writing creatively when one has diverse linguistic and cultural resources. In exploring this theme, this chapter will primarily address research question 1: 'What resources (e.g. linguistic, cultural) of refugee writers influence their experience of the creative writing process?', but will also shed light upon research questions 2, 3, and 5. Linguistic resources refers to the languages the participant speaks, including functional elements such as the vocabulary they have access to within those languages. These languages might hold different connotations and emotional resonance for individual writers. The cultural resources can include imagery or parables from their different cultures, as well as the participants' own experiences of involuntary migration and displacement. Finally, this section also considers the particularities of literary and poetic writing for the participants, and their views of its significance.

## **4.1 Frustration and/or liberation**

The first sub-theme relating to language is that of ‘frustration and/or liberation’. This theme encompasses the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory feelings of the participants about writing creatively in English as opposed to their other languages. Participants sometimes considered writing in English to be a source of discomfort and difficulty, whilst also expressing that it can enable them to express themselves in ways their other languages might not. For some participants, English was free from the political connotations of their other languages. Moreover, some participants highlighted the way that language choice in creative writing relates to their experience of becoming a refugee. This sub-theme will include discussion of: alienation from language (4.1.1); linguistic liberation (4.1.2); and embodiment of language (4.1.3).

### **4.1.1 alienation from language.**

Several of the participants commented on feeling emotionally separated from their work as a result of the use of English. In particular, there were repeated references to the difficulty of finding appropriate vocabulary in English to fully convey their thoughts and feelings. Roj described writing in English as being like ‘smell[ing an] artificial flower’, because it’s ‘not that thing in your mind.’ This theme of not being able to find the right word or phrase was also mentioned by Ruth, who commented:

Sometimes I can’t find the way they express, I can’t find something to bring the same weight or power of words, I can’t find that. I feel as if I can’t tell myself, the way they make me feel, but trying to say something. Sometimes I keep asking them, do they really understand what I try to say? (Ruth)

Sara expressed a similar sentiment, explaining that English words are often only an approximation of the feelings she is trying to express:

sometimes I get frustrated because what I exactly want to express, it doesn't come out...I want to force myself to go to that English word even if it's not the exact thing but never mind, just use an English word. (Sara)

Here, the use of English results in a sort of compromise of meaning for the participants, which can be a source of irritation for them. Sara also spoke about struggling specifically with the feeling that her vocabulary was too limited for her creative writing in English, again mentioning feelings of frustration:

I find it a bit difficult to use this way of writing in English and there sometimes, it's really frustrating and another issue is having limit amount of words if you look at this [piece of writing] I don't find any new vocabulary in my writing and I would like to use more words to express better and dedicated, dedicated of my own feeling the deep down of what I feel. (Sara)

The comments of Roj, Ruth, and Sara all indicate a sense of emotional alienation from the process of writing in English.

Another comment made by several of the participants was that it was generally better for their experience of creative writing to write in English initially, rather than to write in one of their other languages and translate it. Roj noted that aside from one of the poems he had chosen to discuss in the interview, 'The Black Fog', which he had originally written in Kurdish, he normally wrote his work in English initially. He discussed the way that this was a compromise:

Well, before I write all in English, but sometimes, in particular

Black Fog... I write first in Kurdish, and then I change it to English... But that one, but all other writing first I write in English, because I find it easier to write first in English. But in other languages, the problem is it's difficult to change to English. You know why? Because English is not a poetic language. (Roj)

He went on to explain that he felt English was limiting because he found it too literal as compared to his other languages, and that he felt that abstract metaphors which he might draw on in his own language when expressed in English were not understood. To some extent, this might be connected to the constraints of writing within a structured, mentored context.

Nevertheless, he felt that because of this difference he perceived, it was best for him to write directly in English rather than translating from work he had originally written in another language. Writing first in English, however, presented some difficulties for participants. Ruth, who chose for discussion a piece of writing that was an autobiographical account of a specific memory, spoke about the difficulty she had when writing about lived experiences in English rather than the language in which they occurred (in this instance, Persian) and in which the memories were made.

I think in Persian, I remember my memory, so oh that happened, but I still write in English. It makes it much harder if I write in Persian, and I want to translate it, I find that I can't get on with that. I find it easier, maybe it's just me...I don't want to translate word by word, I want to bring the feeling, the context of the sentence properly to give it to them...But I'm not going to write Farsi and translate it. It loses the power for me. (Ruth)

Thus, there is a dilemma in that writing in English leaves Ruth feeling disconnected from her work, but to write in Persian would result in a reduced



experience for her readers. She elaborated: 'I want to bring the feeling...properly to give it to them [the readers].' For this multilingual writer, there is a balancing act between her own emotional connection to the piece, and the extent to which readers can connect with it. This sense of frustration when negotiating between linguistic resources sheds light on the way that being multilingual affects participants' experience of the creative writing process, as referenced in research question 1. The feelings of compromise and discomfort stem from the participants' position of being multilingual writers.

Some writers create multilingual pieces in order to strike a balance between these sentiments. The Somali-British poet Warsan Shire, who writes multilingual pieces that incorporate English, Arabic, and Somali, observed in an interview with Indigo Williams that she uses her language resources for different purposes, noting: 'I think in Somali, I cuss in Somali, when I'm afraid I reach for Somali and this language is very rich, very filling. It's an unflinching language; the crudest most terrible things sound perfectly normal in Somali.' (Shire, 2013). By writing pieces that incorporate her different language resources, Shire is able to infuse her work with the weight of her heritage. In the piece 'Tea with our grandmothers', in the anthology *Teaching my mother to give birth* (2011), Shire weaves Somali and Arabic into the predominantly English piece:

The morning your habooba died  
I thought of my ayeeyo, the woman  
I was named after, Warsan Baraka,

Shire provides her own glossary to her collections, noting that *habooba* is an Arabic word meaning 'beloved woman', but used specifically in the Sudan to refer to grandmothers. *Ayeeyo*, she explains, is Somali for grandmother. By

using these terms, rather than English translations, Shire brings the weight of history and heritage to the unnamed speaker and apostrophe (the person addressed) in the piece. Readers are immediately aware that the conversation taking place is intercultural. Further to this, the fact that these are terms for grandmothers gives the use of terms in languages other than English the implication that perhaps the speaker and apostrophe's grandmothers did not speak English, or certainly, that English was not the language in which they communicated with their grandchildren. This could be an example of what Gramling (2016a) refers to as 'Refusal to participate in compulsory code-switching – for instance, the insistence on referring to the Islamic deity as Allah rather than God/Gott/Dieu' (p. 218). Shire's use of her linguistic resources here could be read as a deliberate resistance to the pressures to conform to idealised monolingualism. Reading Shire's work in the context of Gramling's comments helps to illuminate some of the underlying pressures the participants allude to in the interview data. Gramling's example of the difference between the choices of word for God demonstrates the level to which language is politicised and laden with meanings and significance that cannot necessarily be neatly translated from one to another. Shire's use of the Somali term for grandmother is an example of a deliberate choice to diverge from English vocabulary that is striking because it is unexpected, a departure from the overwhelmingly monolingual norm. Of course, Warsan Shire's writing context is distinct from the participants in this study in that she is not producing work within the scope of this specific creative writing group, which comes with its own regulations and expectations. She has more freedom to bend or break the unwritten 'rules' of creative writing, because she is not part of such a structured environment. The participants, by contrast, worked almost

exclusively in English. This example does, however, illustrate the difference participants speak of in terms of the relative emotional resonance of words in different languages. Reading Shire's work contextualises and makes explicit what Ruth means when she says that she 'want[s] to bring the feeling' to her readers, by demonstrating exactly how different the emotional experience of a word can be in different languages. Moreover, Shire's work gives insight into the way that language choice within creative work represents far more than a communication of meaning. The use of Somali words here emphasises her identity as a Somali British woman and connection to the memory being described. In reading Shire's multilingual work, it becomes easier to understand the frustrations of the participants in producing work solely in English, shedding further light on the experience of the creative writing progress for participants. As Ruth indicated, the challenges of writing autobiographical content in English are significant: 'I think in Persian, I remember my memory...but I still write in English. ...I don't want to translate word by word, I want to bring the feeling'. Shire's use of three different languages to refer to grandmothers illuminates the nuance that cannot be translated from one language to another, highlighting the way that having multiple languages impacts upon the writing experience (RQ1).

#### **4.1.2 linguistic liberation.**

Using English to write creatively, however, was not always considered detrimental to the process by participants. Sara provided detail about her own language learning history, and the associations each language held for her. She noted that, for her, there was a divide between Kurdish and Farsi, where Kurdish represented home life and informal situations, whilst Farsi was the language of school and more reserved scenarios. However, this

divide did not exist for her in English: to her, English could bridge different settings in a way her other languages could not.

Actually, English is my third language, my mother tongue is Kurdish, and Farsi is the official language that I've learnt in my education and English...I, I am a bit stuck between three languages because I didn't learn Kurdish academically. I learnt Farsi academically, it wasn't my mother tongue. I'm not comfortable to express my formal feeling in Kurdish because it was my home dialect, or what is the word...it's not enough to talk about something important or something right for me. And Farsi is not my emotional language and more or less English is a language that I have to use it formally and informally here and I love it. It's very rhythmic, it has got lots of adjectives, verbs, but I have very limited dictionary in my head and it stops me to express myself as I would love. The way I can play with words in Farsi sometimes it amazes me, oh how nice is this piece, but I wish I could play with the word, the language the same way, yeah but it takes some... maybe it never happens, I don't know. (Sara)

Here the participant was simultaneously acknowledging the benefits to her of using English, in that it was free of the cultural connotations of her mother tongues, whilst also referencing the difficulties of working creatively in a language in which she feels less confident. She also discussed her political reasons for writing in English, rather than Kurdish or Farsi, commenting:

Yeah, I'm sticking to one race, my race, if I stick to my mother tongue as a Kurdish speaker then I should hate any Farsi speakers within the country and I don't see myself belong to any race, nationality, colour, religion. I just wash myself off from all

these boundaries... these blocks, and I see myself free, free to get pain with your pain, it doesn't matter where you're from, what's your agenda, what's your religion. (Sara)

Thus, to this writer, the use of English represents a way of claiming neutrality. The connotations of 'washing off' of boundaries bring to mind Phipps and Gonzalez's (2004) term *linguaging*, which they define as a 'life skill. It is inextricably interwoven with social experience – living in society' (pp. 2-3). In using English for her creative work, this participant is engaging in linguaging because she is deliberately selecting the format in which she feels she can best communicate her message of empathy for all people based upon her own social experience. For Sara, her feelings about using English are directly influenced by her experiences of her other languages, in particular, her association of them with political oppression. For her, using English is a way of linguaging that enables her to better connect with the ideal of non-discrimination she values. This is relevant to research question 2 because it clarifies how this participant views her creative work. For her it is a political statement, and an expression of her values. The use of English is a part of this expression. Sara's comments also echo the sentiments of the writer Adnan Mahmutovic, a Bosnian refugee who now resides in Sweden and publishes novels and short stories in English about the refugee experience. He frequently discusses his choice of English for creative writing, noting in 2015 that:

For years I felt I didn't have a language I could call my own, so I thought of trying the famous lingua franca. It worked so well because I could write honestly and make fun of my history without feeling this bondage to the nation implied in Swedish and Bosnian. I understand that for postcolonial peoples English is not

a neutral language, but for me it is. For me it's liberating exactly because I have no historical connection to it. (p.3)

Here, Mahmutovic highlights the significance of allowing refugee authors to define for themselves their relationship with their languages. His comments are similar to the sentiments voiced by Sara in terms of considering English a politically neutral language. He acknowledges the connection between his life experience and feelings about his different linguistic resources, and the way it might be experienced differently by others. The connection between the experiences that lead to becoming a refugee and feelings about different languages was explored by Lutendo, who went beyond wider political connotations to discuss the way that language choice related to her personal experience of being subjected to torture. When asked how she felt about working creatively in English, she explained:

my experience [of being tortured], most of it, it happened in my own language, even when they were abusing victims, abusing, the way they were abusing you in your language, so it draws everything to stage one... But when I'm saying it in English, it's like I'm borrowing someone's story... You need to detach, you tend to detach it, because already you have been detach[ed], you have detached yourself from your language. (Lutendo)

Thus, for this woman, using English was a way of protecting herself from being drawn 'to stage one', of being overcome by memories of her traumatic experiences that led to her becoming a refugee. She directly connects the change in language to emotional detachment from the experiences she draws upon in her creative writing. These comments, along with those of Sara and Mahmutovic, have echoes of Pavlenko's (2005) description of the dichotomy that can be experienced by multilingual writers of creative works.

She acknowledges that whilst for some bilingual writers 'the language of childhood has remained for them the language of the heart' (p. 179), others appreciate the 'clean words' (p.183) that can be found in a second (or indeed, third, fourth and beyond) language. Pavlenko emphasises the distinctive position of fiction, referring to it as the "inherently emotional written genre" (p. 179). For writers who have experienced becoming a refugee, their relationships with their different languages are further complicated. For these writers, the language of childhood might also be the language of torture, or war. The emotional disconnect from their work created by using English might not just be an irritation, but a protective buffer, allowing them to explore painful topics in a way that might be too uncomfortable in a first language. This concept is explored in Rolland, Dewaele, and Costa's (2017) work in which they discuss the 'distancing and protective functions' of code switching (p. 81).

#### **4.1.3 embodiment of language.**

Shire (2011) summarises the complexities of moving between languages for refugees in her prose poem 'Conversations about home (at the deportation centre)'. In it, the refugee narrator describes the sensation of being overcome by her different languages:

I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there's no space for another song, another tongue or another language. I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs. I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with language I can't afford to forget.

Shire's words encapsulate the concept of 'embodied' language as described by Phipps (2007). Phipps argues that rather than being an abstract, solely

cerebral pursuit, the learning of a language involves the whole body. She compares it to throwing a lasso, or playing a musical instrument, in that to do it 'well, fluently, successfully, is to have a feel for the flow of embodied action' (p. 125). The imagery employed by Shire of the mouth, of eating and being bloated, unites language with the body in which it resides. The eating of the passport becomes a symbol of the way that for refugees, a language could be inherently connected to a national identity with which they may be uncomfortable, such as Sara's comments that 'if I stick to my mother tongue as a Kurdish speaker then I should hate any Farsi speakers'. The languages have political connotations with which she does not identify. This is resonant with Bakhtin's (1981) comments that: 'All words have a 'taste'...Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions' (p. 293). In acknowledging that language is embodied, that words do indeed have a 'taste', it follows that these tastes may be bitter, sweet, or both. Similarly, for the participants, the relationship between themselves and their languages was a process, no more separable from themselves and their embodied experiences than the throwing of a lasso. It was a dynamic, fluid relationship, at times frustrating, and at others freeing. Notably, in contrast to Pavlenko's description, participants might experience both of these sensations at once. Moreover, the sense of disconnect or alienation from a 'stepmother tongue' described by Pavlenko, (2005, p. 183), was notably not necessarily considered a hindrance, but in some ways an advantage. The issue of emotional disconnection in English becomes a double-edged sword for refugee writers, simultaneously distancing them from their writing and from the painful experience of migration. When one considers that language is embodied, it is necessary to remember that it can have embodied effects



on its speakers and listeners. For refugees for whom these effects could be the result of remembering traumatic experiences, such as Lutendo, the distance created by using English can be helpful.

## **4.2 'Make it more English'**

A second theme on language was the idea that one ought to, as Ruth noted, 'make it [the writing] more English'. There were three key elements to this, which were: a sense in which the writing should be understandable to an English reader; a feeling on the part of the participants that they should strive for grammatical accuracy and technical correctness; and a sense of making the writing more culturally English.

### **4.2.1 navigating 'correct' English.**

In order to understand the drafting process for creative work within the writing group, it is important to bear in mind the mentoring system in place within the writing group. Every writer has been assigned a mentor, someone who has been working with the group for years. Each mentor will have several mentees who they will help to develop their creative work. This involves reading the work and having meetings to discuss it with the writers, giving points for improvement. For further exploration of the role of mentorship, please see chapter 5 on the theme of 'Relationships'. The participants felt that this process supported them in making their work 'more English', with Ruth commenting: 'When I discuss it with [mentor] for example... she helps me to make it more English, more sense in English anyways.' Here, the participant is acknowledging that there is perhaps a distinction to be made between making the writing more technically accurate or grammatically correct in English, and making it more culturally English.

These concepts cannot, and perhaps should not, be easily separated from one another. There is inevitable overlap and blurring of boundaries between the two. Nevertheless, that both elements cause tension for the participants emerges from comments such as that of Roj that if he were to write: ‘say, “mountain fly”...the English when they’re the reader say “why do you write this? This one is wrong.” But in literature, nothing’s wrong.’ He feels that the conventions of modern English poetry as he sees them do not allow for the scope of creative expression that he desires, and thus, English becomes a language of constraint, of having to conform to its rules. These kinds of limitations could be related to the idea of ‘passing’ in the written work as a ‘native’ speaker of the language, as discussed by Gramling (2016a). Roj felt that if he were to write something like ‘mountain fly’, it would not be considered appropriate by English readers. He feels that he has to express himself differently to cater to English readers. This relates to the concept of ‘passing’ in that it highlights the way that one style of communication, that which most resembles a ‘native speaker’ is privileged over others. To be a ‘native’ speaker is treated as the norm in society, and other states of being are treated as aberrations or flaws which must be concealed.

Some of the influence on participants’ writing style resulted from the nature of the system of mentoring at work in the group. Sara found the mentoring process so central to her writing that she initially hesitated to comment on the work she had chosen for our first interview, because she had not yet had the opportunity to discuss it with her mentor:

Actually I can’t assess this piece because I haven’t discussed it with my mentor... but your feedback was good, thank you, and I think it needs lots of... not lots of... but, anyway, it needs work.

(Sara)

Here, I was keen to re-establish that I wasn't judging the work on its technical elements, and commented that I had enjoyed reading it. In the moment, I wanted to make clear that I was interested in her view of the work, rather than wishing to impose my own. By commenting upon my enjoyment of the piece, I hoped to reframe the conversation from being one about it 'needing work' to addressing the creative work before us. Still, the participant was making it clear that, to her, the editing process as supported by the mentor was essential in the development of her pieces of creative writing.

Roj drew upon feedback he had received from readers of his work, possibly the mentors, when he attempted to write first in another language, then translate into English. The responses he received led to his decision to write most of his pieces in English first, rather than to attempt direct translation:

Because the problem is...I still dream in my language. That is, I don't think in English always. For example, first I write in English in my very, in my poetic way... people say: 'we don't understand that', that is like something people don't understand what you say. For that reason, I make, I make very simple. Simple, like, words. But in general, it's, yeah, when you write in English straight away it's simpler and easy to understand. (Roj)

Here, Roj distinguishes between the 'poetic', the language of dreams, and the 'simple', 'easy to understand' way that he writes in English. This is directly related to the feedback he received from readers, who suggested that they could not understand his work before he did this. This means that, in the name of comprehensibility in English, he was forced, in his eyes, to sacrifice a degree of the 'poetry' in his work.

The theme of the importance for participants of technical accuracy in

their work in English came through in other interviews, with Ruby making comments to a similar effect:

Some of the times, you find you do wrong grammar, because...  
the story... it happens in your language, and then you want to...  
put this in English. You end up writing something which if you  
look at it, you don't even want to know that you have wrote it.  
(Ruby)

This participant again refers to the idea discussed in the theme of 'frustration and/or liberation', that it is difficult to translate work which refers to memories formed in another language. Here, however, she is emphasising the way that this particularly affects her ability to write what she considers to be grammatically correct English. She indicated that this is embarrassing to her, when she says that looking back on work with inaccuracies she would not want to know it was her writing.

There was, in the data, a feeling on the part of the participants that they must strive to make their writing make sense in English, and the sense that they feel pressure to make it as accurate as possible. The participants took great pride in their work and wanted to use the system of mentoring to develop it as much as possible, but also to 'pass' as 'native' speakers (Gramling 2016a). We exist in a world in which prowess in the technical elements of the English language are a means by which people judge the content of writing, not only in factual or academic pieces but also in creative works. It is the outward conditions of 'native speakerism', as defined by Holliday (2005), that create the pressure upon writers to make their work pass as English, as if it were written by a 'native' speaker. The participants felt this pressure keenly, mentioning it numerous times. Although originally used in an English language teaching context, Holliday's term is a

particularly helpful lens through which to analyse the experiences of the participants for this study. It captures the way in which privileging the idealised 'native speaker' contributes to inequality and prejudices. Viewing these intimate parts of the participants' individual lives through their experiences of using English in their writing within the broader context of social inequality is essential to the feminist perspective from which I approach the data. That 'the personal is political' is a central concept from feminist theory which can be traced back to Carol Hanisch's 1969 paper of the same title. The work of both Holliday (2006) and Gramling (2016a) are helpful in that they acknowledge the politically charged nature of even seemingly innocuous interactions surrounding language and the idealising of a 'native speaker'.

Sara spoke about feeling self-conscious about her abilities in English during the creative writing workshops and how this intersected with her identity and language learning history, noting that: 'I didn't go to any private school to learn English and I blame the government, the regime for stopping us not to learn...how to say... white language and then it impacted on my, my confidence. (Sara)

That she called it 'white language', that is to say, the language associated with white people, emphasises the intersection between language and racial identity. Moreover, for her, political and socioeconomic factors in her childhood contributed to her not learning English until later in life. This directly impacted upon her feelings about using the language during the creative writing workshops, in which there is a great deal of group discussion and reading aloud. She directly connects this with government policy during her childhood. Borjian notes that, although English is taught in state schools in Iran, many students are attracted to private institutions for language

learning, finding the state provisions inadequate (2013, p. 104). In her translation of a 1980 speech by Ayatollah Kohmeini denouncing academics, Borjian translates the term 'Gharbzadegi' (غربزدگی) as 'Westoxicated' (2013, p. 67), although the term has also been translated as, among other things, 'Occidentosis' (Al-I-Ahmad, 1984). This term, whilst coined by Ahmad Fardid, came to fame in the book by Jalal Al-I-Ahmad. Rendering this term into English is, as Campbell notes in the notes of his 1984 translation of the text, 'problematic', but the emphasis is upon acknowledging that 'the force of the metaphor is clinical and focuses on the coercive and invasive qualities of Western influence' (p. 138). The influential nature of these attitudes goes some way to explain why Sara feels that she did not have the opportunity to learn English in state school in Iran. These cultural connotations that are brought to the writing process by Sara contribute to answering research question 1. She has a fundamentally different understanding of the position of English as a language to me, a white British person, as a direct result of her cultural background. This influences both how she experiences the process of writing (RQ1) and how she views the work she produces (RQ2).

#### **4.2.2 mouths and tongues: further embodied language.**

Shire (2011) explores some of the implications of the pressure to 'pass' as 'native' speakers in her poem 'Maymuun's mouth', which is written in her idiosyncratic, stream of consciousness style:

Maymuun lost her accent with the help of her local Community College... Her new voice is sophisticated. She has taken to dancing in front of strangers... Last week her answering machine picked up. I imagined her hoisted by the waist, wearing stockings, learning to kiss with her new tongue.

The speaker of the poem notes the associations between Maymuun's passing in English and her distance from her own culture, as she notes that Maymuun no longer answers her phone when she calls. There is the implication that to pass in English is somehow connected to promiscuity and immodesty, by following the comments about accent immediately with the imagery of 'dancing in front of strangers', then later 'stockings', and kissing in the 'new tongue'. Shire also captures the way that passing linguistically is a privileged position, by noting that Maymuun achieved this using education, 'with the help of her local Community College' and noting that the loss of her accent means her 'new voice is sophisticated'. The use of 'voice', 'tongue' and, in the title, 'mouth' emphasises the way that, as noted in the previous theme, language is embodied. By drawing parallels in this poem between passing as a 'native' speaker in English and sexual desirability, Shire underscores the privilege that comes with such things as having what is perceived as a lack of accent. This concept is also explored by Chow (2014) in his account of Derrida's relationship with his own multilingual repertoire and racial identity, noting that:

although Derrida's French is undoubtedly fluent, he considers it imperfect because he has not quite lost his "French Algerian" accent...He can pass for "authentic" as long as he can hide his speech, as long as his "speech" is simply seen and not heard. (p. 22)

Both Chow's non-fiction description of Derrida and Shire's fictional description of Maymuun underscore the impact of the pressure to 'pass' linguistically. Fricker (2007) notes the way that societal pressures relating to accent can result in instances of epistemic injustice, commenting that accent carries with it both a social and epistemic charge that can influence, for better or worse, how a

hearer perceives a speaker (p. 17). It is also the case that indications in a written text of an author being a 'non-native' speaker might also carry epistemic charges for some readers, who might carry prejudices against such people. Moreover, it is noteworthy that even writers, such as Derrida, who can 'pass' perfectly in their writing, cannot necessarily carry this privilege into other areas such as speaking. It is in the physical act of speaking that he feels he cannot disguise his status as a 'non-native' speaker, which he considers to be an 'imperfection'. This recalls Sara's nervousness about reading aloud during writing workshops, due to feeling self-conscious about her standard of spoken English. In the context of the work of both Chow and Fricker this can be understood not as shyness but as a reflection of how epistemic injustices surrounding language can manifest. That the concept of a 'native-speaker' is idealised in British culture results in an overall atmosphere in which speakers who do not conform to this are made to feel uncomfortable.

Adnan Mahmutovic explores the limitations of 'passing' linguistically in his fiction. Although he has acknowledged that for him, use of English is a liberating and helpful factor, Mahmutovic acknowledges the privileged position of English in the world through the eyes of his protagonist, Fatima, in his novel *Thinner than a hair* (2012). Although she has learned English, there is the extent to which, in spite of her language resources, she is restricted. She comments:

Since I had German in school, I begged Father to let me learn English. He agreed to do it, even though it cost him a lot. I think it's remarkable that a small-town girl learned such disparate languages, just so she might stand a chance if she ever needed to flee the country. We didn't know which language was going to dominate the world. That's called learning from history— that



tomorrow might bring anything. In the beginning, English was cool to learn, but at times it was a pain in the tongue and I hated it. The tutor, who was this prim little figure with Woody Allen glasses and greasy hair said, 'I guess the English would hate our mother tongue too.' I said, 'But to hate it, they'd have to be forced to learn it. There's no chance that'll ever happen. (2012, in the chapter Cold (Autumn 1989))

Here, Mahmutovic makes it clear that learning English is not, for many people, a neutral action. The ability of the protagonist to communicate and 'pass' in English may impact her ability to survive in the precarious circumstances that face refugees. Mahmutovic underscores the imbalance in global language politics by reminding the reader that whilst circumstances force many peoples to learn English, the reverse rarely occurs. The description of English as a 'pain in the tongue' reinforces the embodiment of language, as well as the physical feeling of oppression on the part of Fatima, despite having wished to learn the language. The limitations of the advantages of having learned English are also made clear when, later in the novel, the protagonist is forced to register her nationality. Becoming frustrated with the process, she draws upon her education in literature and snaps '[p]ut English and change my name to Jane Austen.' (2012, in the chapter Humming peasant (Autumn 1991)). Of course, Fatima cannot register under this name and nationality. Her ability to pass linguistically has not afforded her all the privilege of someone who is English, and does not completely protect her from her dangerous reality. Once more, language cannot wholly be separated from or substituted for identity. The privilege afforded by passing linguistically can only take Fatima so far.

In summary, this sub-theme has underscored the way that participants

expressed their feelings about the pressures of making their work 'more English'. There are several factors that influence this. One is the system of mentorship in place, which supports the writers in drafting their work. An element of this drafting can be the correction of grammatical errors. Although participants clearly appreciated the process and found it useful (see Chapter 5 for more detail), this also led to some feelings of self-consciousness or embarrassment when such inaccuracies were encountered. This informed my understanding of RQ3, 'How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of the refugee writers?' My findings highlight that the mentorship system is a supportive one, but in intersectional feminist analysis it also exists within the wider framework of social structures which contribute to participants' feelings of inadequacy surrounding 'non-native' speech and writing. This was also revealed in the pressure felt by participants to 'pass' as 'native' speakers of English in their work. This 'native speakerism' (Holliday, 2006) can be seen as an element of oppression, as discussed in the literature review, whereby society in the UK privileges those who possess English as a first language over those who do not. Understanding this structure informs research question 5, which addresses the way that working with multilingual refugee participants can be approached from an intersectional feminist perspective. Working from an intersectional feminist standpoint (see Chapter 3: Methodology), it was important to me as a researcher to be reflexive about my attitudes to language and any internalised prejudices I might carry about 'correct' or 'incorrect' English. There is, moreover, tension surrounding the concept of 'correct' language when applied to poetry. Indeed, Leech noted that it is 'commonplace to regard a poem as a kind of inspired nonsense' (2013, p. 48). Creative writing can rely upon paradox, metaphor and

oxymoron, and does not necessarily comply with traditional restraints of grammar, such as e.e. cummings famously choosing to eschew the rules of capitalisation (Levin, 1965). This issue was particularly highlighted by Roj, who wished to push the boundaries of the understandable in the name of the poetic. It is this tension which leads to the final sub-theme of this chapter, poetical puzzles.

### **4.3 Poetical puzzles**

The final theme relating to the issue of language is that of poetical puzzles. This is to say, issues that arise specifically from the activity of literary writing. Whilst the other two themes could, to an extent, apply in instances where the speaker or writer was working in other genres, this section focuses on elements of complication that are connected to the fact that the participants are all working creatively. There is a cumulative effect here of the complexities of doing any type of creative writing, and of writers negotiating multilingual resources, memories and experiences. I chose the term 'puzzles' following discussions within the Researching Multilingually at Borders project about the terminology which best addresses areas of curiosity emerging from our work. Puzzle was a term suggested as it is free from the negative connotations of 'problem' or 'tension'. Although, the term is not flawless due to its implication of a 'solution', it felt appropriate for this sub-theme for two reasons. Primarily, it is for each writer to determine their own 'solution', or ways of working poetically. Furthermore, puzzle has associations with an intellectual pursuit that yields enjoyment, which connects well with the process of creative writing as experienced by the participants.

The poetical puzzles arose from several different areas. In some

instances, there were specific linguistic elements that existed in participants' other languages that did not exist in English. Further to this, poetic and literary imagery used by the participants in their work might have connotations that were grounded in their own cultural background, that would not necessarily be understood by an English reader. Finally, understandings about what could be considered the typical characteristics of poetry were rooted in culture, and could lead to tensions in writing for an Anglophone audience.

Some intricacies relating to creative writing for multilingual authors emerged from the differences between poetic writing in English and their other languages. Ruth discussed the particular way in which poetry is written in Farsi, explaining that there exist two distinct sets of vocabulary. One set of words is employed for literal, non-poetic work, whilst the other is used for literary writing. She illustrated this point:

For example we have moonlight, but moonlight, we have another name for moonlight, which, in my language is مهتاب [Mahtab] which is girl's name also, and مهتاب is used in poems, we don't use moonlight, we use moonlight in maybe science or maybe logical, literal, very different writing....English doesn't have it, oh, they don't have anything! ...I find in romance, they're lacking, I think they're not that much of a romantic! (Ruth)

Here, the linguistic differences between the two languages have left, for her, a lacuna which English does not have the capacity to fill. No such mechanism exists in English, and there are no words which are reserved exclusively for poetical writing in this way in English. This created a problem for the participant, who felt that she couldn't properly make her work poetic in English as a result of the lack of a specific vocabulary to do so.

Other participants made comments about the specific shortfalls of English as a language when it comes to writing creatively. Lutendo spoke about how, even though her first language influenced her writing in English, she found it difficult not being able to employ some of her cultural resources, including traditional proverbs and riddles from Uganda. She explained that such imagery, which was conventional in her home country, ceased to make sense when she translated it into English, and that the meaning was lost: 'Yeah, it [my first language] influences [my writing], but, but it, I see, we got quite a lot of, do you know, riddles? ...but it feels different... riddles in English, they are meaningless' (Lutendo). Here, again, an element of specifically creative and non-literal language has been impossible to fully translate, in the eyes of the participant, into English, because of lack of equivalent linguistic or cultural resources existent in the language. The same participant spoke about elements of her writing that were specific to her own culture. Her short story featured anthropomorphised owls travelling on Noah's Ark. She noted that she drew upon this well-known narrative in this piece because it struck her as a good comparison for the refugee experience:

Yeah, if you see like you Noah's Ark was like built...for people or for animals to save life because the world was going to be destroyed by water. So...[there is a] refugee element that animals, people if they want, took refuge in the Ark. (Lutendo)

Although the tale of Noah is well known in many cultures, and indeed the flood myth more generally is one of the most widespread in the world (Leeming, 2005; Witzel, 2012), the choice of the owl as the focal point for her story was more personally significant for the writer:

Why I chose that, is like an owl in my country, it's a bird with

the... associated with the bad... and they associate it with people like witches and warlocks. So... it is a bad omen anyway.

(Lutendo)

The writer draws attention to this in her story, which begins 'Where I come from in Africa, most people don't like me.' Indeed, the perception of the owl as a bad omen in Africa has been noted by Mbiti (2015, p. 25), and Orlove and Kabugo (2005) expand upon the manifestation of these beliefs in a specifically Ugandan context. In their paper, they note that the hooting of an owl is seen as a marker of coming death. The symbolism of the owl is vividly illustrated by Ugandan artist Peter Mulindwa's painting *The participant*, however, portrayed the animal in a sympathetic light in her work, in which it comes to represent refugees who may be misunderstood and experience prejudice in their resettlement country. In the story, Noah's wife systematically discriminates against the owls. The participant (to eliminate ambiguity) repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the parallels between the experience of the owl in the story and the refugee experience, particularly at the end of the tale:

Finally the rain stopped and we landed. We had to wait ages for our children and grandchildren to be given permission to leave the Ark, because they weren't registered as legal. My husband – as he was by then – and I had to go and find places that needed mouse catchers, and would guarantee them a home.

And when we got out it was all very different. We were in a place we didn't know. Nobody spoke our language. We ourselves didn't always understand each other perfectly, but this was much worse: pigeons, blackbirds, greedy noisy seagulls. It took us a while to begin to understand what they were saying.

But luckily, once we could make them out, we found ourselves in a place where owls are not trapped and persecuted, but respected for our wisdom and hunting skills. Although it took a long time, we began to feel safe and trusted. We began to rebuild our lives.

And – we learned to fly. (Lutendo)

Here, the participant makes the meaning of the parable explicit, drawing upon the specific issues encountered by refugees in order to underscore her point. The legal and language barriers, along with the prejudices faced, are hallmarks of the process of seeking asylum. The happy ending of the story, she explained to me, was inspired by her own lived experience:

after all the horrible experience, the time when I was given my indefinite leave to remain in the UK, that opens me the doors of the colleges, to be able to demonstrate what I am made of, just like recently I finished my Health and Social Worker degree... I saw the use of working with people, trying to help my, my fellow survivors... So now, I'm learning to fly. (Lutendo)

Although the reader who does not know the meaning of the owl omen can grasp this element of the metaphor in the story, the full cultural implications of the choice of animal might be lost on someone who had not researched the topic. Moreover, without knowing the participant's own perception of and inspiration for the work, the resonance of the final line 'we learned to fly' might be less potent. The full meaning of the story's conclusion can only be understood in light of the participant's experiences and culture.

Roj also spoke about the significance of his own refugee experience and cultural resources in the pieces of writing he had submitted. He explained that his Kurdish identity was significant in his writing, and the

theme of persecution in both the poem and the short story he had chosen to discuss:

Kurdish people is not Islam, is not Muslim, is... they are Yazidi, Kurdish local. The Turkish empire, Ottoman empire... did same in history, like genocide. Genocide [of the] Kurdish in the name of the holy religion. The poem talk about, this one as well, The Wall Writer [the short story] is also talk about that. (Roj)

In particular, I asked the participant about his choice in his short story to have the protagonist, a young girl, reincarnated as a caterpillar. His explanation drew upon his own views and experiences of Yazidi religion, as well as the refugee experience.

Most religions, they don't believe in those gods when the Christian and Muslim and Jewish believe. They believe when you died, your soul change to another thing, an animal or other things. That, the Yazidi believe that as well, the Kurdish. That was one reason. The other, another reason, I don't like to be, a child dead, inside my paper. I like to be alive. Alive, and, a happy life. For that reason, the girl, coming back in a magical way to England. Because, believe here is safe for her. (Roj)

His story deliberately draws upon the concept of reincarnation from his own Yazidi culture as a type of resistance from the dominance of Abrahamic religions. Much like Lutendo's use of the owl imagery, the full connotations of this choice could not be grasped by a reader without knowing the refugee background of the author. The persecution of the Yazidi people in Iraq is extensive and ongoing (Lalani, 2010). Religion is a significant factor in this systematic oppression and genocide (Jalabi, 2014). In particular, as is noted by Maisel (2016, p. 58), many Yazidi people believe in reincarnation after



death. This belief is, as Roj points out, at odds with the Islam, Judaism and Christianity. During our conversation, the participant used a phrase in Arabic:

We would call, I don't know in English, but we would call *min al-duruurii an takuun futuuhaat* [من الضروري ان تكون فتوحات] when you're forced, you have to become Muslim.

This phrase initially presented me with some difficulty as a researcher, because I do not speak Arabic. For help with translation and transliteration, I turned to a student of Arabic I know at my university, whose transcription I then had checked by a member of the Researching Multilingually at Borders project who speaks Arabic. It was in this second discussion that the full implications of the use of this phrase by the participant were revealed to me. The word '*futuh*', which the participant used to mean 'forced', would not always have a negative or violent implication, and could just as easily be translated into English either as 'opening', 'act of divine grace' or 'conquest' (Donner, 2010, p. 258). This participant, from his own explanation, is using the latter meaning of the word. In itself, this is a linguistic reclamation of a term that, whilst within Islam it might have positive connotations, has painful associations for this participant.

By weaving reincarnation into his writing, the participant is making a stand in the face of religious persecution. Further to this, as the child in the story returns to England when she is reincarnated, this element of the plot subverts the bureaucratic structures that determine whether individuals seeking asylum are given leave to remain or not. Once more, much like in the case of Lutendo's use of owl imagery, without some understanding of the author's perspective and cultural background it would be impossible to fully comprehend the content of the text.

Further to the extent to which symbols and connotations might transfer from one culture and language to another, expectations of poetic work and creative writing are not identical across cultures, or indeed between individuals within a culture. This can create complications in determining what is or is not 'correct' in English creative writing, where the rules of engagement are far less rigid than in, for example, factual work. Poetry, in particular, can bend and break the rules of grammar as the writer sees fit, as discussed in the sub-theme 'make it more English'. The freedom to do so, however, is not necessarily so easily employed by multilingual writers, particularly those who are refugees and may not feel wholly comfortable with the creative traditions of their resettlement country and language, for the reasons discussed in the previous sub-themes. Roj complained about the inflexibility of the English language and English readers for poetic writing:

For example, if I write a poem in Middle East, or even Latin America, even France as well... people, they're okay. But English people, for example, say 'mountain fly'... the English when they're the reader say 'why do you write this? This one is wrong.' But in literature, nothing's wrong. That is the main problem in English. But in other languages, okay, because, because I, don't like to be writing poems like spoken language. Because I see a lot of modern poems in English. It's not... it's like talking, just like two people talking. Little bit something, but... If you look at the classic English poems, it's very powerful, because they talk about, it's not just spoken language. Not everyone can write, you have to be a poet. But nowadays, it's okay everyone can write the poem because poems changed like spoken language, like two people speaking. (Roj)

The participant here explored the differences, in his view, between poetic traditions in other languages and cultures and English, finding English to be too literal and lacking in imagery to allow him to use the imagery and poetic devices he wished. To an extent, this is a matter of personal choice, style and opinion. The participant noted that he found writing poetry in English to be particularly troublesome: 'Short story is better, but poem, is very difficult. Because I like to use the meter for example, I don't like just to write everybody understands. I like to be difficult' (Roj). It is important here to remember that the participant's feelings about English people's expectations of poetry will reflect his interactions in the creative writing group and with his mentor. Certainly, not all poets are agreed on a particular way to approach poetry, and what constitutes a poem varies even within the English tradition. The writing of Warsan Shire pushes the boundaries of traditional poetry, with work such as 'Conversations about home (at the deportation centre)' almost seeming to be stream of consciousness sections of prose, but with bursts of poetic imagery such as the line: 'No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark' (Shire, 2011), referring to the reasons that refugees flee their home countries.

For all its problematic puzzlement, however, participants did express that they felt poetic and literary writing has an important role to play in their lives and in modern political discourse. Ruth spoke about the difference between the way poetry was received in her home country of Iran as compared to the UK She noted that the way poetic writing can be open to interpretation could lead to difficulties in the political climate in Iran:

Yeah, we had the poetry readings like that in my country in the university but it could happen that some of them because 'they are radicalist you know they could they did want'? Your poem?

'Oh, he's against the government' or 'oh he means that' 'she means that'. Anytime they could arrest you, you know? But we don't have here. It is amazing. Every time I really think how amazing it is. (Ruth)

She noted that she feels that poetry is necessary and makes a valuable contribution to public discourse on current affairs saying:

Yeah it has sort of an influence, poetry, you know? It has its own influence. The end of the day all of us are human...Every type of writing has its own power. In the right time. Sometimes you need the voice of a journalist writer. Sometimes we need a poem. Sometimes we need more emotion. (Ruth)

Indeed, the emotional aspect of the creative writing process came to the forefront of discussion with Sara, when we spoke about her poem about welcoming refugees. I asked her about a line from the poem: 'I will talk to them in a language that translates life and love well', and the thinking behind this. She responded:

Actually, that's one line that brought tears to my eyes, I don't know what language it is, I think it summarises what we need, life and love...I didn't think about the grammar and phonetics, just it can be the language of the way we look at each other, the language of how we talk to each other, it doesn't matter what kind of alphabet it can be. Of course, it's important to understand each other, but mainly a language which is based on humanity could be our language. (Sara)

Here, Sara raises similar themes as in her comments about using English helping her to 'wash off' political and cultural boundaries. There is, however, acknowledgement that the strictures and limitations of language can be, in

and of themselves, a boundary.

The 'Poetic Puzzles' described by the participants do not have simple solutions. There is no right answer to translation of culturally specific imagery or terms, only an ongoing effort on the part of the writers to negotiate between their linguistic and cultural resources as they see fit. Much like the dichotomy between frustration and liberation discussed in the first sub-theme of this chapter, poetical puzzles are an ongoing struggle for participants, and they must constantly make decisions about how best to work with their multiple linguistic and cultural resources when writing. The plot device of reincarnation, for example, was drawn from Roj's cultural background, views on religion, and identity as a Yazidi Kurdish refugee from Iraq. Furthermore, in spite of difficulties in translating certain vocabulary or images, participants viewed poetic language as purposeful and useful in bridging gaps between cultures, because of its emotional potency. This illuminates RQ5: 'How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?' The complexities highlighted here with regard to poetry and creative work by multilingual participants demonstrates the way that research in this area demands an open minded and flexible approach, such as an intersectional feminist methodology. That the creative work is a different sort of data to the interview texts is reflected in my research design, which built a discussion of the creative writing into the interview process in order to enhance my understanding of that set of data.

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter has explored the sub-themes relating to language raised in the data, focusing upon research question 1: What resources (e.g. linguistic,

cultural) of refugee writers influence their experience of the creative writing process? There has been discussion of three sub-themes: frustration and/or liberation; 'make it more English'; and poetical puzzles. Each of these sub-themes provides responses to and insight into the research question.

The theme of frustration and/or liberation illuminates the way that the participants' emotional relationship with their linguistic resources can influence their writing process. As a result of writing in English, writers experience feelings of annoyance at not being able to fully express themselves. Conversely some writers indicate that working in English is useful to them in that it frees them from the cultural connotations of their other languages. However, participants demonstrated, in their discussions of their writing experience with me, that this experience is rendered more complex when viewed through the lens of refugee experience. For refugee writers, the impact of this effect was amplified, as a result of having undergone traumatic migration. The issue of emotional disconnection in English becomes a double-edged sword for refugee writers, simultaneously distancing them from their writing and from the painful experience of migration. When one considers that language is embodied, it is necessary to remember that it can have embodied effects on its speakers and listeners. For refugees for whom these effects could be the result of remembering traumatic experiences, such as Lutendo, the distance created by using English can be helpful. Moreover, some participants reported feeling elements of both frustration and liberation in writing in English. Rather than being a static state of being, these feelings could exist in tandem or indeed, an individual might shift between them. Sara commented on her challenges when trying to express herself in English, saying 'sometimes I get frustrated because what I exactly want to express, it doesn't come out' but also

highlighted the way that for her it was a way to circumvent some of the trappings of identity she associated with her other languages 'I just wash myself off from all these boundaries'. It is a dynamic process, as opposed to a fixed condition. This exploration contributes to answering research question 1, showing the complexity of the writing experience for participants as a result of their linguistic and cultural resources.

In the theme 'make it more English', the significance of the emphasis upon 'correct' English was considered. In so doing, it became evident that the participants felt pressure, partially from the system of mentorship in place, to ensure their work was as grammatically accurate as possible. Moreover, it can be seen that they draw upon the resource of the mentors within the creative writing group in order to achieve this. The interaction with the mentors informs research question 2, which focuses upon how the community of writers and mentors influences the experiences of the participants. The mentors are a supportive force, but sometimes the group dynamic reinforced ideas of 'correct' or 'incorrect' English that made participants frustrated or self-conscious. Ruby summarised this feeling when she said 'You end up writing something which if you look at it, you don't even want to know that you have wrote it.' The role of the group as a whole, including the element of mentorship, will be discussed further in chapter 6, on (Dis)comfort.

The effort to render the work 'more English' though must also be considered within the context of participants' cultural and linguistic resources. My findings showed that participants acknowledged a pressure to write in an 'English' style, which can be understood in terms of the more general social pressure for 'non-native' speakers and writers to 'pass' in a second language (Gramling, 2016a).

The issues of creative and literary language were considered in the final sub-theme, poetical puzzles. In this section, the difficulties experienced by participants in trying to recreate certain poetic elements of their other languages in English were highlighted. Moreover, some participants found that their concept of poetry was not easily achievable within English cultural expectations of creative writing. It was found that, despite this difficulty, participants drew upon rich cultural imagery in their work, the meaning of which might not be immediately apparent to a reader unfamiliar with the culture of the writer. The conversations with participants shed light upon the implications of their metaphors, such as the use of an owl to connote prejudice by a Ugandan writer. It is in this section that it becomes apparent that the cultural and linguistic resources of multilingual refugee authors significantly impacted the writing experience for the participants. Participants employed elements of their different cultures and their refugee experience in their work, and without their perspective on their choices, some of the significance of the work could be lost.

In this chapter, my purpose has been to illustrate how the linguistic and cultural resources of participants influenced their experience of the creative writing process (RQ1). This is apparent in several ways. Their linguistic resources affected their emotional experience of writing. For some, feeling unable to express themselves adequately in English contributed to feelings of frustration and disconnection from the work. Conversely, for others, having the resource of English also gave some participants a sense of liberation from the cultural connotations of their other languages, and from traumatic memories that occurred in them. The participants' cultural resources, from political and religious connotations to figures of speech and symbolism, were interwoven in the writing they produced, and participants



were conscious of the need to negotiate between imagery and ideas from their home country and ensuring their work could be understood by British, anglophone readers.

## Chapter 5: Performance

This chapter focuses upon the theme of performance. When observing the creative writing sessions, I noticed that there was always an element of performing at the end of each session, in the sense that writers would often share the work they had completed with the rest of the group by reading it aloud. Moreover, reference was frequently made by the participants and the organisers of the workshops to more formal public performances that the writers engaged in. These were often high profile, at well-known and high capacity venues, with large audiences of the general public. The performance of work has associated elements that are absent from the written form, such as the physical presence of the reader and the ability of the audience to hear their voice (including their accent). It is within these differences that some of the implicit power dynamics of 'native speakerism' (Holliday, 2005) become more evident.

In the interviews, participants discussed the emotional significance of performing their work in front of others, and this idea was connected to a feeling that they (the participants) wished to counteract what they considered to be the negative prevailing perception of refugees. It is this assertion of their own experience through performance which I have dubbed 'reclaiming the narrative'. I chose this phrase because it emphasises the way that narrative extends beyond creative writing, into ways of understanding life experiences, and because it underscores that these stories are the rightful property of the participants who lived them. In this chapter, I highlight comments by the participants relating to their experiences of performing their work, and how this relates to their experiences of being refugees in the UK context. There are three sub-themes within this chapter which are: the

impact of language choice and pronunciation on performance; the body in performance; and the disruptive power of performance. The impact of language choice and accent on performance draws upon some of the issues explored in the first findings chapter, on language, and how they specifically relate to performance. The subtheme focusing on the body in performance connects to the themes within the creative work, and also to the embodied experience of performing, and how this affects the relationship between the participants and their audiences. Finally, in the subtheme ‘the disruptive power of performance’, I consider the way participants described the effect of their performances on the audience, and the role they feel it plays in countering negative representations of refugees in the media.

In exploring these themes, I will primarily focus on RQ 4: ‘What feelings do refugee writers have about performing their writing, and how do linguistic and cultural factors influence these feelings?’ The linguistic and cultural factors referred to include the participants’ experiences of performing in English and how that impacts upon their experience of performing their work. Moreover, the cultural factors include the way that the participants’ identities as refugees affect both their feelings about performing and the way that they might be perceived by audiences. This chapter will also shed light on RQ 1, ‘What resources (e.g. linguistic, cultural) of refugee writers influence their experience of the creative writing process?’ and RQ 2, ‘How do participants view their own work produced as part of the creative writing process?’ In discussing the performance of creative work, participants spoke about the capacity for such work to shift public opinion about refugees, and the emotional significance for them of performing in the context of being refugees in the UK.

## 5.1 The impact of language choice and accent on performance

As discussed in chapter 4, language choice is an emotionally complex terrain for many multilingual writers. Pavlenko (2005) draws attention to the complex emotional layers that writers may encounter in selecting a language for their creative work, and Anyidoho (1997) and Li (2007) underscore that this is further problematised for writers who are exiles or refugees from their home country. The language of home may be a source of comfort, or a painful reminder of the reasons they were forced to leave. Likewise, the language of the resettlement country may be refreshingly new, or a source of frustration and difficulty. The participants reported ways in which these issues can be amplified in a performance setting. As Roj noted, a poet may be uncomfortably aware of their difficulties in English when performing. He said when performing he was concerned that:

...my English might be difficult to understand. For that reason, I prefer not to read in front of people...Depends on what kind of people sit in. Maybe some people feel people understand...maybe it's more about my pronunciation. I can't pronounce some words very well. Particularly if you're all English people, listening sometimes is not good for them. I make a lot of mistake. I don't feel ashamed or shy. It's all about, I don't know. I don't like talking.

The anxieties he expresses here, about feeling uncomfortable, although not “ashamed” or “shy”, suggest that he may feel some pressure, as a ‘non-native’ speaker, to pass as a ‘native’ speaker in his adopted language, as discussed in a wider context by Piller (2002) and Gramling (2016a). Roj’s comments echo Chow’s discussion of Derrida’s relationship with his own multilingual repertoire and racial identity. Chow highlights that:

although Derrida's French is undoubtedly fluent, he considers it imperfect because he has not quite lost his "French Algerian" accent...He can pass for "authentic" as long as he can hide his speech, as long as his "speech" is simply seen and not heard.

(2014, p. 22)

Chow explores in detail Derrida's relationship to French in his 'moving autobiographical account' (2008, p. 217) *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin* (Derrida, 1998). In it, Derrida includes in-depth discussion of his feelings about language and, in particular, accent. He highlights the hypocrisy of his own visceral reaction to certain accents, and his deep-seated desire to hide any trace of his French-Algerian one, as 'neither ethical, political, nor social' (1998, p. 46). Chow categorises Derrida's revulsion at anything he considered to be impure French to be a 'typical consequence of colonialism, with something of the psychic burden exacted by whiteness' (2014, p.23). Chow's analysis places the internal feelings Derrida described in the context of systemic oppression. His discomfort is a reflection of the strenuous reality of existing in a society that privileges whiteness and certain ways of speaking. Viewed through an intersectional feminist lens, this can be seen as part of the multi-layered marginalisation of speakers categorised as 'non-native', and reflects Holliday's (2015) assertion that such categorisations have their roots in racist paradigms. The comparison here between Chow's description and the participant's experience is particularly notable in that the participant is especially concerned about "English people" listening to his performances. Although he emphasised that he did not feel 'ashamed or shy', the participant's comments about pronunciation, making mistakes, and concerns about audiences made up of "English people" highlight the power imbalance

when it comes to language use between the participant and his audience. These experiences expose the way that 'non-native' speakers experience language-based systemic oppression. The prejudice inherent in 'native speakerism' (Holliday, 2006) means that listeners are more willing to hear accounts from 'native' speakers, or at least those who can imitate this way of speaking. This is a type of epistemic injustice. Lippi-Green comments that such injustice is far from uncommon:

When speakers are confronted with an accent which is foreign to them, the first decision they make is whether or not they are going to accept their responsibility in the act of communication. What we will see again and again is that members of the dominant language group feel perfectly empowered to reject their role, and to demand that a person with an accent carry the majority of responsibility in the communicative act. (1997 p. 70)

In these instances, we can view the effects of systemic oppression in terms of labour. It was Hochschild (2003) who first conceived of the concept of emotional labour, and who observed that this labour falls disproportionately on women. In the case of spoken interactions between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers, the communicative labour often falls disproportionately on the 'non-native', rather than the 'native' speakers. Cutler (2014) noted the extent to which passing linguistically requires work on the part of the speaker:

In most cases, this kind of passing [as a native speaker] appears to be temporary, context-specific phenomenon in contexts such as service encounters rather than a stable, enduring practice...Indeed, trying to systemically pass for a native speaker would be a daunting endeavour since the

slightest phonological lapse could cause others to question one's identity (p. 150)

Lutendo made reference to the way this work impacted her experience of performing in English, saying 'Now I'm concentrating about making people to understand me in this language. I'm concentrating about my grammar. I'm concentrating about my accent', highlighting the effort involved for her in adjusting her speech for audiences in the United Kingdom.

Accent can come with privilege or disadvantages in different contexts. Lutendo made reference to her own accent as a barrier to getting her message across to the public. For her, growing up in Zimbabwe, 'once you start kindergarten, everything is in English'. She said that 'the only difference [between English there and English in the United Kingdom] is the accent'. When asked about the challenges of reaching the public with her story, her own accent was the obstacle she emphasised:

You cannot stop them [the public] to think the way they like...they have not accent...[my accent can be] so heavy that they won't even understand what I'm saying. How do you improve that silly error? I don't know how to improve that, those are the challenges. (Lutendo)

Her concerns about how people might react to her accent are supported by research. Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) found that the presence of a foreign accent alone can cause 'native' speakers of a language to view others as less credible. Studies have repeatedly shown that detection of a foreign accent can cause 'native' speakers to ascribe negative qualities to a speaker, such as incompetence and untrustworthiness (Eisenstein, 1983; Ryan, 1983; Lindemann, 2002; Cunha de Souza, Pereira, Camino, Souza de Lima, and Torres, 2016). Hansen, Rakić and Steffens (2013) found that this

effect was particularly present when the 'native' speaker had no experience of speaking a foreign language themselves, and thus could not empathise with the position of the second language speaker.

Sara also emphasised the way that not having English as a first language affects her interactions with others:

Here [the creative writing workshop] is full of trust, understanding, equality, and respect for our situation. But outside we are expected to be the same as others and unfortunately, we are assessed by the level of our English skill...I think it's a bit disappointing. (Sara)

Her comment about the expectation to 'be the same as others' reflects the emphasis society puts on assimilation for 'non-native' speakers. As discussed in the first findings chapter, Shire (2011) explores some of the implications of the pressure to pass as 'native' speakers on immigrants in her poem 'Maymuun's mouth', which is written in her idiosyncratic, stream of consciousness style: 'Maymuun lost her accent with the help of her local Community College... Her new voice is sophisticated.' The speaker of the poem notes the associations between Maymuun's passing in English and her distance from her own culture, as she notes that Maymuun no longer answers her phone when she calls. Shire also captures the way that passing linguistically is a privileged position, by noting that Maymuun achieved this using education, 'with the help of her local Community College' and noting that the loss of her accent means her 'new voice is sophisticated'. Shire is drawing our attention to some of the structures within the educational system that privilege a very specific sort of linguistic expression. Frimberger (2016) highlighted this issue, noting that there is 'a class-specific monolingualism is the presupposed linguistic norm [within English language teaching in the UK]



against which all other language practises are judged' (p. 2). Similarly, Roj is keenly aware of the wider narrative and context that might cause his listeners to be prejudiced against his voice and way of speaking. He does not place blame on his audience for this, merely saying that he suspects his performance would not be 'good' for 'English people'. If an audience is not receptive to his performance because of his accent and way of speaking, however, this could be deemed contributory injustice (Mason, 2011; Dotson, 2012). This is when a powerful group deliberately fails to gain the resources necessary to interpret the stories of a marginalised group. In this instance, the powerful group of 'native' speakers could be, in some cases, failing to work to engage with the participant's performance because they are not 'native' speakers. When viewed through the framework of intersectional feminism, the participant's discomfort can be seen to be the result of societal expectations of linguistic conformity impacting him specifically as a refugee and a 'non-native' speaker of English in the United Kingdom. That the pressure to adapt to a 'native' speaker style of expression is often implicitly, rather than explicitly, stated, does not reduce the extent to which it can impact upon participants' relationship with performing their work.

Beyond encountering a refusal to engage with stories that come from 'non-native' speakers of English, those who cannot 'pass' (Gramling 2016a) as 'native' speakers may find themselves on the receiving end of abuse and even violence. In his exploration of the impact of media portrayal of refugees, Kundnani (2001) highlights an incident in Hull in which a white teenaged group, armed with sticks, searched for asylum seekers to attack. When they suspected two students of Indian descent of being asylum seekers and questioned them about it, it was the British accents of the students that convinced them not to target them. Although Kundnani

acknowledges that in other instances the fact that the students were not white may alone have resulted in them being attacked, this episode illustrates the significance of accent within a system of systemic racism, in which it can be the difference between being assaulted and not. Moreover, when viewed in parallel with Virdee and McGeever's (2018) account of a 'a brutal street attack [in Essex] on an eastern European migrant after he was heard speaking Polish in the street.' (p.1808) the connection between language/accent and physical safety becomes evident.

In addition to accent, the issue of language choice in performance has specific complications for refugees. Although it had a negative impact on Roj's willingness to perform, performing in English is not always oppressive or detrimental to the experience of the performer. Lutendo spoke about the way using English when performing gave her more freedom to discuss and write about her experiences without becoming too distressed to continue. She explained:

my experience [of being tortured], most of it, it happened in my own language, even when they were abusing victims, abusing, the way they were abusing you in your language, so it draws everything to stage one...But when I'm saying it in English, it's like I'm borrowing someone's story.

For her, using English is a means of giving herself emotional distance from the painful memories she often discusses in her work. The language acts as a protective barrier, preventing her from experiencing the full weight of her traumatic experiences whenever she speaks about them. Similarly, Dewaele and Costa (2013) argue that altering the language in which traumatic memories are spoken about can enable some people to discuss painful experiences in psychotherapy that would be too difficult to approach in the

first language. Although this phenomenon has been discussed in previous chapters, it is important to explore the connotations of this phenomenon in the context of performance. As Sara highlighted, performing work takes more 'readiness' on the part of the performer than writing, and the position of being in front of an audience is a vulnerable one. Part of the reason Lutendo might feel that performing in English is freeing, rather than restrictive, is that she was familiar with English from a young age. She noted that in her education in Zimbabwe 'once you start kindergarten, everything is in English'. This is a direct contrast to, for example, Sara, who explained that in Iran she was not able to learn English because of government restrictions. She noted that she felt like 'the only person [in the creative writing group] who doesn't have English...compared to others because they're African...they used to study English from childhood...we were not allowed to study English at schools'. Although Sara was not the only person who had not been exposed to English in school, her comments highlight that discrepancies between the participants' language learning histories explain some of the differences in their feelings about performing in English.

Nevertheless, Lutendo, who had been speaking English from a young age, still found that listeners in the UK noted her speech as different from that of British speakers. She noted that when attending a job interview she had been asked where she was from and the interviewer noted that she was 'fluent'. The participant noted that she had been deliberately 'trying to be very eloquent because it was an interview, but they [the interviewers] thought I'm always speaking like that'. The fact that she felt the need to alter her speech patterns for the purposes of an interview, and that the interviewer commented on her fluency, underscore the layers of assumptions and prejudices that can impact refugee writers speaking and performing in the

UK. Lutendo felt she had to speak differently to how she normally would to increase her chances of success in the interview, and the interviewer assumed because of her accent that it was a compliment to note her fluency in English, even though Lutendo has been speaking in English since kindergarten. The identification of Lutendo as an immigrant and 'non-native' speaker by the interviewer plays into the power dynamics of the experience. Lutendo mentioned accent several times during interviews, speaking about how during performances she would be 'concentrating about [her] accent' in order to make 'people to understand [her] in this language [English]'. Moreover, when asked about obstacles in getting audiences to listen to her work and experiences, she named her accent as the most significant, saying that it was 'so heavy that they won't even understand what I'm saying'. The racialization of accent, particularly the accents of African women, is explored in depth by Creese and Kambere, who highlight that prejudice against these accents is 'systemic, a tool used "to put [African women] down." It is not, after all, about communication. It is about power and exclusion, marginalization and "Othering," racism and discrimination' (2015, p. 571). This recalls Chow's discussion of linguistic nativism, in which he uses the term 'xenophone' to describe 'foreign-sounding speech/tone' (2014, p. 11). In his poem 'Good English', Tawona Sithole explores the implications of these pressures in his childhood English lessons in Zimbabwe. He emphasises the way that the colonial legacy impacts language, commenting 'I wish the good English was good enough to translate the shock of hearing people mispronouncing their own names in order to sound more English' (2014). Here, identity and meaning are compromised by the strictures of performing 'good English'. The idea of 'correct' language supersedes all else, and results in individuals sacrificing an aspect of their identity,

symbolised by the correct pronunciation of their own names, in order to perform 'good English'. Payne, Philyaw, Rabow, and Yazdanfar (2018) highlighted the significant racial and cultural dynamics surrounding the mispronunciation of names in a classroom setting: 'The consequences of reframing names for some of the students in this class resulted in feelings of shame, anger, and conformity...Most importantly, the reclaiming of names resulted in [a] sense of empowerment, self-acceptance, and pride' (p. 570). That Sithole witnessed his classmates deliberately mispronouncing their own names in order to conform to a particular style of English is a startling illustration of the power dynamics that underpin accent difference. This emphasises the extent to which the societal privileging of certain accents, dialects, and languages can be internalised and performed by speakers. Holmes and Dervin comment on how Sithole's poem captures the interwoven factors of 'language use; structures of class, race and economics; his place of birth and country in which he was educated (Zimbabwe). In short, the intercultural aspects of his English-language identity and communication in English appear to inscribe a fixed identity' (2016, p.3). The social forces which led Sithole's classmates to sacrifice so much in order to perform 'good English' stretch far beyond their immediate classroom context, both geographically and historically, recalling Zimbabwe's colonial past.

Although there are pressures on the participants to perform what Sithole calls 'good English', it must also be acknowledged that there are writers who deliberately resist these forces. Using multilingual repertoires can be an act of resistance to hegemonic structures on the part of performance poets. Sarkar and Winer (2006) explore the use of code switching between languages by performance poets in Quebec, commenting that although individuals use different strategies to do so, they are

'fundamentally linked by a positioning of multilingualism as a natural and desirable condition, whether or not everything is then comprehensible to everyone' (p. 189). A similar attitude may be observed in the multilingual poetry of Shire, in which she frequently employs words and phrases in Somali and Arabic. In a 2013 performance available online, Shire can be seen using a Somali proverb as part of a performance (Shire, 2016). As she reads her poem 'The House', which is predominantly in English, she suddenly switches to Somali:

*Nin soo joog laga waayo, soo jiifso aa laga helaa,*

I said *Stop*, I said *No* and he did not listen

By using her other languages, Shire is resisting the systemic oppression of multilingualism in the UK context, and also reversing the power dynamics of emotional labour between herself and a monolingual audience. To comprehend the richness of that part of the poem, a listener who does not speak Somali must find a transcription of it (Shire, 2017) and research the Somali proverb, eventually finding a definition in Kapchits of 'He who does not hear the word 'stop!' will hear the words 'lie down!' [i.e. he who does not listen to warnings will get into trouble].' (2002, p 26). Understanding the proverb clarifies how Shire is redefining the proverb, turning it instead to a reference to rape and recentering its focus on the impact on the woman, rather than the consequences for the man. This is also a type of resistance against patriarchal structures embedded in language. Were Shire to perform only in English, this richness and resistance to hegemonic structures that privilege monolingualism would be lost. In using Somali, Shire's message is clear. To those who understand her words, it signals belonging and invites them to engage in a critique of their own culture. To those who do not understand the language, the message is that it is now their turn to

labour for meaning, and that in this instance they are not the primary audience for this piece.

To hear an unfamiliar language can be a jarring experience, even for those who are prepared for it. Like Sithole (2014), and Chow (2008; 2014) Frimberger (2016) draws attention to the internalisation of cultural hierarchies, even on the part of those who would seek to rationally reject them. She explored her own bodily discomfort as a researcher encountering languages beyond her understanding, recalling Derrida's comments (1998) by noting the disconnect between her intellectual values and her physical reaction. This illustrates the challenges involved for audiences in approaching work that resists monolingual, monocultural social expectations. Even if they are consciously working to engage with the material, they may have to resist their own internalised prejudices and expectations.

In deliberately disrupting the expectations of the audience, Shire draws attention to the injustice of society's insistence on and privileging of English monolingualism. Shire demonstrates here the way that poets, in their physical presence on stage, can explore and celebrate their 'marginalized identity' in a way that might not be possible on the page (Somers-Willett, 2009, p. 69). In this instance, the identity which is marginalised is that of a speaker of languages other than English in the United Kingdom. Participants referred to their experiences of this marginalisation both explicitly and implicitly during the interviews. As Sara highlighted, while going about her daily life she felt 'assessed by the level of [her] English skill'. That she contrasted this with the positive experiences of 'trust, understanding, equality, and respect for our [the refugees'] situation' in the creative writing workshops underscores the lack of these qualities in encounters where she feels judged on the basis of language.

These findings illustrate the multi-layered relationship between language and performance. To perform work and speak in public brings with it concerns that are absent in written work. In performing, the participants are conscious of the way their speech may be received by English listeners, both in the context of creative performance and in more commonplace, everyday scenarios, such as performing 'good English' for an interview. Regarding RQ 4, 'What feelings do refugee writers have about performing their writing, and how do linguistic and cultural factors influence these feelings?' the data reveals that participants can feel a great amount of trepidation about performing in English specifically, due to their perception that they must tailor their performances to cultural expectations in the United Kingdom and the needs of monolingual English speakers. These societal pressures are born from and reinforced by the systemic system in place that privileges 'good English', carrying with it connotations of whiteness and what Frimberger (2016) describes as 'a class-specific monolingualism' (p. 2) emphasised in the UK context. Moreover, the comments of participants about concentrating on accent and being conscious of being judged on the basis of language proficiency when performing and during their daily lives highlight the way that they experience the social pressure to conform to a particular type of linguistic expression. This is particularly notable in the performance context, in which the participants described feeling vulnerable. The following section will explore this sense of vulnerability, through an examination of the sub-theme of 'the body in performance'.

## **5.2 The body in performance**

As Phipps (2007) underscores, language cannot fully be separated from the body. Understanding the performances of the participants using Phipps'



framework helps to elucidate the link between the participants' words in their creative work and the presence of their body on the stage. For further discussion of this concept, please see section 4.1.3. The previous subtheme has alluded to this connection, both for performers and audiences. We see the former, for example, in Roj's concerns about performing before an audience of 'English people' and in Chow's description of Derrida's 'visceral reactions' to what he considered to be impure forms of French (2014, p. 22). The latter is made clearer in Frimberger's discussion of her own physical sensation discomfort at hearing unfamiliar language (2016).

This connection between language and the body becomes more explicit in the context of performance, in which the body of the writer is usually physically present before the listeners, and voice is given to the silent written word. Performing, even more so than writing, is a physical experience. The act of performing poetry as opposed to keeping it in written form brings the performer into sharp relief. The audience witnesses their physical presence on stage. Their body; their movements; the sound of their voice: all these things become part of the whole that is the performance. This subtheme will explore the way that participants' bodies and physical presence affected their experience of performing their work.

The physical presence of the body in and of itself is a significant element in the performance of creative work. Lutendo spoke about the potency of a live performance for her, saying: 'publicly you can attach your eyes to somebody's eyes and you feel like you know your voice, your thoughts have been heard.' Her emphasis on physical presence through reference to eyes and voice reveals the way that in performance poets can achieve a personal connection with their audience that could be lost on the page. In performance, the audience must acknowledge the human being

before them, and Lutendo spoke about using this opportunity to show her audience the effects of her experiences of torture on her body:

I said that it is time to reveal what are my souvenirs. Because when I said souvenirs, people did not understand what I mean. But when I said it is time to reveal what are my souvenirs, then I told them that I was talking about my scars...people were expecting [me] to come with money, to see, like, spoons, saucepans, everything for keeping's sake. But when I explain what are my souvenirs to them, no one would like to take out money to buy those souvenirs. (Lutendo)

The presence of the body, and the tangible imprint of this participant's traumatic experiences in the form of scars, act as a sharp reminder to the audience that her work is anything but abstract. Scarry highlights 'how inaccessible the reality of physical pain is to anyone not immediately experiencing it' (1985, p29). The physical manifestation of pain, in the showing of the scars, presented by Lutendo goes some way to bridge this gap in empathy for those who hear her speak. This is not to say that all audiences are receptive to this bridging. Just as people may recoil from unfamiliar languages and accents (Derrida, 1996; Chow 2008, 2014; Frimberger, 2016), so too can they be repelled by descriptions of physical pain and suffering. Sara commented on the way that people sometimes respond to her speaking about her experiences:

They get upset because it's too much on them. And straight away they remind you, bear in mind you are breaching the boundary. You are not allowed to touch us because we want to live in a safe environment. (Sara)

Here, she underscores the way that people can flinch away from even hearing narratives of pain. Her description of people viewing her speaking about her experiences as ‘breaching a boundary’, and her language of ‘touch’ and a ‘safe environment’ highlights the irony of the hearers’ reactions. They are not the ones who have had a boundary breached or been injured, and listening to her words in no way prevents them from being safe. Sara’s words also highlight the political motivation for rejections of narratives of pain by those who are privileged. When she says, ‘it’s too much on them’, she highlights that audiences may not want to face the harsh reality of refugee experiences. When speaking about her writing she elaborated on the ways that people respond to expressions of pain:

Some people they don’t like it, they find it really miserable because it talks about pain. Pain, pain, pain. And they avoid pain...We avoid pain, we just run away, run away from responsibility, from pain, from sadness. But, when it is existing, we need to stick to it, to solve it, to make it better. I think I mainly talk about pain because I feel pain a lot. (Sara)

Her emphasis on responsibility further underscores the relationship between an awkwardness, or discomfort, on the part of listeners to engage with narratives of pain. This participant seems to be suggesting that to ignore such pain is a moral failing, and that addressing such pain directly through open discussion is necessary in order to ‘make it better’. Scarry underscores the specific difficulty in communicating pain to others, explaining that, for the person feeling pain: ‘so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that “having pain” may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to have certainty’, whereas by contrast for those outside of this experience ‘it is so elusive that “hearing about pain” may exist as the primary

model of what it is “to have doubt” (1985, p. 5). The way that expressions of pain can result in healing but also rejection from others is echoed by Shire in an interview where she compares the process of writing and performing work on difficult topics to a physical wound:

Not everyone is okay with living with an open wound. But the thing about open wounds is that, well, you aren't ignoring it, [you're] healing, the fresh air can get to it. It's honest. You aren't hiding who you are. You aren't rotting. People can give you advice on how to heal without scarring badly. But on the other hand there are some people who'll feel uncomfortable around you. Some will even point and laugh. But we all have wounds. (Shire, 2012)

Shire's metaphor becomes all the more potent when applied to participants showing physical scars from their experience during performance. As the participants highlight, sometimes audiences have a visceral negative reaction to hearing and seeing expressions of pain. This is particularly pertinent to these participants, as refugees who are survivors of torture. As Sara commented, to speak about their experiences is to speak about extreme pain. Sara also emphasised the emotional vulnerability of performing her work:

I think it [performing] needs more readiness of you. And more connection between your mind and your heart, and also with the audience. It takes you to a higher stage to hear your voice, to be in contact with what passed through your mind and heart.

Here, Sara's use of physical language and reference to the senses to describe her bodily experience of performance as distinctive from the experience of writing. She describes the intensity of performing her work in

terms of the connection between the mind and heart, and referring to performing as being 'in contact' with the work. Not only does this invoke a sense of embodied language as described by Phipps (2007), it also highlights the vulnerability of refugee writers performing their work for an audience. For Roj, the vulnerability of being physically present and exposed to the prejudices of others was one of the factors that made him prefer writing without performance. He said:

The thing is, I'm disabled. I never felt people talked to me my entire life, like people talk to me like a normal person. Because you feel people see you as a disabled. For that maybe affects you, you don't like to go to a lot of places...in particular now if you have lost a leg in war, and you're Middle Eastern, and you're Muslim man...people hide those things. But they can't hide it. For that reason maybe I don't like to go to a lot of place to meet people. So then I just stay in my writing, maybe. (Roj)

This vulnerability in being physically present partially stems from the multi-layered prejudices Roj experiences as he goes about his life: as a person with a disability; as a refugee; as a person of colour; and as a Muslim. Whilst in writing these elements of his identity are not visible to his audience, in performance they are. This contributes to his feelings of discomfort surrounding performing work publicly.

In some instances, however, the presence of the body becomes central to the performance itself. As Lutendo uses her scars in order to illustrate to the audience the pain she has been through, so too other refugee performers have used their own bodies to make their message explicit to wider audiences. Balfour and Woodrow draw attention to the example of the body in performance found in the Kurdish asylum seeker Abas Amini, who in

2003 stitched up his eyes, mouth and ears as part of a poem in protest at the UK government attempts to deport him back to Iran. They draw on the poem read aloud by an interpreter for Amini at a press conference as he was unstitched:

He sewed up his lips so that he could speak out.

He sewed up his eyes to make others see.

He sewed up his ears to make others hear.

You whose eyes, ears and mouths are free,

See, hear and speak out. (Amini, 2013, p. 17)

Soguk uses the terms 'biopolitics' and 'biopoetics' to describe this radical act of protest, emphasising that in this instance the body, poem, and act of political resistance are one and the same (2006). The sight of Amini's mutilated body creates a strong sense of horror and revulsion in its audience. The physical manifestation of his political suffering in the form the stitches binding his skin is simultaneously disturbing and impossible to ignore. His actions, whilst extreme, were successful in gaining him asylum in the UK (Soguk, 2006; Balfour & Woodrow, 2013). Amini's performance is specifically drawing upon similar actions by a group of 70 asylum seekers in Australia, who a year earlier sewed their lips shut as part of a large-scale protest against indefinite detention. The sewing of lips would be used again by asylum seekers in Greece and on Christmas Island in 2010, and once more in the UK in 2011 (Farrier and Tuitt, 2013, p. 254). Bargu (2017) notes its use as recently as 2016. Amini's performance, incorporating his tortured body, was so potent that it effected political change. He overcame the barrier Scarry (1985) describes between those in pain and those hearing about pain by making his agony so undeniable that it demanded response.

In relation to RQ 1, this sub-theme demonstrates the way that the body is a resource that the participants can and do draw upon in their creative work. Lutendo, in revealing her 'souvenirs', forces audiences to face up to the pain she has endured, in the same way that Amini's protest demanded attention on the global scale. The body in performance becomes the conduit through which the author and the creative work become one indivisible whole. It is this which can bring audiences face to face with the situations of refugees.

The participants' comments about responsibility and audience reaction allude to RQ 4, 'What feelings do refugee writers have about performing their writing, and how do linguistic and cultural factors influence these feelings?' By looking at the participants' comments alongside high profile examples of refugee performance such as Amini's protest, it is possible to contextualise their comments as part of a wider refugee experience. In addition to being a resource in performance, the body was also discussed as a site of pain and vulnerability for participants. Roj's comments made clear the way that being physically present exposes him to multi-layered prejudice, as a 'disabled...Middle Eastern...Muslim man'. Sara highlighted the way that performing her work can be particularly emotionally vulnerable. Performance, in particular, can be considered a means to shift public opinion about asylum seekers and refugees. In the next section, I will expand on this discussion, focusing on the way that participants spoke about the significance of performance in terms of helping to change negative stereotypes people may hold about refugees and asylum seekers.

### 5.3 The disruptive power of performance

The final subtheme to be discussed is the way participants felt performance could be used to reframe the dominant media narrative against refugees. To do so, I consider participants' views of that narrative and their feelings of responsibility around performing their work. Participants discussed the impact performing their work had on the perceptions their audiences had of refugees and asylum seekers. Finally, participants spoke about the reasons why performing creative work can be particularly impactful when contrasted with more mainstream media representations.

When asked about media representation of asylum seekers and refugees, participants overwhelmingly expressed that it was negative and inaccurate. Lutendo commented 'they think that refugees are there to wear out the economy of the country...they still stereotype it', whilst Roj responded 'Now people don't like refugees and asylum seekers.' Kundnani charted the way that racist and xenophobia portrayals of refugees began to become commonplace in British tabloid media. He noted that:

The tabloids have acted as a surrogate nationalist party and, precisely because they have advanced a national preference politics without entering elections, they have been able to do so without the threat of democratic challenge. (2001, p. 55)

Kudnani makes the point that, within racist and xenophobic social structures, asylum seekers and refugees become a specifically victimised group.

Williams (2015) highlighted the toxicity of specific comments made by journalist Katie Hopkins. In an article that has since been taken down by The Sun newspaper online, Hopkins referred to refugees as 'vermin', and Williams notes the echoes of Nazism in such comments (2015). The Sun has 26.2 million readers a month online, the second highest amount in the UK



(Ponsford, 2017). In a comprehensive study of media representation of refugees and asylum seekers, Baker, Gabrielatos, and Khosravini noted the overwhelming negativity found even in more liberal publications, commenting that in many articles 'Immigrants and asylum seekers are not portrayed as being a heterogeneous set of people or as doing or saying anything. Instead they are objectified and backgrounded' (2008, p. 293). That refugee representations in the media dehumanise and homogenise this diverse group of people contributes to the prejudices participants described encountering.

The participants were very aware of the media antagonism towards refugees. Roj commented on the way that this influences public opinion, noting 'not all news is fact. Maybe you listen to news...British people don't like refugee and asylum seekers'. He felt that this was the result of ignorance, 'they don't know, they don't understand'. Nadia discussed the narratives surrounding refugees in the current climate, noting that whilst 'some people, like activists – human rights activists – they speak well about refugees' this was in contrast to the attitudes displayed by politicians, who she said 'use or abuse these names [refugees] sometimes...like now, in Brexit, you can find terrible things about refugee or immigrant'. She made clear the impact of this ignorance:

My daughters are young, and so it's very hard for them to announce themselves as a refugee. They hide almost all the time, they hide from even their friends, you know. It's very hard because – not all people, but most of the people haven't the reality imagined of a refugee. Who is a refugee? Is it like a – like a low-class person? Or, you know, who is it? Who is she - or he? Sorry. Is it like a fish in a jar?

Nadia here underscores the extent of the dehumanisation of refugees in the public eye, particularly in her final comment. She suggests that the discourse surrounding refugees reduced them to the level of animals in the court of public opinion. The image of the fish in the jar implies that refugees are trapped and dispassionately observed by those outside. In this context the participant's daughters find it difficult to reveal their refugee status in public. Lutendo also emphasised the effect of the public discourse surrounding refugees:

The political opinion... most of, the majority of the political, they think that refugees are there to wear out the economy of the country. There are a few there not that known, they can also be taxpayers...I know some of them [the public] they still stereotype it, like the media, they portray another image for which way we are not. For the public, the media, they can take you high and they can even drop you down.

This emphasises the precarious position of refugees in terms of dominant narratives. The impact of the ongoing negative media portrayal of refugees is not abstract, but has real consequences for the participants' everyday lives. Ruth spoke about experiencing ongoing rudeness and cruelty from one of her college course-mates, who eventually revealed that the reason behind her behaviour was my participant's refugee status. She spoke about how the woman in question would engage in acts of bullying, such as avoiding handing her worksheets during classes: 'She passed by me to show me how much she disliked me'. Although during the interview the participant laughed about this, pointing out that in the context of her experiences these actions on the part of the other woman seemed a minor inconvenience, it is nevertheless a demonstration of the persecution

refugees can experience in the UK. This is part of a wider picture: following the 2016 EU referendum there was a spike in hate crimes around the UK (Cocoran and Smith, 2016, p.17). Participants were aware of a need to alter the negative perceptions of refugees held by some of the public: '99% of people [in the UK] really are very good. Just 1%, they're not. They decide they want to listen to a group of false things people say...[poetry] helps to change that' (Ruby).

Partially because of awareness of the prevailing media attitudes, several participants expressed feeling a responsibility to perform their work. Frequently this sentiment was connected to the first-hand knowledge that many people in similar situations do not have the freedom to speak out about their experiences. This was a recurrent theme in the interviews, such as this comment by Sara:

I should say, if it's mainly focused on me, I find it difficult and painful. But if it's about something like human rights, then I'm more confident to perform...In the beginning, I think I was quite blind. I did not know what was the purpose. I was asked and I looked at it as an opportunity to express, to do something and then I gradually realised I believe in doing this because I am responsible to make peoples like me's voices heard. For those who have no words, I put words on their pain. And also at the time I am expressing my pain.

That the sense of duty to communicate her experiences overrides her feelings of discomfort about performing demonstrates the extent to which this participant considers such performances important to the public dialogue. The allusions to voice and hearing highlight the significance of performance over the written word in her eyes. She is conscious of the fact that others

facing persecution may not ever have the opportunity to articulate their experiences in public. She reiterated this sentiment, stating that when she performs:

you make people hearing you, hearing your story, which doesn't belong just to you as a person it belongs to a group of people who are in the same situation as you are as a refugee. That's the most important part of the work because it's not just about me. It's about a hundred, a thousand people like me who probably they are not able to talk or to write or express themselves, but I can do it, let's do it.

Here, Sara explicitly aligns her performances with representing refugees as a group. The participants expressed a strong sense of obligation to represent in their performances both refugees and those who continued to endure persecution in their home countries. Echoing this closely, Lutendo said: 'I'm like representing thousands and thousands of survivors who are out there.' When asked about the difference for her between performing and writing, Ruth underscored the contrast between her freedom to perform her work in the UK and her experiences in her home country (Iran):

you feel you are the voice of your people, you know, you feel more confident and you feel...really the freedom and the joy you can speak out freely, which in my country we didn't have at all...no way to speak out. Anything, we didn't have that freedom. It is amazing even as a minority really. Group of people we can say we have our own voice. At the same time, we have safety. It is important. No one come after us to arrest us. We don't have that in every country!

Here the participant made it clear that her desire to perform her work is directly linked to the experiences that led to her becoming a refugee. She directly contrasts the context in the UK to the conditions experienced in many other countries around the world, directly commenting on the privilege it is to speak out without fear of imprisonment or other sanctions. She expanded on this, noting that poets can be particularly vulnerable to such punishments, saying that ‘we had the poetry readings like that in my country, in the university’, and that as a result people may interpret the poem and conclude “‘Oh, he’s against the government”...Anytime they could arrest you, you know?’

Some of the participants reported finding performing to be an intensely emotional experience. Ruby connected her desire to perform her work to having endured torture and persecution, saying that ‘it [the performance] is important because what most of us went through, we just do it to show those people that they can’t beat us. We’re stronger than they thought we would be.’ She described performing as a way of escaping from painful memories of her past experiences, saying: ‘we [the performers] can forget about things that happened, a little bit. In that time we have forgotten what has happened to us.’ Lutendo made a similar comment that as a result of performing she ‘would feel better and...see [her] level of resilience in another stage.’ She expanded on this, explaining why she felt it was such a powerful experience for her:

you have given my voice an opportunity. Meaning that my voice was very little like a kitten but nobody was hearing me. But now I’ve got a platform and a way of amplifying my voice for my voice to be heard...I thought ‘yeah I’ve done it. My voice has been given an amplitude – today I have spoken at a public

event. I've done it.' So, every public event was life changing to me.

Here is it evident that the identity of the performer as a refugee who escaped political oppression is an essential element of Lutendo's performance of poetry. The participants and their work cannot be separated from their lived experiences. Shire has commented in interviews along similar lines, noting that:

I'm from Somalia where there has been a war going on for my entire life. I grew up with a lot of horror in the backdrop – a lot of terrible things that have happened to people who are really close to me, and to my country, and to my parents.

(Reid, 2013)

Considering this, we can also see Shire's feeling of duty in terms of her work.

In an interview with Mistry (2013) she commented:

It's my responsibility to tell the story of my family and friends...Because I have this platform, and I don't know where it's come from, so I'm going to do what I can. Rather than just writing about ex-boyfriends...so boring, what is that? (Shire, 2013)

Not only did participants consider it a responsibility to perform as a result of their experiences as refugees, but moreover because of their identities as creative writers. As Nadia noted: 'I think it's the responsibility of open-minded people, like writers or artists, I think, or intelligent people, to clarify some dark side of something for public.' The parallels between these statements underscore the significance of performing poetry specifically for refugee writers.

Further to providing an outlet for refugees to explore their experiences such as persecution, involuntary migration, and exile, the performance of creative writing was also highlighted by participants as a means of reaching a wider audience with their stories. The participants spoke specifically about the role they felt creative works had to play in challenging prejudices against refugees. Edkins and Pin-Fat (2005), in reference to the aforementioned lip-sewing protests, highlight that poetry can be a means of escaping the constraints of sovereign power. Roj highlighted the dichotomy between the news and creative work, saying:

I have to put something like literature or poet-way. Because if I just write my experience, a lot people say, 'we know' because people know what happens in life because of media, television everything.

Performance of creative work has the possibility of presenting its audience with something new. It can sometimes reach its audience emotionally in a way that simple facts cannot. Several participants spoke about their performances helping to change the minds of those who are biased against refugees and asylum seekers. Lutendo recounted such an occasion:

But when we actually speak publicly and explain our experience, everyone brought to tears. And from that night we were like I saw being treated differently. Why? Because people, they did not know. Someone have their own perception, that they have of a refugee...one confessed that 'I thought refugee were just here to collect our money and go with it'. Yet when he heard our experience, and he heard us speak in public, he took that pain...that night he said to us 'now I understand what it is

to have that title refugee.’ So to me it made me to feel...I’d

been able to help somebody to understand my world.

In being physically present and performing her work, the participant could open a dialogue around the experiences of refugees, and change the mind of an audience member. In a similar vein, Ruth highlighted that performance ‘is important, yes, for the audience...to get to know the refugee or their struggles’. Her use of the phrase ‘get to know’ underscores the personal connection formed between the performer and their audience. Performance can be both interactive and intimate. Roj also highlighted the significance of interacting with audience members:

We went to somewhere in Britain, giving our work to see people. But most of them had never seen a refugee. And 100% all white people. And when they see people from Africa and particularly young people, a lot of good people ask: ‘Why have you come here?’ but when you mix with these people and they read your stories it changes their mind.

That performing creative work can help to resist the more negative portrayals of refugees in the public sphere was a recurrent theme in the interviews.

Lutendo said ‘speaking in public I think one day it will change the fraction of those who stereotype us.’ She emphasised the way she used humour in her performances in order to draw attention to the humanity of refugees:

I said ‘Look at me, am I not a beautiful woman? Right?’ It’s like it was drawing the public and the attention, saying ‘I’m still there’...in my heart I was like asking them in there ‘Listen, do I deserve to suffer?’ So, I decide to be humorous about it.

That creative performances have an element of entertainment, and that this can be instrumental in altering public opinion of refugees, was a sentiment



shared by Ruby, who said that performances are important ‘to make people see that we are not what they talk about behind our backs. We are human beings. We can entertain people.’ In both of these instances, the participants felt that the creative element to their work enabled them to communicate their humanity to their audience, to resist the dehumanising images frequently presented by the media.

That performance of poetry draws attention to systemic marginalisation of its authors is demonstrative of its roots in the social justice movement. Johnson notes that ‘contemporary spoken word continues the thread of using words as motivating and solidifying forces because of their ability to move masses, create change in communities and revolutionize people’ (2009, p. 204). Johnson emphasises the way that performance poetry can address social issues, and the way that the venues in which it is performed create spaces that ‘give voice to the voiceless’ (2009, p. 207). In their work on youth spoken word, Weinstein & West, (2012) comment that performance poetry has the possibility of: ‘restructuring systems of meaning and, in many cases, rewriting dominant representations of reality’ (p. 300). Although some writers, such as Shire, use multilingual works to do so, not all writers will feel comfortable employing these techniques, as demonstrated by the comments of Roj. Nevertheless, the participants’ comments about the opportunity performing their work publically gives them to resist the UK media stereotypes of refugees demonstrate that they, too, consider it to be a means of rewriting these dominant representations. These accounts are demonstrations of the effectiveness of performance of creative work in challenging oppressive dominant narratives. This takes on new meaning in the context of refugees currently in the UK, due to the multiple ways in which refugees experience systemic oppression. Performing creative work gave

the participants in this study a resource they could use to counter stereotypes of refugees held by the public and cemented in the media.

This sub-theme speaks to RQ 2, 'How do participants view their own work produced as part of the creative writing process?' The findings here show that the participants view the work they produce as significant both for them personally and for wider audiences. Several participants spoke about the powerful emotional response they had to the experience of performing their work. Having lived under conditions of political persecution, many of the participants felt compelled to speak about their experiences. This feeling stemmed not only from their experiences in their home countries, where the freedom to speak out did not exist, but also from the knowledge that other individuals remain under the conditions of silence. The participants expressed a strong desire to represent the experiences of refugees as a group. Moreover, the participants viewed performing their creative work as a means of resisting the negative portrayals of refugees in the British media (for further discussion of these portrayals, please see section 1.1). The participants' performance of their own narratives invites compassion from audiences, and contrasts with the dominant social narrative presented about refugees.

#### **5.4 Summary**

This chapter has explored the sub-themes emergent in the larger theme of performance in the data: the impact of language choice and accent on performance; the body in performance; and the disruptive power of performance. In doing so, it has shed light on: RQ 1, 'What resources (e.g. linguistic, cultural) of refugee writers influence their experience of the creative writing process?'; RQ 2, 'How do participants view their own work

produced as part of the creative writing process?'; and RQ 4, 'What feelings do refugee writers have about performing their writing, and how do linguistic and cultural factors influence these feelings?'

The first sub-theme explored the way that issues of language, addressed in the context of writing in the first findings chapter, carry over into performance. In order to do this, it explored the participants comments on accent and the idea of performing 'good English'. These concepts were addressed in the context of multiple systemic layers of oppression, exploring the academic literature surrounding the prejudices of 'native' speakers against perceived 'non-native' speakers. In addition to highlighting the pressure to 'pass' as discussed by Pillar (2002), Chow (2014), and Gramling (2016), this section noted the deliberate choice on the part of some writers, such as Warsan Shire, not to pass. Viewed through an intersectional feminist framework, the privilege associated with passing as a 'native' speaker can be viewed as an extension of nationalistic and implicitly racist ideologies. The theoretical implications of this are that linguistic passing can be viewed in a similar way to passing in terms of race or gender. To do so successfully can afford the individual certain advantages, whereas to be unable to do so can leave the speaker vulnerable to prejudice.

In the sub-theme focusing on the body in performance, the significance of the physical presence of the performer was underscored. The participants' comments on the role their body played in performance were considered. The differences for the participants in terms of embodied experience between performing in front of an audience and writing were explored. Performing is, in the comments of the participants, more physically demanding than writing, particularly because it made it more difficult to maintain emotional distance from the sometimes painful content of their

work. The presence of the body could also have the effect of bridging the empathic gap between the audience and the performer. This was placed into the wider context of refugee bodies in performance, for example the phenomenon of lip-sewing, as studied by: Soguk, 2006; Farrier and Tuitt, 2013; Balfour & Woodrow, 2013; and Bargu, 2017. For refugee performers, the body is a resource which not only informs their performance but also makes manifest the pain they have endured. Lutendo's discussion of her scars as souvenirs of her past is a striking example of this.

Finally, in the sub-theme on the disruptive power of performance, the comments of the participants were placed alongside the context of media representation of refugees in the UK. The participants were troubled by the dominant media narrative surrounding asylum seekers and refugees, which contributed to the prejudice they experienced in everyday life. Moreover, they felt that they had a responsibility to represent other asylum seekers and refugees who did not have the opportunity to communicate their experiences. This sub-theme emphasised the specific role played by creative performance, as opposed to purely factual accounts, in altering the views of the public. Participants felt that creative performance was uniquely placed to affect audiences emotionally and give them a greater understanding of the position of refugees.

## Chapter 6: (Dis)comfort

This chapter explores the theme of '(dis)comfort'. In it, I discuss the role of the writing workshops as a comforting experience, including the shared meals that preceded each session, and the emphasis on the group as a 'safe space' (6.1). Then I explore the supportive relationships participants formed through the creative writing workshops, both with other attendees of the workshops and with their mentors, and how these contribute to a comfortable environment for participants (6.2). Next, I highlight how participants' physical experience, including illness and disabilities, impact upon their experience of participating in the writing workshops (6.3). I will discuss the relationship between writing and feelings of comfort or discomfort in the comments of participants, drawing upon the discussion in chapter 4 of embodied language. Finally, I will discuss feelings of comfort and discomfort in relation to this research project, and participants' comments about the experience of being 'researched' (6.4). This chapter will address research question 3, 'How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of the refugee writers?' by examining the way that the workshop environment and relationships are viewed by participants. It will also explore research question 5, 'How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?', by considering participants feelings of comfort or discomfort with the research process and the feeling of being 'researched' and the ways that research framework can minimise discomfort for participants.

## 6.1 The workshop environment and shared meal

The environment of the writing workshops seemed to signify more to the participants than an opportunity to develop as writers. When participants discussed the role the writing workshops played in their lives, they spoke about the additional benefits of meeting regularly with the group. Roj contrasted this with his experiences of loneliness before joining the workshops: 'after being refugee, it was like being an island. I lost all my connection, all people I left completely. I was alone for a year, maybe more than a year'. He emphasised the negative impact this had on his wellbeing, saying that without any distractions he would 'just walk sometimes. Listen, most of time listen to radio for improve my English, and think and think and think, you know. And all the past come to my mind, like catch me'. The comforting space of the writing workshop in contrast to such isolation became a common thread of my conversations with participants. This subsection will explore the elements that participants mentioned as contributing to the welcoming workshop atmosphere.

One of the key events of the workshops was the shared meal. Counihan and Esterik noted that 'feminism and women's studies have contributed to the growth of food studies by legitimizing a domain so heavily associated with women over time and across cultures' (2013, p.2). As a researcher using intersectional feminist theory as a framework for this study, I felt that it would be inappropriate to omit a consideration of the meal and its role from the perspectives of the participants. In my visits to the workshops prior to beginning interviews, I observed that a structure was followed for each session. Before the workshop itself began, everyone participated in a meal together, usually comprising of pizza, chicken, and salads. I began bringing food with me, quiche or cake or something similar, to contribute to

the meal when I went to observe workshop sessions, in the spirit of 'reciprocal research', as described by Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei (2011, p. 1279). While we ate, the leader of the workshops would direct us to each introduce ourselves. This would always happen, even if everyone attending had met previously. I used this opportunity to reiterate that I was there as a researcher and why I was interested in the workshops. Others would speak about how long they had been attending and which of the mentors they were working with. Mentors would speak about how long they had been working with the organisation. This process served several functions. Aside from ensuring that no one missed a meal as a result of attending the workshops, which took place on an evening, the meals and surrounding rituals seemed to fulfil an important social function. The group introductions acted as a crystallisation of social ties within the group, and also ensured that anyone new to the group, such as myself, was familiar with the names of other attendees. Moreover, it underscored the familiarity of participants with me and the aims of the research I was conducting. When asked about the meal, participants expressed strong positive associations with it as a part of the workshops. Nadia noted that the meal cemented the friendly atmosphere between people attending the workshops, describing it as: 'a good time to make a relationship friendly, you know...it's good to, you know, getting more friendship...I just sit close to you during the dinner, we speak together and we share something together, laugh. It's good.' Lutendo described the process of sharing the meal as being reminiscent of a family environment. She emphasised that shared meals were important to her in childhood, saying 'I was born alone, but my mum used to look after a lot of people. So, it's like I left that life behind.' She expanded on how this affected her feelings about the writing group:

We feel like the family has come back again. That's the most important thing at least. The eating together actually it makes me feel at home... Yeah it is reassuring isn't it? Now after that you think what if I fail to do anything, if I say about anything, I'm within the family. Actually, it kind of like, it gives us reassurance that, you know... So, by first being with family, yes of course the tummy will be full, but that reassurance that no we are together, it gives us a bond... Mmhmm, yeah that's very important, actually, to get back the lost sense of being in a very big family. We feel like the family has come back again. That's the most important thing at least. The eating together actually it makes me feel at home.

Here, Lutendo seems to highlight that, for her, the social function of the meal in allowing the group to bond supersedes the physical one of alleviating hunger. The repeated comparison between the relationships in the group and a sense of family emphasises the significance of the community of the writing group for this participant. Valtonen highlights the impact of family environment for refugees in resettlement:

The importance of the family is even more marked when the settlement transition is even more demanding due to large cultural difference, or the necessity of dealing with the aftermath of refugee experiences of violence and uprooting, for example. Moreover the family role retains its significance when settling communities are from societies, cultures, and socio-historical backgrounds in which the family plays a strong, central and unconditional role in looking after the well-being of its members. (2008, p. 123)



Her comments are significant in that they link the mealtime to a sense of security and comfort. The social significance of food and meals is a rich area of study, and Douglas (1973) notes that there is a wealth of research on it in the field of anthropology. Her work is particularly relevant here, however, in that she highlights the worth of exploring food rituals on a small scale, rather than at a macro cultural level. The shared meal prior to the writing workshops can be viewed through her terms:

Gifts of food are flows of life-giving substance, but long before life-saving is an issue the flows have created the conditions for social life. More effective than flags or red carpets which merely say welcome, food actually delivers good fellowship.

1973, p. 12.

Here Douglas highlights the role of food in solidifying positive social structures, emphasising a feeling of camaraderie between those giving and receiving it. Fieldhouse, too, refers to food as the 'universal medium for expressing sociability and hospitality' (1985, p. 84). Julier (2013) explicitly connects sharing food with fostering friendships. In her feminist approach to the topic, she underscores the necessity of contextualising the making and sharing of food in order to grasp its social significance. She highlights as an example the distinction between most feminist literature, in which the task of preparing food is usually viewed as an oppressive chore, and African American feminist literature, in which it can represent the reclamation of the domestic space in contrast to historically being forced to prepare and serve food for the families of others (2013, p.8). Moreover, although she does not use the term 'intersectional' explicitly, Julier's emphasis on understanding inequality in the context of food lends itself well to this study. Just as she contextualises her observations about food with race and class, I will

contextualise the comments made about food with the participants' status as refugees. Some participants connected the process of sharing a meal with remembering meals in their home country, and the way that it alleviated some of their feelings of loss. Sara commented that 'I do love it [the shared meal]. Especially for us as coming from a collectivist culture and sharing is a main part of our lives. Whatever we eat there is delicious.'

The term 'collectivist' is a word which Hofstede used to summarise cultures in which, among other things 'Identity is based in the social system' and there is a 'belief in group decisions' (1983, p. 62). This term has been heavily criticised, notably by Holliday, who emphasised that it was overly essentialist and simplistic, as well as being associated with negative connotations such as totalitarianism (2010, p. 10). In this instance, however, the participant seems to use it in a positive light to allude to the emphasis on shared meals, and sharing in general, she experienced in Iran. It might be that this is a way of connecting the experience of sharing a meal in the workshops with a sense of being at home. She went on to comment on the way that for her sharing a meal solidified the bond she felt with the others in the group: 'being together in a closer environment, like having something together shared and just thinking whether the person next to you has got enough is the main positive side of it.' Here, she directly connects the meal with a bond of fellowship amongst the writing group. Ensuring the person beside you has enough during the meal represents a general atmosphere of nurturing and caring for one another. Lutendo also linked the sharing of food with memories of her home:

So, this one [eating together], it reminds us our orientation.

Where we came from. In Africa, we used to eat in such a big round table like that. So, it lets us to remember what we've

lost...you say 'pass on the dish. I'll have a dish of this'. No different.

Thus, it seems that for some of the participants the sharing of food was something which brought back memories of home. Sara, however, seemed to reiterate that the physical impact of eating together before the writing sessions was also valuable to her. She alluded to problems with money and to the way that the meal helped her following a long day at work:

I do have the same things at home. But of course, we face lots of difficulty in terms of finance. But what I'm saying as an example, I just have the same thing that we could eat there, but I prefer to keep myself hungry to come there and to have it and enjoy it. I think it's a good idea to start from something – to have a time to communicate, talk to ask each other, "how are you?", to talk about work. I think it's a good idea, actually...And also it impacts, when I go there after 5,6,7 working hours it helps.

In my time at the workshops there were frequently allusions to money by the mentors, who privately commented to me that some of the participants were in financial hardship. Whenever the group arranged to attend an event together, the mentors would offer to pay (through the organisation) for travel expenses for anyone who needed it. This was always handled delicately, and arrangements would be made individually and discreetly with anyone who required additional support. The leader of the writing workshops mentioned to me that some attendees might need help at one time or another with needs such as groceries and topping up mobile phones. Sellen, Tedstone, and Frize (2002) in their study of for refugee families in East London found that as a population refugees were extremely likely to suffer

from food insecurity. That the mentors were aware of the financial difficulties of some participants in the workshops and worked hard to accommodate them in a sensitive manner is testament to the caring atmosphere cultivated in the group. A helpful lens through which to view the mentors' approach to meeting the needs of the participants is that of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). In his conceptualisation of human motivation, Maslow specifies that the most basic needs, including physiological requirements like hunger and a feeling of safety, must be met so that an individual can achieve a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and eventually self-actualisation.

In her study of events catering specifically to refugees in the UK, Lewis conceptualises such events as being a point of convergence between ideas of reconstructions of 'home' and the forging of a new community in the UK, a 'staking of being here' (2010, p.583). This is a useful way to understand the significance of the meal that preceded the writing workshops. The participants seemed to consider it both reminiscent of memories of their home cultures, but also a vital part of the crystallisation of the social ties within the writing group. It is this holistic approach to the wellbeing of participants which creates a sense of comfort and safety in the space of the workshop. Roj described this in detail:

For me there is two places very relaxing. Two, three places in my life. One is, home, my home. Home mean house, not country. I don't feel safe in any country. But when I stay in my home, my house, I feel safe. I feel comfortable. And when I go to, there is a hospital...because I have an artificial leg....Now the third place is [the creative writing workshops], I feel safe as well. I feel very comfortable.

That the participant reiterates the same way he describes home when discussing the workshop environment, 'I feel safe. I feel comfortable' emphasised the parallels he sees between the two places. Moreover, it underscores that workshop environment existing as a safe space is necessary to facilitate feelings of comfort there. The two sensations, feeling safe and feeling comfortable, are inherently linked.

These findings highlight the way that the workshops cater to a variety of needs for participants beyond helping them to develop their creative writing. Viewed in reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), it is clear that the workshop is organised to present a safe and comforting environment for the participants, fulfilling their physiological needs such as hunger and safety. It is because of this that the workshop environment is a fruitful one for developing a sense of love and belonging in the participants. Regarding research question 3, 'How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of the refugee writers?', this sub-theme explores the way that the mentors structure the sessions to ensure that participants feel comfortable and secure in the environment of the writing workshops. The meal that precedes each writing session plays a significant role in this, partially by fulfilling the physiological aspects that represent the bottom of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs by satisfying hunger. After this need is met, it is possible for others, such as a sense of safety and the opportunity to build self-esteem, to be realised. The meal and introductions of each person at the table also fulfilled an important social function. The sharing of food served to solidify connections within the group, and that each person would introduce themselves every week also served to emphasise the bonds between people. The meal is an excellent representation of the holistic approach of the group to the pastoral care of the participants, which

also involves awareness of issues surrounding financial instability for some participants. In the next section I explore further the relationships formed within the group by participants, both with fellow participants and with their mentors.

## **6.2 Comforting relationships in the group**

The interpersonal relationships within the creative writing group were a strong theme in participants' discussions of their experiences. This subsection will focus on participants' comments about their relationships both with the other writers in the group and with their mentors, and how these bring them feelings of comfort. In so doing, this subsection will address research question 3, 'How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of the refugee writers?' First, the relationships between participants in the workshops with one another, and how this creates a sense of comfort for participants, will be explored. Subsequently, the role of the mentoring system within the writing group will be examined, in order to distinguish between these two different types of relationship in the group. Ruth underscored the importance of the group's atmosphere for her sense of wellbeing, saying:

Even on Wednesday, I was working in [a migrant centre] it was very busy day, I got tired. You know, from early morning till five o'clock I worked there, and then, I was coming here. But I got very more positive energy from the group.

Here, the participant contrasts her work day which leaves her feeling tired, to the workshops which have a revitalising effect, giving her 'positive energy'. Similar sentiments were expressed by Lutendo, who said 'when I come here it's like coming to rejuvenate myself, really feeling myself without excuse

because every day of the workshop, every, each time I go, come and learn a new thing.’ In her study on creative arts adult education classes, Pearce (2017) noted the social significance for participants of engaging in group creative activity. Pearce emphasises the bonding that is facilitated by these classes, commenting that ‘Participants generally reported creating friendships, belonging to a group and a sense of support in their classes, both from their tutors and from the other participants’ (p. 49). In fact, this is highlighted by Pearce as a major theme in the data: ‘along with improved mood, gaining a sense of belonging and support was the most frequently mentioned outcome reported by participants’ (p. 54). Similarly, in the course of this research, participants reported that the social role the writing group played in their lives was very valuable to them.

The connections between the members of the writing workshop seemed in the interviews to be central to the feelings of comfort derived from participation. There are two key distinctions between the groups (mentors and participants) that contribute to the relationships taking on a different significance to the participants. Primarily there is the formalised nature of connection between mentor and mentee. Although many participants did consider their mentor a friend, this dimension to their relationship added an element of responsibility on the part of the mentors towards their mentees. Another point of differentiation is that the mentors were largely British, whilst the other participants were fellow refugees and survivors of torture. This meant that while the mentors could play a part in helping the participants adjust to life in the UK, the other participants were of particular importance in making each other feel understood on the topic of shared trauma. Thus, it is necessary to examine these two types of relationship within the community of writers and mentors separately, so as to fully appreciate these divergent

elements. Stickley et al (2018), in their study focusing on creative writing groups of refugees and asylum seekers, noted that: ‘Ultimately, the sense of sanctuary [for the participants] resulted not from the creative writing, but the friendships built amongst participants.’ Certainly, Roj’s comments highlight the transformative power of the relationships within this group setting for his own sense of comfort and wellbeing:

when you come to workshop, somebody takes your hand and says come to the life. Because you are like, you are, you are here. You are also human. Because you are a friend, in communication with the people.

The following sections will explore the relationships participants described having with other attendees of the creative writing groups (6.2.1) and with their mentors (6.2.2).

### **6.2.1 relationships with the other workshop attendees.**

This subsection will focus on the role that the relationship with other participants in the creative writing workshops played in participants’ feelings of comfort within the group. Participants spoke very positively of the welcoming atmosphere amongst participants in the creative writing group. Ruby, who noted that she had been attending the group since 2002, said of the group dynamic: ‘Everyone’s friend. Very supportive of one another which is very good. And you find yourself like as if you are a family. And that’s how we are!’. She connected this feeling of closeness with the fact that she had been attending the group for over fifteen years, and that others had also been attending for long periods, saying: ‘Yeah we have been in a group for a long time, especially me! So we are like a family.’ By contrast, Nadia commented that she was ‘quite new in this group [the writing workshop], so I



haven't any specific connection with members, just I see every two weeks here'. Nevertheless, she commented that she found the social side of the group helpful, and emphasised that it was particularly useful to her as a refugee, saying:

I enjoyed to join this group, actually, because you know, the problem is for – it might be for every refugee or immigrant, because we left our family, friends behind and it might be hard to making new relationship...compare of the past, I'm alone here, you know. I'm a lawyer, I was very busy. If you – if I show you my diary from the past, oh it's – there's nothing, not any space, it's full of number, full of name, full of date, full of – you know, and just thinking about the past, I just – I don't know what I should name these feelings – horrible sometimes. You feel like you are alien here, you know, without any... I have a few family here, but compare of the past, you know, my clients, my friends, and so it's good idea to be in a group, for me.

Here, Nadia directly connects the importance to her of the group relationships with the isolating experience of being a refugee. Refugees are at a particularly high risk for developing mental illnesses such as depression, and as Burnett and Peel (2001) stress, 'Social isolation and poverty have a compounding negative impact on mental health, as can hostility and racism' (p.545). This echoes the comments of the Roj about the isolation of his experience of being a refugee in the UK and how it impacted his own feeling of wellbeing, who noted that when he was on his own was when 'all the past come to my mind, like catch me'. The meaningful connections with other participants in the creative writing group went some way to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation for the people who were interviewed.

### **6.2.2 the mentor/mentee relationship.**

In addition to the relationships with the other refugees in the group, the participants discussed their relationships with their mentors. Each participant would have a mentor with whom they would work to develop their creative pieces. These meetings would take place in addition to the fortnightly workshops. Roj noted that he and his mentor have a 'one to one meeting every week to edit our work.' Sara also spoke about the role of the mentors in particular with helping with grammatical or language issues in writing, saying:

And I have her with me in this difficulty and at the time she helped me to be able to amend the mistakes to be more able to write to be more able to express myself and especially writing in proper English...If I wrote anything in my language, and it had any mistakes in terms of converting to English she was so calm and helpful.

The mentors have a technical function within the bounds of the creative writing workshop. Whilst participants said that this mentoring system was influential to their work, they also explained that the interpersonal relationship with the mentor was very comforting to them. Ruth expanded upon the connection with her mentor and how it went beyond help with her writing, saying:

The relationship between my mentor and I was really close in some points. It was up and down but it was sometimes very close. It was really, she wasn't really just my mentor she, she was trying to be a really central in many ways. To support me, whether it is emotionally, or if I seem lonely, or she makes

plans to go out to see museum or something. She knows I like it, you know? And yeah basically it is close relationship between me and my mentor.

These comments highlight the multifaceted role of the mentor within the group. They fulfil a need beyond support with the creative writing, often acting as a general support and point of contact for their mentees. In particular, Ruth emphasises the non-writing activities she did with her mentor, by bringing up trips to museums as an example. Sara also highlighted the social and emotional element of her relationship with her mentor:

I think that they [the mentors] have different positions. They can be like a lovely mum, a lovely teacher, a great listener a lovely helper and at that time, who can help me with my writing. They fill a different place. My mentor did that for me she listened to all my stories, [my] moaning, and she empathised with me offered someone here being with me, and actually, if she can't do anything she understands what I'm saying.

In these comments, the pastoral responsibility of the mentors for their mentees becomes clear. That the participant first mentioned her mentor as performing a mother-like nurturing function speaks to the extent to which these relationships provide comfort and support. Multiple participants used the image of family to describe their relationships with others in the writing workshops: 'We feel like the family has come back again' (Lutendo); 'you find yourself like as if you are a family' (Ruby). Nadia underscored why this image is particularly significant to them as refugees, noting that 'for every refugee...we left our family, friends behind and it might be hard to making new relationship'. That so many participants referred to the group as being a

surrogate family, and that Sara compared her mentor to a mother figure, reveals the extent to which these relationships provide comfort. This echoes the findings of Stickley et al (2018), who noted that in their interviews with refugees attending creative writing classes: 'Participants described the relationships they had formed because of attending the creative writing group as meaningful and positive; "family-like", there was a sense of recognition and belonging' (p.13). Sara's comments about her mentor helping with writing and language came after the more relationship-focused comments.

When asked about how the mentors were paired with mentees, Sara emphasised the way that the system promoted a feeling of acceptance and belonging for her:

At the beginning I attended the session, I don't know. I didn't have a big part of me with me. I was there, just my body. And so blank and then after the end of the session [mentor] kindly offered to be my mentor and I felt nice, I felt I'd been accepted. And but that acceptance came through the pain. The pain can make it ours together. And we started our work together an hour before the workshop every two weeks. In the beginning, I worked better and then later I felt, I start my studying and being have to write a journal every week didn't let me have my own feeling. I wasn't able to write regularly, especially in the last three years. In the beginning I was more active. But I didn't miss any opportunity with when I could write. And she was so useful, friendly, patient and very accepting.

These comments underscore the way that the mentor relationship is fundamental to the participants' experience within the group. Being asked to be a mentee to a specific person was symbolic of being accepted into the

group when Sara first began attending the sessions. She highlighted the extent to which this helped her emotional state when she said that ‘that acceptance came through the pain’. The relationship between the mentors and mentees can be a source of tremendous comfort to the participants.

This subsection has clarified the ways in which the interpersonal relationships within the creative writing group contribute to feelings of comfort, wellbeing, and belonging for the participants. In order to examine them thoroughly, relationships were divided into two major categories. These were: the relationships amongst participants; and the relationship between participants and their mentors. The findings reveal that the relationship amongst group members can be supportive to the point that it takes on a familial feeling for participants. Moreover, the mentors themselves come to represent a nurturing, almost parental role for some participants. Viewed in the context of the high risk of refugees becoming socially isolated, it is clear that these relationships are very important to the comfort of participants.

### **6.3 The comforting experience of writing and sharing**

Aside from the social role of the group in the lives of participants, the actual act of writing, and in particular sharing that writing with others, was something that participants emphasised in interviews as important to their feelings of comfort in the workshops.

Lutendo stated: ‘I don’t want to speak for others but I think the writing brings us together.’ Stickley et al (2018) noted the importance of the sharing of creative work in their study of refugee creative writing groups: The chance to share their experiences and to “feel heard” was another feature of the writing group that participants valued highly. There was gratitude expressed for the

chance to be listened to, to feel recognised and to feel a sense of belonging that the asylum seekers may have not experienced elsewhere/everywhere. (p.12)

Here, the juxtaposition of the atmosphere within the creative writing groups, and the more hostile reception that can often be received by refugees elsewhere provides a stark contrast. Several participants raised the way that sharing writing amongst the group promoted a sense of closeness and familiarity. Lutendo spoke in detail about the way that hearing the work and stories of others within the group made her feel:

It has huge influence that matter of closeness. Because yeah in my experience it make me to feel more close to that person when he shares or he shares something he's writing. It's very... In some point I can feel them. The way they think. The way they are. You know what I mean?...It feel, oh god, they think like me! You know, it brings that closeness. All of a sudden, yeah. It's nice to share....their real life stories, and it's, oh, I thought it is me only who work through these issues. It's kind of sharing.

Here, it is evident that, for this participant, part of the comfort that is derived from sharing is from seeing her own struggles and experienced reflected in others. This helps to dismantle feelings of isolation, and to promote a sense of understanding between participants. Sara made comments of a similar nature:

Yes, it does [facilitate closeness] actually. I think hearing any member of the group, being more aware of what they passed through made others more aware to find the similarity. I think that similarity makes the strong bond between us. And one thing that I'm recently noticing is we also need to understand

the differences as well, this is something so near that I have been thinking of.

Both of these participants shed light upon the importance of not only sharing their own work in the sessions, but of hearing the work of other attendees. Stickley et al (2018) also noted the significance of refugees listening to the life stories of others in a group creative writing setting:

being able to put into words...those transitions and changes [of seeking asylum] helped them to connect the past and present in a way that helped them make sense of it and come to terms with it. Furthermore, the sharing of these stories and listening to others seemed cathartic and mutually beneficial (p.13).

Sharing creative work which addresses past traumas and the experience of becoming and living as a refugee helped to cement the commonalities in experiences for the participants in the group. As Lutendo explained:

If you look at my experience and take the experience, look at [other attendee]'s experience, ... You pick some lines which are very similar, they might be written in a different way but they mean one thing. This troubling is quite similar. So having that time, hearing that, you see that we are all survivors and we all went through a tough time, and sometimes you get to build your own resilience. And get closer to the group so that know, these people have suffered the way I have suffered.

Here, the participant makes clear the connection between the writing and the traumatic experiences in her and other participants' pasts. Although the group comprises of people from many different countries and cultures, she sees parallels between their experiences leading to becoming refugees in the UK. Stickley et al (2018) noted a similar theme in their data:

They [the participants] felt able to share their life-stories freely and sharing these experiences and making sense of them within a group setting seemed to have the double benefit of helping them come to terms with their histories and having some faith in the present and future (p.15).

The experience of sharing writing amongst the group helped to enable participants to see commonality between their experiences and those of the other people within the group. This was a source of comfort to participants, who had experienced trauma in their lives. The creative writing was a way to approach those shared traumatic experiences within the safe setting of the writing workshops.

In exploring the comforting experience of sharing creative writing within the group, this subsection has addressed research question 3, 'How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of the refugee writers?' by highlighting the way that the writing highlights the mutual experiences of the participants. Not only is the sharing beneficial for the person who is delivering the work, but also for those receiving it. Stickley et al (2018) note the positive impact of such sharing: 'Creative writing groups therefore may offer one way to enable people who have experienced trauma and displacement to move-on, grow, and envision a brighter future' (p. 16). The findings here support this sense of positivity and comfort to be derived specifically from the act of writing and sharing within the group.

#### **6.4 Researching and being researched**

In considering comfort and discomfort within this project, it would be an omission not to consider those feelings within the project itself, that is, among participants, mentors, and researcher. I knew from conversations with the mentors and participants before I began the interview process that I



was far from the first researcher to speak with the group in some capacity. As part of being reflective on the research process, and on best practice and ethics, I was keen to hear participants' thoughts on research, and the feeling of being researched. I am cognisant of the fact that often participants do not get a great deal of input regarding research frameworks. As Temple and Moran (2006) explain:

To date, much research with minority ethnic communities is arguably not 'with' minority ethnic communities, including refugee communities, at all. Refugees are employed because they have particular skills, such as language abilities, and knowledge that can facilitate access. They are not invited to take part in other aspects of research, such as discussing concept differences across languages, looking at their perspectives on issues, setting the research questions, reviewing findings, or writing the report. They cannot challenge the researchers; perspectives. (p. 7)

Hugman, Bartolomei, and Pittaway (2011) also emphasise the necessity to take the opinions of the participants into account when examining research design:

First, in CRR [Centre for Refugee Research] projects refugees are partners, not simply participants. That means the scope of research, how it will be conducted, who will take part, what will be done with the data and findings, and so on, are all negotiated with refugee groups and individuals rather than set in advance by the researchers. (p.661-662)

In keeping with an intersectional feminist approach to research, I have tried to discuss research methods as openly as possible with my participants and

the organisation within which the creative writing group takes place. As Hugman, Bartolomei, and Pittaway (2011) state: participants must have the opportunity to exercise their human agency and to engage as partners in the process' (p.669). At the end of my final interview with each participant, I asked them about their views of the experience of participating in the project, and others with which they had been involved. Participants discussed the varied experience of being involved with research projects, including positive and negative experiences from their past. This subsection will reflect upon participants' comments about the research process in this study, and things that have made them comfortable and uncomfortable when being involved with research projects. In so doing, it will address explore research question 5, "How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?" by considering how participants described their experience of taking part in this study.

Participants emphasised the importance of feeling they knew the person conducting the research for their sense of comfort and wellbeing. Roj, commenting on the fact that I had attended sessions for some time before beginning to conduct interviews, commented 'When you're used to the person, even if you not talk to them, become like your friend. But a lot of sometimes people come for one session you see or two sessions, and you feel uncomfortable to talk to them.' Here, there is a direct contrast between his experience of being interviewed by me, a person he is more familiar with, and previous interviewers with whom he felt less comfortable. The importance of developing a relationship with the researcher prior to interviews was also emphasised by Lutendo, who noted 'Both of us [she and I] we get to know each other, you get to know the atmosphere and the way

we work...and we get to build up something, some sort of relationship and trust.' She went on to connect this trust specifically to the content of the interviews being emotionally charged, 'there must be a trust to talk to you about what I've faced.' Similar comments were made by Nadia: 'I think you make some like a kind of relationship before, and we can trust you more and... Sometimes it's hard to speak to someone you don't know.' This supports the comments made by Dickson-Swift et al (2007):

Qualitative researchers must initiate a rapport-building process from their first encounter with a participant in order to build a research relationship that will allow the researcher access to that person's story...Part of the role of the qualitative researcher is to facilitate participant disclosure. This disclosure can be heightened if there is a level of rapport between researcher and participant. (p. 331)

Ruth, when asked about the importance of a researcher becoming embedded in the writing group prior to conducting research, underscored the necessity of building such a relationship:

Yeah definitely [it is important]. Both of us would get to know each other you get the atmosphere and the way we work you get the idea. And we get to build on something, some sort of relationship some trust. Because to build up that trust there must be a trust to talk to you about what I face. I think... or my opinion about what I think about everything. It must be trust, acceptance [or] I'm not going to talk to this about this with you, you know what I mean?

Ruth's comments here reflect the findings of Holmes (2014), who noted that within the framework of Researching Multilingually, 'trust was critical in gathering *authentic* data' (p. 15).

In discussing the experience of participating in research projects, participants also spoke about previous projects with which they had been involved. Lutendo commented on less positive experiences, stemming from a feeling of not really knowing the person interviewing her:

A complete stranger, asking all these questions, you think that, you know, I'm being used for my information. What is he going to do with this information? What is this person's character? Sometimes you answer, but you are not answering from your heart.

Lutendo went on to underscore the sense of being used in previous research by highlighting her discomfort with a researcher who gave her money in exchange for participating in a project: 'Some of them, they used to give us ten pounds...you feel very used'. The issue of paying participants is a complex one within academic research. As highlighted in section 6.1, I was aware that some participants were struggling financially. There is a school of thought that participants ought to be paid for their time, since researchers benefit, often in their careers, from the data that they provide. This can be seen as a type of 'reciprocal research' (Hugman, Pittaway, Batolomei, 2011, p1279). Temple and Moran (2006) also discuss 'the idea of paying a minimal amount for the time of refugees who take part in research (p.16). The comments made by Ruby, however, highlight the potential pitfalls of this approach. For this participant, the nominal amount given was insulting, because it characterised the relationship between herself and the researcher differently. She felt it cheapened her experiences, saying 'I think that ten

pounds is not even worth the information I'm giving.' Roj also highlighted the way that the sensitive topics of research could exacerbate his feelings of discomfort with unfamiliar researchers:

Yeah, I feel it's not you, but people come, like student. I feel it's uncomfortable. Because you know, you understand people come to you because you're different and you have a problem. Even I have a problem in my life, physical, emotional, psychological – everything. But I come here just for writing, not for... Because I can't go to a lot of place. But mostly I come here for writing. To think of someone, some people maybe make you very comfortable, like talk to you just like everyone. But some people come just like something is like. You know what do you call, animal testing or experiment...And people maybe say – you feel it's... I don't know. You feel like you're crazy or something or different.

In these comments, and the prior discussions of the atmosphere within the group, it is evident that the writing workshops represent an important sanctuary for participants. Unfamiliar people encroaching on that space can cause discomfort. Roj emphasises the negative and alienating experience that can be associated with being researched, when he says 'You [the person being researched] feel like you're crazy or something or different'. His use of the word crazy, a pejorative term for mental health issues, emphasises the way that some research makes him feel stigmatised. Dickson-Swift et al (2007) emphasise the way that researchers must be extremely aware of their position when doing research on sensitive topics. One of the participants they interviewed discussed the sense of responsibility that accompanied doing this type of research:

It is so much more than just signing a form to say that they are willing to offer you information. They are actually allowing you into their lives, they are telling you personal information that might be quite hard, so you need to demonstrate a certain degree of discretion, of respect, of appreciation for what they are doing 'cause the reality is that it is more than just words, it's more than just what you are going to analyse, it's their life, their experience, and you need to make sure that you are aware of that. (p.330)

This highlights the importance of developing trust with the participants in work on sensitive topics. Participants in this thesis did, however, speak positively about their experience of working with me on this project. Prior to beginning interviews, I took part in workshops, writing alongside the participants and sharing my own creative work with them. They told me that my having been an active participant in the workshops myself had been fundamental in my becoming known to the group and their feeling comfortable around me: 'You shared as well, become like one member of our group. That makes a difference yeah' (Roj). Ruby expressed much the same sentiment, saying: 'We felt that you were part of us, and you're really interested in what we're doing... Yeah because we came to know you. As part of the group.' Sara also commented that she felt that my becoming embedded in the group as much as possible was beneficial for both me and the participants, saying:

I think it was a way to get more familiar with the context with the aspect of the work, who you are going to work with. What you need to expect from them in terms of safety-ness for them and yourself. And also readiness for you and also to be trusted. If

I'm thinking if I just met you in the street it's not easy for me to come and talk to you.

Lutendo was particularly keen to explain the contrast between her experience with me working on this project and previous experiences she had had:

You did a good thing. I tell you if you did not come and be with us, me getting used to you. There is a time I let quite a lot of researchers which I participate in them...you are invited to an office, like here you come here, you're not going to see [mentor] you're not going to see anyone from the [charity]...You don't have any trust and any endearment...So when you came...I said Melissa would like to do this. It was really, I think 'I know Melissa'. And we talked about me having to come to the session [for interview], it was like yeah I understand. And when you said you wanted me to be a participant and you wanted to interview me it was really perfect, because I know who is Melissa and I know you so it was perfect. You did actually the good thing.

Here, she not only discusses the significance of knowing me as a person but also of the interviews taking place in an environment familiar to her. She contrasts this with other interviews she has done where she has had to go to an office and has not had the support of an organisation and people known to her.

Another element of the research that I discussed with participants was my participation specifically in the creative writing activities that the group did during workshops. Having considered the way that sharing writing amongst participants affected rapport, here I will consider the way that it affected

participants' perceptions of me as a researcher. Largely participants were very positive about having seen me as a creative writer, as well as a researcher. Lutendo noted that it gave her the impression I was integrated into the group: 'It [my taking part] helped quite a lot... we felt you are part of us. And yeah, really interested in what we are doing.' Sara felt that the process of taking part was also important for my perception of the group and their work as well:

In some of them [methodologies] the researcher...is a participant as well. It helps you to experience the same as the participants do. And it was the best way to get closer to us. To find out, to examine yourself, how difficult it is for you to express right down. To touch pain within you.

The process of sharing my own creative work also brought with it a sense of my own vulnerability as a researcher as well. Whilst I have never experienced anything like the trauma my participants wrote about, my writing did include discussion of sensitive events in my own life history. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) explore the complexities and tensions surrounding researcher self-disclosure. As a method in qualitative research, self-disclosure presents some challenges and concerns, particularly in research pertaining to sensitive topics: 'There was recognition by the researchers in the current study that qualitative research on sensitive topics creates a space for self-disclosure by the researchers that may not be appropriate in other types of research'. (2007, p.332). I did find that I disclosed information about my own life whilst talking with participants in interviews. The following exchange, with Sara, is one example of this:

Sara: I have noticed I do speak in a poetic way. It gets through unconsciously. Because the way I write I just make my



emotions the word. And also the work as well, what I've been [given feedback] on it appears I put a lot of emotional investment in my work with the client, and I found it quite strange but I took it as something as the way I am. So I don't know how to evaluate it but it's me and I can't separate my work with me the way I am. I know they don't give me a good mark for this but I'm ok with that...

Melissa: I had a similar experience – I used to be a teacher and one of the deputy head teachers said to me as feedback “make sure you don't care too much you're just a teacher not a social worker”. And I looked at her and I thought “wow!” that is not my philosophy. I can't not care. I do care and that's human that's good!

Sara: Exactly, and even if for them it's too much but it's the way I can be. If you take me away from that I get lost. Someone who is lost can't care for others so I need to get myself together all aspects of me to learn to be more professional but still me. And still to care...[British people] They get scared of you! If you express your feeling – they think “Wow you have some serious issue! You need to get cured”.

In this discussion, Sara and I shared our past experiences with struggling to separate emotions from professional work. Both of us had found being seen as overly emotional a source of difficulty in some work environments. I was not, at the time, consciously trying to self-disclose in order to create a rapport. Rather, this was the natural flow of the conversation between myself and the participant. I recognise in retrospect, however, that exchanges such as this one will have contributed to the feeling of familiarity

between myself and the participants. One thing I found troubling in some of the literature surrounding self-disclosure was the sense that it was almost a tool simply used to encourage participants to be more forthcoming with their own stories and experiences, because: 'When a research participant feels that they are in a safe place, they may feel more inclined to share some aspects of their lives that they may not have shared previously' (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007, p. 338). For me, engaging in self-disclosure was a way to make participants feel more at ease in the interview settings, and to engage with them as human beings. Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei (2011) discuss 'the notion of reciprocal research' which was pioneered by the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research. This type of research:

operates through establishing a more reciprocal relationship between researchers and participants than might be seen in many forms of research, in that it seeks to create relationships between researchers and participants in which there is a more equal exchange of ideas and of benefits to be gained by being involved in the research project. (p.1279)

I did not seek to be an unknown entity to my participants, but rather to be a person with whom they were comfortable and familiar. Self-disclosure occurred as a natural part of the exchange of ideas and thoughts in our interviews. I would, however, challenge the notion that self-disclosure fulfils 'a need to create some sort of 'level playing field'' (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007, p332). Sharing my experiences with participants is not equivalent to them sharing theirs with me. I was the one recording the exchanges, transcribing them, and turning the resultant data into a thesis. Whilst I feel in this project self-disclosure enabled me to, as Dickson-Swift (2007) note: 'enhance rapport, show respect for the participants and validate the participants'

stories' (p. 332), it is important not to overstate the extent to which it nullifies the power dynamic between researcher and participant, particularly as I was working with vulnerable refugee participants. Nevertheless, these parts of the interviews contributed to a feeling of comfort between myself and the participants, which I feel was essential to the research process. Moreover, in combination with my efforts to adopt an intersectional feminist methodological approach, in which I was not a dispassionate expert figure, but rather embedded in the research context and deferring to the expertise of the participants, I feel that my self-disclosures went some way to contribute to dismantling the distance that can traditionally categorise more traditional relationships between researcher and researched.

This subsection has explored the dynamics of researching and being researched within this project. It is relevant to research question 5, "How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?", in that it considers how best to make refugee participants feel comfortable taking part in a research project. The data revealed a strong theme of participants needing to feel familiar with the researcher as an individual, and that my being an active participant in creative writing with them helped to facilitate this. This is in keeping with Gajparia's (2017) exploration of the importance of the researcher performing emotional labour in intersectional feminist research. My participation in the creative writing and efforts to self-disclose during this study can be seen as elements of emotional labour. Both of these contributed to building rapport with the participants. Conversely, the data also contained accounts from participants of taking part in research projects where they were made to feel uncomfortable, usually due to a lack of familiarity with the researcher themselves, or in the environment in which

the research was conducted. This section has emphasised the way that an intersectional feminist approach can be used to ensure refugee participants feel as comfortable as possible throughout the research project. It was this methodological standpoint encouraged me to participate in the creative writing sessions prior to beginning interviewing, due to its emphasis on researcher reflexivity and emotion (see section 3.2 for further detail).

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has focused on the theme of comfort and discomfort in the data. The four sub-themes that emerged were: the workshop environment and the shared meal; comforting relationships within the group; the comforting experience of writing and sharing; and researching, and being researched. In exploring these subthemes, the chapter has gone some way to address research question 3, 'How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experiences of the refugee writers?' and research question 5, 'How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?'

The subtheme focusing on the atmosphere within the group and the shared meal that took place at the beginning of every writing session highlighted the way that the group is structured in order to provide for the writers taking part. The needs that are met for participants are both physiological, including hunger, and social and emotional, such as a sense of belonging and feeling of family. This section explored the role of sharing food in cementing the social ties between people in the workshops, and considered the way this can be viewed through the prism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943).

The subtheme focusing on relationships was split into two main sections. These were: relationships with other workshop attendees; and the mentor/mentee relationship. The former explored the sense of understanding between participants based on their shared experience of being refugees in the UK. The latter examined the more formalised dynamic between mentors and their mentees within this writing group, and how the mentors fulfilled a nurturing role for the participants that went beyond simply helping with their creative writing and was comprised of a more holistic approach to wellbeing, addressing participants' feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Next, the subtheme on the comforting experience of writing and sharing emphasised the specific benefits of the creative writing within the group in creating a comfortable environment. In it, participants' comments not only about sharing their work, but also about hearing the work of others in the group, highlight the way that the writing can elucidate points of commonality between participants. This is consistent with the findings of Stickley et al (2018) in their work on refugee and asylum seeker creative writing projects.

Finally, in the subtheme on researching and being researched, I considered the presence of comfort and discomfort within this research project. I examined data pertaining to participants' experiences of being involved in research, both positive and negative. Participants emphasised the importance of feeling comfortable around the researcher in order to speak about delicate issues. In exploring this sense of comfort, I also reflected on my participation in the creative writing tasks during the workshops I attended, and my use of self-disclosure in interviews. Overall, these elements amplify the significance of a close bond of trust between

researcher and participant in order to obtain data that can be considered authentic (Holmes, 2014) and therefore trustworthy.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I first summarise the main study. This section (7.1) examines how the research questions have been addressed. Following this, I will explore the implications of this study (7.2). Subsequently, I will consider the limitations of this study (7.3), and then directions for future research (7.4). The chapter ends with my final remarks regarding this study (7.5).

### **7.1 Summary of the main study**

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of refugee creative writers in a creative writing group. There is a lack of research exploring the specific experiences of writers who have experienced becoming refugees, and those that do exist (e.g. Baraitser, 2014; Pearce, 2017) often do not explore in detail the linguistic and emotional complexities encountered by writers who have been forcibly displaced from their country of origin, and the loss of their former linguistic and cultural landscape entailed in this separation. Those studies that explore the emotional experiences of multilingual writers in more depth (e.g. Chow 2014; Pavlenko, 2005) do not necessarily focus on the creative writing experiences specifically of refugees, nor of the significance of a creative writing group in this context. This study explores their experiences both of the writing process and of being part of the group. This study adds to the body of work on second language creative writing; creative writing groups; refugee authors; and on experiences of refugees in the current UK context. In synthesising these interconnected topics, and exploring them through the lens of intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), this work has

provided an in-depth exploration of the tensions that arise where these areas converge. It is a study which occupies a liminal space between the boundaries of the areas of comparative literature, refugee studies, and intercultural communication. In so doing, it fills the lacunae in the established literature of a holistic view of the experiences of refugee writers, taking into account the factors that influence their emotional experience of the writing process. These include: the language in which the writing is produced; the influence of a writing group as a 'safe space'; and the wider socio-political context of both the host country and their country of origin.

Through an exploration of the way that refugee writers go through the creative writing process, linking the concepts of language, performance, and (dis)comfort, this study adds to the body of knowledge about the way refugees experience the creative writing process, and has implications for creative arts support for refugees. To better illuminate the complex elements that contribute to this experience, this study has drawn upon the body of literature relating to theories of intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) and epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007). Intersectional feminism has provided the theoretical and methodological framework for this research, which means that the participants' experiences can be understood within the wider context of social power dynamics.

The methodology of this study is qualitative and adopts a social constructionist standpoint. It is informed by the theory of intersectional feminism, meaning that I have sought to take into account the multi-layered structures of societal oppression that affect the participants and take them into consideration when conducting the research and analysing the data. The oppression experienced by participants includes, but is not limited to: racism; sexism; ableism; and xenophobia. Nevertheless, within the context



of the creative writing group, they built a supportive network that had a positive influence on their experience of writing. Moreover, through the wider performance of their creative work, they were able to resist dominant media narratives that stereotype refugees. The primary data collected for this study included: 12 interviews (2 each with 6 writers from the group); 7 pieces of creative writing by the participants; and field notes from the writing workshops I attended with the group (including the 6 months spent building rapport prior to beginning interviews). Secondary data includes published work by refugee writers Warsan Shire (2011) and Adnan Mahmutovic (2012), along with interviews in which they took part. In my analysis I have drawn on the combined primary data, whilst the secondary data was used to further illuminate the findings by providing a point of comparison with the comments of the participants. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis. Through this, major umbrella themes and smaller sub themes emerged. The major themes were: language: explored in chapter 4; performance, discussed in chapter 5; and comfort and discomfort, considered in chapter 6.

### **Research Question 1**

What resources (e.g. linguistic, cultural) of refugee writers influence their experience of the creative writing process?

This research question was primarily addressed in Chapter 4, which focused on the large, umbrella theme of language within this study. By exploring participants' comments about their linguistic repertoires, along with instances of multilingualism influencing their writing, this chapter delved into the richness of writing by multilingual authors. The findings showed that

participants' language background remained influential on their creative work even when they were writing in English.

The data revealed that participants encountered feelings of frustration and/or liberation associated with writing creative work in English. The sense of frustration often stemmed from either participants feeling they did not have a wide enough vocabulary in English to express the sentiments they wished to convey, or from a feeling of being emotionally disconnected from English as a language compared to their other language resources. In addition to the interviews with participants, published interviews with the Somali-British poet, Warsan Shire (Shire, 2013, March 18; June 21; September 4), and Bosnian refugee author, Adnan Mahmutovic (2015), were used to illustrate this phenomenon. In this way, the participants felt stifled by the fact that they were not always able to use their linguistic resources to their full extent. Their sense of having limited resources in English, such as vocabulary, compounded the feelings of frustration some participants experienced during the creative writing process.

Conversely, feelings of liberation came from some participants' perspectives on English as possessing less cultural dogma for them than their other languages. In particular, some participants connected feelings of distress around using their other languages with their experiences leading to their becoming refugees. Some participants pointed out that for them, traumatic experiences such as torture had occurred in their other languages. Thus, in certain circumstances, using English provided a necessary emotional distance for individuals seeking to address sensitive emotional topics in their creative writing. In this way, having access to English as a linguistic resource allowed participants to write creatively about topics relating to traumatic incidents from their own lives from a place of greater

emotional distance than would have been possible in some of their other languages.

These findings resonate with previous work in this area. The work of Pavlenko (2005) describes this dichotomy between positive and negative feelings for writers associated with writing in a language that is not the 'mother tongue', whilst Dewaele and Costa (2017) considered the effects of emotional distancing by using a language other than the first within the specific context of therapy. This study has advanced this concept by exploring it specifically within the context of refugee speakers for whom certain languages may have connotations of violence and trauma. As the participants for this study were all survivors of torture, their experiences are an example of the way that multilingual language users react to situations of extreme pain and pressure. Moreover, the findings of this study assert that the relationship between participants' feelings of frustration and that of liberation was not a dichotomy but rather a duality. Rather than it being the case that participants fell into a category of either considering English a source of frustration or one of liberation, one person might fluctuate between these states, or indeed experience both at the same time. Roj expressed that English made him feel he could not fully express himself poetically, but also acknowledged the opportunity English presented him as a resource for engaging a wider readership for his work. Lutendo noted the value of English for enabling her to better articulate her experience of being tortured, but also acknowledged her annoyance at not being able to draw upon the rich cultural resource of proverbs she had in her other languages.

The findings also revealed that many participants felt pressure to make their writing sound 'more English'. This included both functional linguistic structures, such as grammatical correctness, and more cultural

elements, such as the use of poetic imagery that could be jarring to an English reader (see Roj's example of 'mountain fly' in section 4.3). Examined through the lens of intersectional feminism, this can be seen in the context of 'native' speakers possessing a level of privilege associated with that status, and the emotional labour that is often implicitly demanded of 'non-native' speakers in expecting them to express themselves in an 'English' way. Rather than expecting readers to make the effort to accept different images or sentence structures than those with which they might be familiar, the onus was on the writers to remove cultural and linguistic 'markers' from their work. Although they noted feeling conscious of the way that 'English people' (in Roj's words) might perceive their work, the participants expressed resistance to conforming to a monolingual, monocultural style of writing. This was achieved, for example, through the use of imagery in their work that drew upon their cultural background rather than the English context. For examples of this, see Lutendo's explanation of the significance of the symbol of an owl in her work as a bad omen in African folklore in section 4.3.

The sentiments expressed by participants about the pressure to conform to an 'English' style of creative writing echo Gramling's (2016a) research in which he deliberately applies the word 'passing', frequently used in LGBT and race theory, to the idea of language. This research amplifies and extends those studies by considering how this phenomenon can be viewed as a part of overarching systemic structures of marginalisation. In this work, the concept of writers feeling the need to sound more 'English' (both in written and spoken dialogue, as well as creative work) is contextualised through the use of intersectional feminist theory. In this way, the pressure to sound 'more English' can be viewed as an extension of the implicit societal

prejudice that Holliday (2005, 2015) has recognised as ‘native speakerism’. Moreover, this study has applied this concept (originally applied to the domain English language teaching) to the broader context of prejudice surrounding accents and modes of expression.

Another facet of this question was addressed by the findings surrounding the concept of poetical language. Participants found there was a specific tension in trying to negotiate between their different language resources when writing creatively in terms of different expectations and ideas surrounding the concept of literary writing in their cultures as opposed to the prevalent perception of such writing in the context of these writing workshops. For example, Ruth raised the issue that in Farsi, there is a separate vocabulary for poetic writing. The lack of a similar structure in English was jarring to her. This study has opened up the opportunity for exploration of the creative gaps between literary traditions in different cultures, and the way that these gaps may be explored as creative opportunities rather than obstacles.

## **Research Question 2**

How do participants view their own work produced as part of the creative writing process?

This question was primarily addressed in chapter 5 on the topic of performance. However, some light was also shed on this research question in chapter 4 on language.

Chapter 4 explored the interaction between participants’ views of their creative writing and their own emotional and political experiences in their different languages. Participants spoke about their experiences of becoming

refugees, and the connotations different languages held for them as a result. Participants commented on some of the potential advantages they perceived as a result of writing in English. Some viewed their work in English as a means of reaching a wider audience than their work in their other languages. Moreover, others noted, in a similar way to the writer Adnan Mahmutovic, that for them English felt more politically neutral, allowing them to cast off some of the baggage they felt when working in other languages. This exploration highlighted the way that some participants considered their creative work as a means of giving testimony about their experiences. This sense of testimony came to the forefront of the findings, however, when explored in Chapter 5, on performance. Here, the participants' views of their work could be considered in two major categories. The first is its significance for them personally, and the second is its significance for audiences and the wider world. The findings showed that the emotional resonance of producing and performing the creative writing was directly related to participants' experiences of becoming refugees. Participants spoke about their feelings around their writing in context of issues of censorship and persecution in their home countries, and how this gave them a feeling of responsibility with regard to sharing their experiences with the general public in the UK.

### **Research Question 3**

How does the community of writers and mentors influence the experience of the refugee writers?

This research question was addressed in chapter 6, which explored the comfort participants derived from the creative writing community developed by the group in which this research was conducted. It builds on work by

Pearce (2017) in considering the complexity of the relationship dynamics within creative writing groups for refugees. The findings of this study were divided into three categories: the structure of the writing workshops and how it added to a sense of security for the participants; the relationships participants had with other refugees in the group; and the specific relationship between the mentors who ran the groups and their mentees.

The structure of the workshops was found to be a source of stability and comfort to participants. The shared meal and introductions amongst the group helped to cement the bond between the people in attendance. Moreover, having a regular, scheduled meeting time with familiar people helped to combat the feelings of social isolation described by some participants as part of their experience of living as a refugee.

Relationships with other participants who were also refugees were extremely important to the participants' experience of being part of the group. Participants spoke about the feelings of support amongst the writers, and the way that connecting with other people who had similar experiences to them in terms of being tortured and becoming refugees was comforting in that they felt they were understood.

The influence of the mentorship system on participants' experiences was an important factor in the creation of a community atmosphere. Participants connected the mentors with a sense of belonging. The mentors fulfilled a role that went far beyond the supervision and editing of the participants' creative writing. The mentors were a nurturing, caring figure in the lives of participants. They were able to support participants in different areas of their lives outside of the workshops, and acted as a point of contact when participants were struggling with feelings of loneliness.

Overall, the community of writers and mentors was fundamental in creating the supportive environment that enabled participants to write about personal and traumatic topics in a safe space. It was this community that was the backbone of the writing sessions, and which meant that the impact of the fortnightly workshops reverberated throughout the lives of the writers.

#### **Research Question 4**

What feelings do refugee writers have about performing their writing, and how do linguistic and cultural factors influence these feelings?

Research question 4 came to the surface in Chapter 5, which explores the theme of performance that emerged from the data. This included both informal performances within the writing group setting, and formal performances to the wider public.

The first finding relating to this question was that participants expressed feelings of trepidation specifically about the way they might be perceived by English audiences. This connected to the findings in Chapter 4 on the topic of language, relating to the pressures participants felt to make their work seem more 'English'. In performance, however, there was an added feeling of pressure and vulnerability due to the presence of factors such as the accent and voice of the writer, as well as being physically present on a stage. It was in performance that participants' feelings of being othered as refugees were most evident. Roj spoke about his concern that because of his status as a 'non-native' speaker that his performances would not be enjoyable for 'English people'. Sara explained that she felt people in the UK responded negatively when she spoke about her traumatic experiences: 'They get upset because it's too much on them. And straight



away they remind you, bear in mind you are breaching the boundary. You are not allowed to touch us because we want to live in a safe environment.’ Her metaphor of touch highlights the physical immediacy that comes from speaking in front of people, as opposed to writing.

Another dimension of the findings that answered this research question was that of participants discussing their feelings of responsibility surrounding the performance of their work. The participants linked this directly with their identity as refugees, and the way that work like theirs might be censored in their home country, or that others who had expressed dissident views might have been unable to leave and get refugee status. Participants felt they had a duty to use their creative work as a means of providing testimony to wider audiences about the experiences that led to their becoming refugees.

Finally, participants’ views on performing their writing were connected with their perception of the public discourse surrounding refugees in the UK. Participants were aware of xenophobic pieces of media portraying refugees in an unfavourable light. They viewed performing their writing as a means of connecting with the public and defying negative stereotypes about refugees. They felt that performance was a means of reaching a wider audience with their writing and connecting emotionally with people outside of the group. As Lutendo highlighted:

one [audience member] confessed that ‘I thought refugee were just here to collect our money and go with it’. Yet when he heard our experience, and he heard us speak in public, he took that pain...that night he said to us ‘now I understand what it is to have that title refugee.’

In this way, performance of creative work was a way for the participants to share their experiences with people who might not otherwise have been receptive to their narratives.

### **Research Question 5**

How can an intersectional feminist framework be applied to accommodate research with multilingual refugee participants and multimodal data?

This question is best divided into two components. The first is the way that an intersectional feminist framework can be effective in research working with multilingual refugee participants, and the second is how this framework can account for the presence of multimodal data.

The complexities of working with multilingual refugee participants were primarily addressed in Chapter 4 on language, and chapter 6 on (dis)comfort. Although the data was primarily in English, participants' other language resources influenced their writing and were at the forefront of my conversations with them. This study prioritised the building of a close rapport between the researcher and participants as vital to the collection of meaningful interview data on emotionally sensitive topics. In so doing, however, I was limited by my own linguistic resources, which do not extend to the many languages available to the participants. The intersectional feminist research framework hinges on a position of humility and trust on the part of the researcher in relation to the participants. This was particularly important for this study, as I did not possess the same linguistic resources as the participants. They were the experts on their languages and writing, and so they brought the richness of their understandings and interpretations to the discussion. For this to work, it was essential to abandon any notion of

the researcher as expert prior to beginning the fieldwork. Thus, when encountering data that might include words or concepts from languages unfamiliar to me as a researcher, it was my responsibility to ask participants for clarification and independently research these between interviews. It was important not to allow my linguistic limitations to constrict the discussions available. For example, when Roj drew upon a phrase in Iraqi Arabic, I endeavoured to understand the meaning. To do so, during the interview I prompted Roj to explain what he meant by 'min al-duruurii an takuun futuuhaat' [من الضروري ان تكون فتوحات]. Following this, I consulted with two speakers of Arabic (one of whom was another researcher within the Researching Multilingually at Borders project, and the other of whom was a fellow student at my college) in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the words Roj had used. Finally, using the combined information from these sources, I researched the cultural connotations of the phrase in the literature. In this way, even though I am not a speaker of Arabic, I was able to explore the meaning and significance of this phrase in chapter 4. Further to this, I also attempted to use words and phrases from unfamiliar languages in some of my own creative writing, in order to better empathise with the experiences of the participants. An example of this can be seen in Appendix A.

That the participants were refugees meant that they could be considered, in research terms, vulnerable. Moreover, in discussing their writing, we touched on sensitive topics including suicide ideation, rape, and torture. The findings showed that the participants considered my being embedded within the writing workshops as essential to enabling these frank and delicate discussions to happen with trust. They discussed other research projects they had been involved in, in which they had to speak with someone

unfamiliar to them, and how this made them feel uncomfortable and not necessarily able to give detailed honest answers to questions. That this research was conducted within an organisation that was known to participants was also important in ensuring their comfort, as participants spoke about other projects involving going to new locations as being another factor that increased feelings of uneasiness. The workshop organisers have worked hard to create a safe space for all attendees, and so going to those was fundamental in establishing a rapport with the participants. I attended the sessions for 6 months prior to beginning the formal interview process, and all of the participants noted that this was helpful in making them feel more comfortable speaking to me.

The role of multimodal data came to the foreground in chapter 4 on language. For this project, 'traditional' data, such as interviews and field notes, is analysed alongside pieces of participants' creative writing in order to shed light on the complexities of the writing process. I found that exploring the creative work itself enhanced my analysis of the interview data. It was, however, essential to discuss the themes of the creative work with the authors themselves during the interviews. This is part of the research framework that prioritises the participants as the experts, both on their languages and cultures as well as their creative writing. The data revealed that there were elements in the writing of which I would not have understood the cultural connotations had it not been for the guidance of the participant authors themselves.

My own participation in the creative writing also took a significant role both in the building of rapport with my participants and also as a form of reflection on the themes that emerged from the data. Two of the poems I wrote in response to this study can be found in Appendix A. I performed

these works at Newcastle Literary Salon in May 2017 in order to gain further insight into the embodied experience of performance as described by the participants. In this way, I also contributed to the production of multimodal data for this study. My own creative work, however, occupies a different location to that of the participants. Rather than providing insight into theoretical issues, it sheds light on the way that researchers can use creative writing in order to explore themes that emerge from their fieldwork, and to develop rapport with participants in a creative arts context.

The other element to the multimodal data was the inclusion of creative writing by and interviews with refugee authors outside of the participants of this study. In chapter 4, this was used to enhance the understanding of the participants' views on writing. The work and comments of Warsan Shire (2011) and Adnan Mahmutovic (2012) provided a vital point of comparison with participants' comments, emphasising commonalities in their experiences as refugee writers. These can be considered as a separate, secondary strand of data, complementing but never superseding the participants' works and comments in the interviews. The most similar example to this strategy that I have found in the literature is that of Shay's (1994) work on the experiences of Vietnam veterans. In it, the narratives of the veterans he interviewed are displayed alongside extracts from *The Iliad*. In a similar way to the way that Shay uses *The Iliad* to elucidate the comments of the veterans, I have used the comments and work of Shire and Mahmutovic to underscore and expand upon the themes highlighted by participants in their work and the interview data.

## **7.2 Implications**

The following section details the wider implications arising from this study. First I consider the theoretical implications (7.2.1). Here, I will analyse the ways that this study has engaged with the theoretical framework of intersectional feminism and creative arts research, and the extent to which this was useful in the project. Following this, I will discuss the methodological implications emerging from the contributions of this thesis (7.2.2). This will demonstrate the manner in which this thesis was conducted and how it can inform methodologies and best practice for similar work in future. Finally, the social implications of this work will be considered (7.2.3). In this section, I will explore the implications this study has when examined within the wider context of the lives of refugees in the UK and creative arts practice.

### **7.2.1 theoretical implications.**

The theoretical implications of this study are related to the intersectional feminist framework (see section 3.2 for further discussion) applied to this work and the way that it can be applied to different aspects of research with refugees. This section will consider the ways that the study benefitted from this framework, and also its limitations as an interpretive device.

The framework of intersectional feminism as originally envisaged by Crenshaw (1989; 1991) was central to the conception and execution of this research. It informed the research framework as well as the collection and analysis of the data. The implications of this study for the field of intersectional feminist research are in two major areas. These are: the application of intersectional feminism to better understand linguistic hegemonies; and the concept of 'passing' as a 'native' speaker as being a fundamental part of systemic oppression.

This study took the concept of intersectional feminism (which examines the intersecting and overlapping axes of systemic oppression, including racism, sexism, and ableism) and applied it to the experiences of refugee creative writers. The ways this highlighted the tensions in the creative writing experiences of the participants were as follows. It emphasised the implicit expectation that participants would modify their expression to better fit the abstract concept of ‘an English speaker’. This not only affected the way they felt about their accents when speaking and performing but extended beyond spoken language and into the creative work. It supplanted ideas of the flexibility of creative writing as compared to writing solely for communication purposes. Participants expressed concerns about whether their writing had correct grammar, and whether they would be understood by English audiences. Here, the concept of ‘native-speakerism’ as described by Holliday (2005; 2015) intersects with the status of English as a global language in a way that can be overly prescriptive to people who use English in ‘non-standard’ ways. Understood through the lens of intersectional feminism, this subtle and implicit bias towards ideas of ‘correct’ language can be seen as an element of cultural imperialism.

Although participants were clearly concerned with the concept of ‘correct’ English, this did not detract from the overwhelmingly positive experience they reported of the creative writing workshops. This study contributes to the body of work around the opportunities presented by creative writing groups for people who are marginalised in society (Kagan & Duggan, 2011; Stickley et al, 2018). Participants found the environment and structure of the writing group to be a supportive influence in their lives. This research has explored in depth a concept mentioned in Gramling’s (2016a) work *The Invention of Monolingualism*. In it, Gramling adopts the

term 'passing', which has its origins in race and LGBT studies, and applies it to 'non-native' speakers of a language. This is to say, some people who speak and write English as an additional language might do so in a way that allows them to be taken as a 'native' speaker by listeners and readers. The framework of intersectional feminism highlights the privilege associated with the position of being, or being viewed as, a 'native' speaker. Those whose speech or writing is 'marked' as 'non-native' may be exposed to prejudice as a result of this. Having an accent that is viewed as foreign has even been linked to being the victim of hate crimes in the UK (Burnett, 2017; Virdee & McGeever, 2018). In applying the concept of passing to language, this study also dissects the constructs of the 'native' and 'non-native' speaker. Just as within gender and race studies, the notion of passing underscores the fluidity of race and gender in real life as opposed to their more rigid social constructs, so it does to the concept of the 'native' speaker. Much like gender, being a 'native' speaker is not an inherent state of being but rather a type of performing language. For those for whom English is an additional language, this performance requires more input of emotional labour (Hochschild, 2003) than it does for those for whom English is their first language (Cutler, 2014). The cultural imperialism that plays in to this dynamic is clear in the way that different 'English' accents are received and interpreted. One participant mentioned being complimented on the level of her English, but explained to me that she grew up speaking English from when she attended kindergarten. The implicit assumption that having a Zimbabwean accent indicates being less able to communicate in English than, for example, an American or Australian one, is an example of implicit prejudice on the part of the person who made the comment. Whilst as a standalone incident, the interaction may seem relatively inconsequential, the



framework of intersectional feminism and the use of narrative analysis in this study helps to contextualise it within the greater structural inequalities faced by the participants.

This is not to say that intersectional feminism is a framework with no drawbacks or challenges in research. As a framework, intersectional feminism can put individuals into rigid categories that do not reflect the multiplicity and richness of human experience. Moreover, traditional interpretations of intersectional feminism can oversimplify complex issues by viewing them through only the lenses of race, gender, and social class. As a framework which has its origins in the United States of America, some of the literature has a US-centric perspective that risks erasing other cultures. Moreover, the framework can have a danger of essentialising identities such as 'woman', 'black', or 'refugee' in a way that unhelpfully generalises lives which are extremely varied. Nevertheless, the spirit of humility and openness that is provided by the intersectional feminist framework can also open research up to possibilities that would be excluded by a more traditional approach which might emphasise the position of the researcher as a dispassionate expert. Moreover, within this research, this framework has encouraged me to reflect carefully on my own positioning in relation to the topics discussed, and was instrumental in formulating my approach to building rapport with the participants.

### **7.2.2 methodological implications.**

The methodological implications of this study relate to three key areas. These are: undertaking sensitive research and working with vulnerable participants; how to approach multimodal data and creative arts research; and researcher reflexivity and empathy. All of these implications are

informed by the intersectional feminist narrative methodological framework I adopted for this study.

There are several methodological implications relating to best practice when undertaking sensitive research and research with vulnerable participants to be derived from this research due to the in-depth discussions with participants on their experience of participating in research projects, including, but not limited to, this study. Moreover, within the field of sensitive research, this project specifically contributes to the body of literature surrounding best practice when working with refugee participants such as the work of Temple and Moran (2006), and Hugman Pittaway and Bartolomei (2011).

Participants spoke in detail about the importance of feeling that they knew me as an individual prior to undertaking the interview process. I attended the writing workshops for six months prior to beginning interviews, which allowed me to build a rapport with the participants. Investing time in this at the outset of the project was essential in giving the opportunity to develop a genuine relationship between researcher and participants. The need for rapport building in qualitative research, particularly in research involving vulnerable groups such as refugees, has been explored in previous studies (Dickson-Swift James & Liamputtong, 2007; Rubin and Rubin 2012). The complexities of rapport building in intersectional feminist research, along with the power dynamics between the researcher and participants, have been considered in detail by Gajparia (2017), who uses the term 'capitalising on rapport' to emphasise the tensions and guilt felt by intersectional feminist researchers in using emotional labour to create rapport with participants with the end goal of completing a project such as a doctoral thesis. This project, however, adds to the body of knowledge by exploring the specific dynamics

of conducting research with refugee participants (Hugman, Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2011; Hynes, 2003; Temple & Moran, 2006). Moreover, by explicitly discussing the research methods with participants, this project sheds light on the ways that some accepted research practices can be problematic in context. In particular, the fact that one participant raised being paid a nominal amount of ten pounds in exchange for taking part in an interview for another project as insulting highlights the care and sensitivity required on the part of researchers working with refugee participants. Temple and Moran (2006) allude to paying a small amount to refugee participants in exchange for their time taking part in research (p.16). For that participant in their study, however, a bond of trust between herself and the researcher within which she could share her thoughts freely was far more important than monetary compensation for her time. This is not to say that this should be applied across the board to all research projects, but rather to underscore the concept of 'reciprocal research' (Hugman, Pittaway & Barolomei, 2011, p1279) as a multidimensional concept that should be considered carefully when applied to work with refugees.

Another specific methodological contribution of this study with relation to the building of rapport between researcher and participants is that of the social cohesion and bonding facilitated by engaging in creative arts alongside participants. During the fieldwork, I took an active role in the writing classes, sharing some of my own creative writing with the group. Participants spoke positively about this, stating that it helped them to feel that they knew me better. The act of the researcher engaging in creative work alongside participants being a means of fostering a better connection with them is one of the key methodological implications of this study. The role of researcher creativity in communicating with participants when researching in

a creative arts context has been explored in the context of the research on mentoring by Bennetts (2010). This study reinforces and develops Bennetts' assertion that engaging creatively with participants is useful as a strategy for building rapport. Moreover, this study, unlike Bennetts', has specifically focused on creative writing, and the way that it can be a form of researcher self-disclosure in order to facilitate productive researcher/participant discussions in the context of doing what Dickson-Swift (2007) describes as 'sensitive research'. By self-disclosure, I refer to the elements of my own life and personal experiences I revealed to the participants through my creative work. These contributed to the building of a rapport between us.

This project has added to the body of knowledge about how researchers should approach projects with multimodal data involving creative arts, in particular when participants are in some way marginalised by society. The methodology of this study resists an approach influenced by Barthes (1968), which would entail analysing the creative work of participants without input from the authors themselves. Instead, the methodology applied here continually asserts the validity and significance of the authors' own interpretations and intentions surrounding their writing. Drawing upon the work of Burke (2010), which highlights the necessity of acknowledging authorial identity and intent, this study demonstrates the way that this theory may be applied in an intersectional feminist framework. By highlighting and appreciating the participants' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the influence these have had on their writing, this project asserts the need for the voices of marginalised groups to be amplified and respected in the research context.

Further to this, in its combination of more 'traditional' qualitative data sources such as the interview transcripts and notes from my observations of

the writing workshops with more creative forms of data, such as poetry by the participants, this study has implications for the way that researchers can approach narrative analysis that incorporates such diverse sources. Building on the concept of shared narrative found in Shay (1994) and Wells (2011), this study has demonstrated the way that creative work can be used to better understand the experiences of participants.

### **7.2.3 Social and pedagogical implications**

In addition to the theoretical and methodological implications outlined above, this study has a number of social and pedagogical implications. These relate to: the societal function of creative arts programmes; and best practice in the implementation of effective support networks for refugees. I hope that this study might inform practitioners running creative writing workshops, and those working directly with refugees. Moreover, the findings of this study have implications for policy in terms of funding and supporting arts projects and integrating refugees into their new communities.

The findings of this study emphasise the multitude of benefits brought about by creative writing workshops. The participants universally reported finding the workshops enjoyable and valuable. This study demonstrates that such workshops play an integral role in developing a sense of community for participants, as well as giving them a space in which they can explore difficult emotions and memories whilst feeling secure and supported. The organisation's conscious effort to make the location of the workshops a 'safe space' emotionally for participants was fundamental to the success of the programme. This, alongside the mentorship system, resulted in workshops that were fruitful creatively and socially.

The central role of the mentor figure in the accounts of the participants also has implications for wider creative writing programmes. The participants all spoke positively about the influence of their mentor not only on their work, but on their life as a whole. The mentors played a significant holistic role in helping the participants with issues outside of their writing. In keeping with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, the mentors ensured that participants' psychological and safety needs were met, so that feelings of belonging and esteem could follow. This was especially essential due to the participants' status as refugees, and as survivors of torture. Participants spoke of loneliness as an issue that affected their lives, and the mentors being fundamental in combatting that. This study would promote the mentoring system of creative writing teaching, with the caveat that the mentor must be prepared, in some instances, to provide support that does not directly relate to the writing.

The findings of this study would also support the assertion that creative writing workshops can be used as a springboard for public engagement. Participants spoke powerfully about their experiences of performing their work to the wider public, and engaging with audiences about issues of migration, racism, and the refugee experience. The context of creative arts can give a different perspective to mainstream media coverage of social issues, and creative writing workshops can be used to empower and amplify the voices of people whose narratives may otherwise be marginalised in the public discourse. Thus, creative writing workshops can fulfil an important role in social justice and intersectional feminism.

The implications of this study also extend to how support networks may best be established and maintained for refugees in the UK. The participants underscored the importance of the writing workshops in helping

them not only with their creative work, but also with settling into their lives in Britain. They commented on the importance of meeting with fellow refugee survivors of torture, whom they felt could best understand their own experiences.

### **7.3 Limitations of the study**

In keeping with the intersectional feminist approach of this research, it is important to consider my own identity in relation to hegemonic structures. Whilst I have worked hard to try to dismantle my own internalised prejudices, I must acknowledge that I am a relatively privileged white, British woman, and there may be things I have been unable to fully comprehend in my participants' narratives. I have no first-hand experience of having personally experienced racism, for example. This is not to say that studies can only be conducted by people whose experiences mirror that of their participants, but rather to recognise the level to which my privilege removes my lived experiences from those of the participants. I have endeavoured to minimise this limitation, and have been fortunate while completing this study to have access to other researchers within the Researching Multilingually at Borders project who have experiences of being an ethnic minority within the UK. Further to this, although my participants all mostly spoke and wrote in English, there may have been missed opportunities where, had I had language repertoires more similar to theirs, we could have communicated more effectively. I speak English and an intermediate level of French, but the latter was not a language used by any of my participants. I was able, however, to draw upon my own experiences as a language learner in order to empathise with the experiences of writing in English described by the participants.

#### **7.4 Directions for future research**

This study has underscored the need for more research that explores the complexities of creative writing for multilingual individuals who have experienced trauma. Future research could further add to the already existing scholarship in these areas.

One area which would particularly benefit from further consideration by researchers in this field is the construction of creative writing which is itself multilingual, for example involving moving between languages within the text. This study has touched upon this topic in its exploration of the work of Warsan Shire, but as the participants mostly wrote almost entirely in English, there is room for this concept to be explored in far more depth in another study. Although some studies of multilingual literature exist, these are rare and often do not include direct engagement with the writers (Gardner-Chloros & Weston, 2015; Weston & Gardner-Chloros, 2015).

Another direction in which future research would be valuable is that of the impact of the researcher engaging in creative arts alongside participants as a means of building rapport. Although this study has explored the phenomenon with reference to creative writing, it would be worthwhile to explore the ways this effect varies in different contexts and when the art in question is something other than writing, such as more visual arts.

As I have mentioned in the section on limitations, as a white British woman there are elements of the participants' experiences I am extremely removed from in my own life. Studies in this area would benefit from the addition of autoethnography by researchers who are themselves refugees. Moreover, as my own language repertoire was a limitation of the study, research done by multilingual researchers who were themselves able to



move between languages alongside participants would be of value. In order to do this, a study would likely have to employ a wider number of researchers than was possible in this doctoral study, or focus on refugees who all shared a similar linguistic background.

### **7.5 Final remarks**

By exploring the experiences of refugees participating in a creative writing group using an intersectional feminist framework, this study has contributed to several elements of both practice and research. Primarily, it has demonstrated how refugee writers conceptualise their complex relationship with their linguistic and cultural resources within the context of the UK. This has significant implications both for researchers and professionals working with this group.

Further to this, the study has explored the relationship dynamics within creative writing groups for refugees. In investigating the way that both peer and mentor relationships offered support to the participants of this study, this research has implications both for those running similar creative writing groups, and for academics seeking to better understand this style of creative writing teaching.

In highlighting the role that performance played in the lives of participants as a means of resisting negative media depictions of refugees, this study can contribute to the body of work on social justice that seeks to reduce structural inequalities.

I could not have predicted when I began this study in 2014 the way that the discourse around refugees and immigrants in the UK would shift. In the wake of the rise in anti-refugee sentiment, this study is important in

highlighting the narratives and experiences of people living within and most affected by this context, namely the refugees themselves.

## Appendix A: Poetry

### Untranslatable

My words are sticky on my tongue  
I've had one between my teeth  
For three years. I can't seem to shift it.  
I've worried it, constantly  
But I never spit it out.  
Maybe it doesn't exist in the boundaries of English,  
I'm feeling Fernweh, homesick,  
For a language I never spoke.  
I worry this is an act of Tingo,  
I'm borrowing words I'll never relinquish  
Tied up in English  
But feeling l'appel du vide  
Linguistically speaking  
I want to throw myself off of English.  
I have sehnsucht for a sense of  
Dépaysement.  
I guess I'll settle for a sort of  
Kintsugi of my sentences  
Language alchemy  
Filling the gaps with gold.

## Hame

Hame, hyem, a noun,

Home, place of family

Comfort, sanctuary.

From Scandinavian

And Old English.

I learned, in stages

To distrust my dialect.

A deep discomfort that

Began when a teacher

Mocked my "posh voice".

I was eight years old

And had not realised

That girls are punished for being heard.

My mother went to war over that one,

But I never forgot the feeling that my voice

Was somehow wrong.

Ten years later, a girl from Essex

Would make me feel ashamed for my language,

Demanding I clip the wings of my vocabulary

So she would not have to hear the beat of unfamiliar words.

She travelled three hundred miles to

Keep us grounded. A missionary,

Kindly informing us of our damnation,

Self-inflicted for the sins of our short vowels.

Now, my Geordie's rusty,

It creaks when it emerges, tentative at first,

Only showing itself for my grandparents.

When, once again,

I am a bairn.

We still teach girls to hide their heritage

To be a blank canvas for another's story.

We cut them loose from their moorings.

Boys can be blissfully broad, their voices may take up space in the room,

But we teach girls not to trust their voices

For fear of what they might give away.

## **Appendix B: Application for and confirmation of ethical approval**

### **Research Proposal- Melissa Chaplin**

#### **Objectives of the study**

This study aims to explore the way that working in a second language affects the experience of creative writing for refugee writers.

#### **Description of the target cohort**

The study will draw its sample from the clients of [organisation's] programme. These individuals have all been referred to the programme by clinicians from within the organisation. The sessions are overseen by several mentors, each of whom is responsible for several individuals in the group.

#### **Methods and procedure of data collection**

The primary method of data collection will be informal interviews, although emails will also be used. Extracts of the participants' creative work will also be used where pertinent to the discussion.

#### **Data management**

The data will be uploaded to a secure, password protected location, that can be accessed only by myself. I will be transcribing the interviews myself from the recordings. The data will be used in my PhD thesis and also for possible publications. When analysis is complete, I will conduct member checking with participants via a second interview.

#### **Reporting strategies**

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, so as to protect their anonymity. I will automatically change any names in transcription. Any information in the interviews that could identify the participant will not be transcribed.

## Durham University

### School of Education

#### Research Ethics and Data Protection Monitoring Form

Research involving humans by all academic and related Staff and Students in the Department is subject to the standards set out in the Department Code of Practice on Research Ethics. The Sub-Committee will assess the research against the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011).

It is a requirement that prior to the commencement of all research this form be completed and submitted to the Department's Research Ethics and Data Protection Sub-Committee. The Committee will be responsible for issuing certification that the research meets ethical standards and will, if necessary, require changes to the research methodology or reporting strategy.

The application should contain:

- 1) this completed (and signed) application form
- 2) a copy of the research proposal which should be no longer than one A4 page that details: (a) objectives of the study, (b) description of the target cohort / sample (c) methods and procedure of data collection, (d) data management and (f) reporting strategies.
- 3) depending on the methodology you plan to employ, outline of the interview schedule / survey / questionnaire / or other assessment methods
- 4) the participant information sheet, and
- 5) the consent form

Templates for the participant information sheet and the consent form are provided at the end of the form.

#### Notes:

- As all applications should be submitted electronically, electronic (scanned) signatures should be used.
- You will be informed of the outcome of your application within two weeks of submission. If a specific application deadline has been notified, and this is missed, then the turnaround time will be 4 weeks from date of submission.
- No research should be conducted until ethical approval is obtained.
- Incomplete applications will be returned without consideration.
- **Please send all documents to [ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk) , School of Education Research Office, tel : (0191) 334 8403.**

## Application for Ethics Approval

Name	Melissa Chaplin
Email address	m.r.chaplin@durham.ac.uk
Title of research project	<b>Language and therapeutic creative writing with asylum seekers and refugees: a narrative study</b>
Date of start of research project	April 2015 (anticipated start of data collection period)

	Please tick one		
PGR Student	✓		<i>For PGR, PGT and UG students</i>
PGT Student		Programme	PhD Education
UG Student		Supervisor	Dr Prue Holmes

*For staff*

Staff		Is the research funded	<b>Y</b>
		Funder	Arts and Humanities Research Council (through the Researching Multilingually at Borders large grant, reference AH/L006936/1)
		List any Co-Is in the research	

*Other*

Other		Please give further details	
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(1) Does the proposed research project involve data from human participants? This includes secondary data.	(1) <b>Y</b>
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<p>If the research project is concerned with the analyses of secondary data (e.g. pre-existing data or information records) please continue with Q6-9</p>	
<p>(2) Will you provide your informants – prior to their participation – with a participant information sheet containing information about</p> <p>(2a) the purpose of your research</p> <p>(2b) the voluntary nature of their participation</p> <p>(2c) their right to withdraw from the study at any time</p> <p>(2d) what their participation entails</p> <p>(2e) how anonymity is achieved</p> <p>(2f) how confidentiality is secured</p> <p>(2g) whom to contact in case of questions or concerns</p> <p>Please attach a copy of the information sheet or provide details of alternative approach. <i>Please see attached Participant Information Sheet.</i></p>	<p>(2a) Y</p> <p>(2b) Y</p> <p>(2c) Y</p> <p>(2d) Y</p> <p>(2e) Y</p> <p>(2f) Y</p> <p>(2g) Y</p>
<p>(3) Will you ask your informants to sign an informed consent form?</p> <p>(please attach a copy of the consent form or provide details of alternative approach)</p> <p><i>Please see consent forms attached to the Participant Information Sheets.</i></p>	<p>(3) Y</p>
<p>(4) Does your research involve covert surveillance?</p> <p>(4a) If yes, will you seek signed consent post hoc?</p>	<p>(4) N</p> <p>(4a) N/A</p>
<p>(5) Will your data collection involve the use of recording devices?</p> <p>(5a) If yes, will you seek signed consent?</p>	<p>(5) Y</p> <p>(5a) Y</p>



(6) Will your research report be available to informants and the general public without restrictions placed by sponsoring authorities?

(6) [Y]

(7) How will you guarantee confidentiality and anonymity?

*The issue of confidentiality is particularly complex for this project. In discussing participants' creative work, if they were to decide to publish this work later, it could make them identifiable. Moreover, if their work were in the body of my PhD, then that could affect their ability to publish it later. There are a number of measures I intend to take to ensure that participants remain as anonymous as possible.*

- *Keep data with any identifying information secure, using the methods outlined in the research proposal attached.*
- *Use pseudonyms for all participants involved.*
- *When transcribing audio data:*
  - *Use pseudonyms.*
  - *be aware of other details in the data which may serve as identifying markers (e.g. strong dialect terms, references to locations, names, etc.), and consider on a case by case basis whether these details can and should be amended or disguised as transcription occurs to protect anonymity. If there is no material impact on using the data for the purposes of answering the research questions, such data should be amended. The relevant passage will be marked as amended for confidentiality reasons in the transcript.*
- *Avoid naming the research sites specifically in any of my writing, only specifying that it is located in the United Kingdom. See note below for further information.*
- *If using extracts from audio data in presentations, avoid using extracts that contain any information that could identify the speaker.*
  
- *In the case of participants from the {writing group}, request that participants only bring work they have not and do not intend to publish so as to minimise the risk of this being an identifiable factor. While the participants retain the right to change their mind about this, this request should ensure that the possibility of participants being identified through their work is minimal.*

*NB. It will be difficult to guarantee the anonymity of the organization because of their prominence in the field of creative writing with therapeutic outcomes, and their prolific outputs online. I will need to discuss this with the organisers and ensure they are aware of this and the measures I am taking to minimise the risk of their organisation being identified. To protect the anonymity as much as possible, I will not refer to any particular geographic location in my outputs, describing the research only as taking place "in the United Kingdom". This should also contribute to keeping the identities of the participants protected.*

(8) What are the implications of your research for your informants?

- *My participants will be asked to speak about the creative writing process, which can be a very personal topic. While this could be difficult for some in terms of the emotional content, I hope that it will be an empowering experience for them. By allowing the participants to talk about their creative process and choice of language, the project will give them an opportunity to reflect on their achievements in a positive way. Moreover, the discussions might help participants to develop their creative writing techniques through the interview process. Finally, giving participants a space in which they can reflect on the*

*therapeutic effect of the creative writing or other multimodal forms of creative work could be enormously constructive for their continued participation in the classes.*

- *The vulnerability of participants must also be considered. Some participants are drawn from the [writing group]. As such, the participants are vulnerable as a result of their past trauma, as well as their refugee status. With regard to this, I have designed the research with the wellbeing of participants consistently at the forefront of my thinking. I intend to prioritise this in the following ways.*
  - *No participant will be asked directly about trauma they have experienced. This is to prevent the secondary trauma of reliving the experience. Of course, it is possible some participants will voluntarily speak about past trauma, in which case I will handle the situation delicately and with the utmost respect for their narrative. I will draw upon my training as a teacher working with vulnerable pupils and also upon the support networks provided by both organisations. I will not be alone with participants but supervised by their mentors. These people will be able to support the process and ensure I am not overwhelmed. Moreover, they will ensure that participants needing further support have access to it.*
  - *The interpretations of the participants will be at the forefront of my research, which I will ensure by using member checking as outlined in my research proposal.*
  - *My participants do not speak English as a first language, and thus extra care must be taken when obtaining consent. In my early observations of the classes at the site, I took note that the classes being conducted in English did not seem to hinder any of the refugees present, and all of them are familiar with English. To ensure consent is informed, my consent forms are in plain English, drawing upon my experience in teaching to keep language clear. Moreover, mentors from the programme, with whom the participants have a longstanding relationship, will be present for the interviews and consent form, and will help me to make sure that the participant has fully understood the ethics of the research process and their rights as participants.*

**(9) Are there any other ethical issues arising from your research?**

- *This is a multilingual study. Refugee participants may not be English speakers and this will complicate the research process, as has already been highlighted elsewhere in this application form. My study will draw on “researching multilingually” methodology, a strength of my first supervisor and the researchers in the AHRC project (from which I am being funded), and will thus support my researcher development in this important aspect of the research*
- *It is also important that I consider my own wellbeing in conducting this research. It is possible that I will be exposed to stories of trauma while doing the interviews, and this could be upsetting for me. If I feel my emotional state is being compromised, I will draw upon the directors at each research site and, if necessary, the Durham University counselling service for support.*

**Further details**

1. *Please see the Research Proposal attached for further details of the study.*
2. *Because this is a qualitative study I have familiarised myself with ethical guidelines for this type of research in addition to the BERA guidelines. Due to the varied nature of narrative research, the focus of this study, there is no official guideline for its ethical execution. Rather, I have consulted numerous different papers and drawn together principles from them.*

3. *I have prepared and attached an outline interview schedule describing the topics to be addressed. Due to the use of an unstructured interview approach, this is only a rough outline. The topics may shift slightly depending on the creative piece applicants bring to discuss, and the natural progression of the interview conversation.*

### **Declaration**

I have read the Department's Code of Practice on Research Ethics and believe that my research complies fully with its precepts.

I will not deviate from the methodology or reporting strategy without further permission from the Department's Research Ethics Committee.

I am aware that it is my responsibility to seek and gain ethics approval from the organisation in which data collection takes place (e.g., school) prior to commencing data collection.

Applicant signature ...  Date: 14 April 2016

Proposal discussed and agreed by supervisor

Supervisor signature  Date: 14 April 2016

To enable electronic submission of applications, electronic (scanned) signatures will be accepted.

## **Participant Information Sheet**

### **Title of research project: Language and creative writing: A narrative study**

You are invited to take part in a research study to look at the relationship between working in a second language and creative writing. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is conducted by Melissa Chaplin as part of her postgraduate studies at Durham University. This research project is supervised by Dr Prue Holmes [p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk) from the School of Education at Durham University.

The purpose of this study is to look at the relationship between working in a second language and creative writing.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take part in interviews discussing your creative work and review my analysis by email; the data collected will be audio recordings of these interviews, and the email messages we send, as well as some short extracts of your creative work.

In the interests of protecting your and other participants' anonymity, it is advised that you choose writing to discuss that you have not published and do not intend to publish in the future.

Your participation in this study will take approximately 180 minutes.

You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences for you.

All responses you give or other data collected will be kept confidential. The records of this study will be kept secure and private. All files containing any information you give are password protected. In any research report that may be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you individually. There will be no way to connect your name to your responses at any time during or after the study.

This project is funded by the AHRC Researching Multilingually at Borders project. Full details of the project can be found at

<http://researching-multilingually-at-borders.com/>

If you have any questions, requests or concerns regarding this research, please contact me via email at [Melissa Chaplin m.r.chaplin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Melissa.Chaplin@durham.ac.uk) or by telephone at 07875426719

This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University (date of approval)

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[www.durham.ac.uk](http://www.durham.ac.uk)

Durham University is the trading name of the University of Durham

**Declaration of Informed Consent**

- 1) I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to look at the relationship between working in a second language and creative writing.
- 2) I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- 3) I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- 4) I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- 5) I have been informed that the investigator will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. Melissa Chaplin, School of Education, Durham University can be contacted via email: [m.r.chaplin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.chaplin@durham.ac.uk) or telephone: 07875426719
- 6) I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the School of Education, Durham University via email e-mail: [ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk)

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Date Signature	Participant Name (please print)	Participant
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I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

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Date	Signature of Investigator
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## **Interview Schedule**

Due to the unstructured nature of the interviews, this interview schedule will provide a list of topics to be covered, rather than exact questions. Each participant will be asked to bring a piece of their creative work to discuss, so the interview will be adapted depending upon the creative piece.

### **Topic 1**

The piece of creative work, why it was selected and how they found the experience of writing/creating it. Specific words and phrases in the writing to be discussed for those doing writing. Specific elements of visual art also to be discussed.

### **Topic 2**

The creative classes, how they came to participate in them and their experience of it.

### **Topic 3**

The opportunities and challenges working in another language, e.g., English, or other languages used in the class, creates. The role of their mother tongue in this class.

### **Topic 4**

Writing in English as opposed to a first language. How does this influence their writing, and their experience of creativity.

### **Topic 5**

When writing in English, does the first language still influence their work? How?

### **Topic 6**

The mentoring process and how it affects their creative writing. Relationship with the mentor.

### **Topic 7**

Relationship with others on the course and their writing. Whether this influences the writing process.

### **Topic 8**

How the classes fit in with their lives. How they influence aspects of their life, and how their life influences their writing/creative work.

**29 April 2016**

Melissa Chaplin

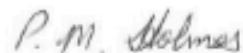
PhD

[m.r.chaplin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.chaplin@durham.ac.uk)

Dear Melissa

**Language and therapeutic creative writing with asylum seekers and refugees: a narrative study**

I am pleased to inform you that your application for ethical approval for the above research has been approved by the School of Education Ethics Committee. May we take this opportunity to wish you good luck with your research.



Dr. P. Holmes  
Chair of School of Education Ethics Committee



## Appendix C: Sample of field notes

Field notes- May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016

Today's session takes place in a different room from usual. Due to the uncharacteristically pleasant weather we are in 'The Garden Room'. The room is in a wooden building that almost gives the feel of a log cabin. One wall is comprised of large windows looking onto a lush green patch of land.

The session begins at 5.30pm, as they always do, with a meal. Several tables are pushed together and covered in food. There is the usual selection of pizzas, hot chicken thighs, hummus with carrot batons, and sweet fruit breads. These have been prepared in one of the building's several kitchens. I have brought chocolate cake bites to contribute, not wanting to take anything without also giving back. Also as usual, when everyone is seated and eating, we each introduce ourselves, including a couple of sentences about our lives outside of the group. I have already met most of the people here before, but there are two new faces. One is another visiting researcher and the other, who arrives late, is a participant. I find out later that he was late because of a lengthy phone call to the job centre. He made the call in reception, using the organisation's phone, and one of the mentors made sure a plate of food was taken to him while he was there. The updates from the group are largely positive. One woman, who has attended the sessions for ten years now, is nearing the end of her bachelor's degree. She is expecting to achieve a 2:1. Another is training to be a counsellor. When I introduce myself, I briefly reiterate the aims of my PhD and the focus upon multilingualism. This leads to a brief discussion on languages, with [X] revealing she is fluent in four.

There are twelve people here, including myself. Three of these are mentors, although there are some mentors who, for unspecified reasons, are not there today. This is a small group by the normal standards and several of the regulars are missing. This is chalked up partially due to it being 'exam season', which impacts a number of the members. The group leader mentions someone is not attending after recovering from serious illness. This leads her to comment that after illness there is 'trauma to the spirit' and to discuss the way that medicine in our culture does not address this.

As we begin the writing portion of the workshop, there is the usual reminded to turn phones to silent. We are told by the group's leader: "You don't have to read your writing out, but you do have to write". This is followed by the comment that "It would be wonderful if you could talk about each other's work."

This session is not led by X, however, but one of the other mentors. Four of the five mentors I have met are female, often with backgrounds in education. The leader of the session, who describes herself as a writer, explains that the session today will build upon the work in the two previous sessions on 'autobiography' and 'truth, secrets and lies'. The session today

is called 'Dear Diary'. Leader explains this is a reference to the diary of Anne Frank and discusses Anne's use of 'Dear Kitty' in the diary, explaining that as Anne wrote "Kitty became a figure to whom she could say anything." As she does this, she hands out stapled sheets she photocopied before the session. Leader then lays out the session, saying that we will, as usual, do "A little bit of group work, then some reading, then some writing."

For our first activity, we are paired off and our task is simply to tell our partner three things that have happened to us today. We must then share our partner's three things with the group. Some of the things shared include:

- Suffering knee pain, the escalator in the tube not working and being late.
- Playing with their daughter, getting rained on and having to change clothes.
- Leaving a message for one of the group who could not make it today.
- Taking their children to school.
- Receiving a warning letter from the Home Office. This prompts questions from the group leader, who looks concerned. The woman who got the letter, explains that the letter was warning her not to complain, and saying "If you still complain we'll stop your support." Leader asks who her key worker in the organisation is, and advises her to show this person the letter.
- One mentor talked about an event which had happened the week prior. She and one of the participants went to hustings for the London mayoral election. They discuss this event briefly, and there is a general excitement in the room about Sadiq Kahn's victory.
- One participant discusses events in her home country involving terrorism and leading to the death of 14 people by poison. The participant had arranged a prayer event here for her home country and had been delighted when over 450 people attended (although distressed that she had only prepared enough food for 200!)

Following this, we are asked to share something in the last few days that had made us either very happy, very sad or irritated. I am partnered with a mentor and I speak candidly of a close friend who had been hospitalised that day. She tells me about her seeing her daughter starring in a play. There is a general mood of trust in the room and I reflect a little on how this has been achieved. I think that the sense of ritual around the meal and introductions help people to feel calm and safe here, as well as the manner of the mentors. In this section, the following things are shared:

- X complains about teenaged boys in her shared accommodation, who are frequently loud and who invite large groups of friends over for

parties involving drugs and alcohol. She is clearly quite distressed by this. There is some general discussion of the issues surrounding 'temporary accommodation' and how it often turns out to be much more permanent than originally thought. X's daughter is involved in another play collecting stories about these issues, and Leader suggests putting her in touch with X.

- Leader has been in Paris shooting footage for a documentary. She expresses relief at being back in the UK.
- One of the participants talks about having been to the doctor to change the pain medication for her arm. She says this has improved it and there are expressions of support and sympathy in the room.
- One person had been to a demonstration at the Yarl's Wood detention centre.
- Another has had his claim for tax credits and child benefits rejected. There are expressions of shared frustration in the room.
- One man has written a political article that has gained interest, and will soon be going to Brussels for a political conference.
- A group leader mentions a friend who had been very ill but seems to be getting better.

We move on to discuss public events that have interested us recently. These include:

- The election of Sadiq Khan to the office of London mayor.
- The local council elections.
- Donald Trump's comments that Khan could be an 'exception' to his proposed ban of Muslims to the United States and Khan's response that this was inadequate.
- A participant has attended a May Day protest march.
- A musician in X's home country had collapsed and died while performing.

Leader says that "In a diary, you can write the things that happened to you, how you felt, and how you relate to the world around you." At this point, she draws our attention to the stapled sheets we were given at the beginning of the session. There are several examples of diary entries and we read these aloud, taking turns by paragraph around the room. As we read leader encourages us to think about 'Which of these do I really like and really respond to?' I reflect upon the way that field notes and diaries are both similar and different. The reading is, on the whole, confident. When a word is mispronounced, a mentor will gently correct it. The examples include:

Samuel Pepys's account of the fire of London; a brief comment by James Boswell on the advice from Samuel Johnson to keep a diary; an idyllic country scene from the Victorian diary of Reverend Francis Kilvert; several extracts from Virginia Woolfe; a Polish man named Dawid Sierakowiak talking about conditions in a ghetto during WWII; President Harry Truman reflecting upon the decision to drop the atom bombs on Japan; a short, humorous episode from the diary of playwright Joe Orton, which the leader jokes is notable for being one of his only entries unconcerned with gay sex, to the amusement of the room; and finally two very minimalist entries from John Lennon. After reading, participants are asked for opinions on the diary extracts and what they found interesting. One mentor comments that one reason for writing a diary could be if you can't talk to anyone, and says that "It's like having a conversation with yourself." Leader agrees, saying "The crucial thing is that you're completely honest." She then discusses the way that one might be inspired to write a diary including when something new happens, such as moving to a new country. She produces from her bag little red notebooks, one for each of the participants. As she hands them out, she says "The rule is, you start each page with 'Dear Diary.'"

At this point there are 20 minutes of silent writing time for participants to write anything inspired by today's workshop. Leader emphasises that this is private and that they don't have to read out if they don't want to. As this is happening, the leftover food is bagged up, for people to take home after the session.

For the duration of the twenty minutes every participant is focused intently on the paper in front of them. Some pens are flying across paper, while others move slowly but deliberately. During this time, I consider the idea of writing deliberately without an audience in mind. I wonder if this is different, in therapeutic terms, to writing that is read aloud. After the silent writing time has elapsed, Leader asks if anyone would like to read. X volunteers.

### X's Diary

X talks about using a diary back home. She says she remembers writing "Everything, I mean *everything*." She talks in particular of writing about the bad things people were doing to her. She does not elaborate on what these things were. She says she talked to her priest about it and he advised her against using a diary because it kept the bad things in her thoughts. This is the first time since then that she has used one. "Can I use it or not? Big question," she concludes, looking around the room for thoughts. Another participant, Sarah, asks quietly, "How do you feel yourself?" X replies "If you keep writing everything that's happened to you, you will have it in your mind."

### Y's Diary

Y talks about going to a doctor's appointment a long time ago and being told she needed psychiatric evaluation. She says she remembers thinking "This lady doesn't know me at all. I am a very bad person and because of me, all my people were killed, including my children." She talks about collapsing and waking up disoriented. She ends her entry "All this time, I never knew I was in a detention centre, I thought I was in a 5-star hotel."

### Z's Diary

Z talks about diary keeping in her life. "I remember the day I was in the detention centre, I could not keep a real diary so I wrote in the hem of my clothes." She remembers thinking "My experience has to go to useful purpose." She talks about making a documentary. She says "When I am in front of you, telling my story, I am not looking for sympathy...I want my story to help people." She talks about writing a diary entry once a year" and says "I am still writing the whole history of my journey."

### S's Diary

S's diary is a dream she had. "I was a shopkeeper and a lady came in, I can't remember much about her appearance... She whispered her story...tears blurred my eyes." The lady in the dream needed money, around £250. In the dream S took the money from the till to give to her. "I felt I was talking to my mother", she comments. Then, in the dream, she looked at her handbag and realised her purse was gone, stolen by the woman. "She misused my trust." S ends her story, saying "Dear Diary, I write this down because it's the silliest dream I've had. Are you smiling? Please do."

### J's Diary

J has written about current events in the Labour party. He says "After the left wing Jeremy Corbyn was elected as Labour leader, all right wing media campaigned against him, and even the London mayor candidate, Sadiq Khan." He is excited that London now has its first Muslim mayor.

After this, the group disbands. Leader makes sure that participants take home all the remaining food, and I thank her again for allowing me to attend the session.



Picture: One of the red notebooks handed out.

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