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Interrogating community: dispersed refugees in Leeds

**Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD Social Justice
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by

**Hannah Jane Lewis, BA (Hons) Social Anthropology,
University of Sussex**

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Abstract

Community is a key and contested concept much used in social sciences and public policy, including asylum and immigration policies. The notion of refugee community is often utilized uncritically to apply to national, ethnic or other groups, yet the existence of 'community' cannot be assumed. Where refugee community has been addressed, studies of refugee community organizations dominate. Less attention has been given to everyday experiences of people seeking asylum, particularly those living outside London following the introduction of compulsory dispersal. This ethnography results from fourteen months of fieldwork in the major dispersal city of Leeds in the north of England, and included people from over twelve countries at different stages of the asylum process.

The research found that conditions in the country of origin and UK policies create insecurity that shape social life and affect the ways that 'community' is experienced. Policy infiltrates daily life through housing control mechanisms, shaping capacity for home-making and affecting social relationships. In this precarious context secrecy is a vital tool in managing social life. Refugee community organizations, parties and social events form around nascent social groupings that include some and exclude others. Moving beyond recognition that divisions exist within 'communities', this research examines how boundaries operate in new UK social settings for recently-arrived refugees. Forms of familiarity and cultural reproduction are achieved through music, dancing, dress and food. Rather than simply representing 'home' culture, such practices create moments and places to contest both continuity and adaptation to the UK. The central importance of food highlights the particular role of women in reproducing community - the ephemeral nature of eating and dancing enables a sense of shared values within the context of fluidity. Recently-arrived refugees do not live in a community, but engage with (or avoid) spatial and temporal realizations of community.

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Glossary

IND	Immigration and Nationality Directorate
LASSN	Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RCO	Refugee Community Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Note on the text

Refugee is a legal term in the UK for someone who has been granted leave to remain. In wider use, the word refugee is used to refer to someone forced to migrate as a result of persecution. Asylum seeker is the legal term used to refer to someone who has made a claim for asylum and is awaiting the outcome. I will use the term 'asylum seeker', but only for the purposes of differentiation when the point being relates only to asylum seekers, and not refugees.

Where possible I refer to 'refugees', but this should be taken to include both asylum seekers and refugees. The decision to elect 'refugee' rather than 'asylum seeker' as a group term is partly political, as asylum seeker is a term which has come into use more recently, and which focuses on the place to which people come. In the past only the term 'refugee' was used, which reminds us that people seek refuge from persecution.

Qualifiers are used for 'community' when the term is quoted or refers to a use in literature, policy or demotic discourse where community is assumed to exist. This distinguishes the assumed existence of 'community' from discussion of community as a concept.

Dispersal refers to the compulsory system of allocation of housing in towns and cities around the UK, away from London and the South East through the National Asylum Support Service for people who claim asylum.

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1 Introduction

This thesis is about community among recently-arrived refugees in the UK. Community is a key concept in the social sciences, and is a much utilized and contested term in contemporary public policy. Refugees are the subject of an increasing number of research studies and, in recent years, have been the object of intense political and media scrutiny both in the UK and elsewhere. The topic of this research, therefore, draws together two areas that are particular concerns of current academic discussion, public debate and social policy: community and refugees. This attention has often continued, however, with very little reference to the thoughts, feelings and social realities of the people at the centre of these debates. This ethnography is a study of people's experiencing of the effects of policy, rather than a study of policies themselves. This thesis addresses conceptualizations and manifestations of community among people who have claimed asylum in the UK and examines the influences of policy on these social processes. As such, it aims to contribute some everyday perspectives from individuals often marginalized in research and public debate.

Recent approaches to theories of community in anthropology and sociology have moved away from a modernist concern with the loss or death of community toward viewing community as a symbol or conceptualization, and latterly have taken up the interaction of actual social ties and conceptualizations or feelings. Fundamental to critiques of classical approaches to community as bounded and located in one place is an accounting for increased and increasing movement and mobility. These critiques have uncoupled any essential link between people, place, culture and stable social ties, questioning the traditional view of community. While, as a result of globalization, movement is taken to be a universal feature of contemporary social relationships, fluidity, contingency, and multiple belongings are not experienced equally by all. Though there is great variation in the contexts that people who are called refugees leave and enter as they migrate, their migrations feature scales of lack of choice, force, multiple losses and change of status. Modernist and postmodernist approaches stress the impact of precariousness and insecurity on all social forms and concepts; people forced to migrate as a result of conflict and persecution are surely at the sharp end of this uncertainty that supposedly shapes us all in the contemporary world.

This research took as its starting point the possibility that community is both realized in actual social relationships and imagined. There is little agreement on definitions of

community. However, it is possible to identify these two broad, influential approaches: the existence of community as a thing constituted by actual social ties, and the notion of community as imagined. To complicate the matter, studies about 'refugee community', as in other areas of social science, may use the term 'community' as an analytic tool, simply to denote a delimited research population. In this usage, community often stands in for nationality or ethnicity, usually with little critical attention to the application of the term. Furthermore, refugees in the UK are subject to (and made subjects by) structures and policies that seek to invoke 'community' as an organizing principle and mode of resource distribution. Again, immigration and asylum policy, as with other areas of social policy, utilizes community widely, but in a simplistic way taking little account of the social complexities behind the label.

The lives of people who have claimed asylum in the UK in recent years are ostensibly defined by lack of choice and powerlessness. The Home Office presides over decisions on asylum claims on the basis of the narrative told in an interview: asylum applicants wait in a limbo for a decision having surrendered their futures to a bureaucratic process greatly impacted by political influences beyond their control. Asylum seekers are offered housing in towns and cities around the UK on a 'no choice' basis. People who claim asylum have left countries where ongoing persecution and conflict may continue to threaten those they left behind. Without doubt, these factors create a precariousness and insecurity that impacted every aspect of the daily lives of the people involved in this research. Part of the aim of this thesis is to examine these impacts and their consequences for the establishment and maintenance of social life in a new country.

Such conditions of precariousness and insecurity often did seem to preclude forms of association and communality that are commonly considered features of 'community'. However, this thesis is not a catalogue of the reasons why community does not exist among refugees. Instead, it uncovers nascent forms of socializing and belonging that elucidate the mechanisms by which individuals exercise agency and power in the context of apparently overarching precariousness. In this context, Prina Werbner suggests that:

We need to look at the processes whereby refugees do form communities, and we need to look at them from multiple perspectives. While we also have to draw on

statistics, and the statistics are flooding in, we also need to know about the kinds of social processes that are occurring among refugees¹. (Koser et al., 2004: 62)

This thesis presents some situated perspectives on the social processes of community building occurring among recently arrived-refugees in the context of dispersal in the UK.

1.1 Context of the study

In June 1999 the Kosova Programme brought to Leeds the first group of refugees from UNCHR camps in Albania² (Robinson et al., 2003). The response was overwhelmingly positive—people went spontaneously to the airport with flowers to welcome those first arrivals. Local media proudly declared the hospitality of Yorkshire folk. Then, later in 1999, the proposed dispersal policy—to house asylum seekers in areas with available housing stock outside of London and the South East—was announced. A scaremongering article printed in the Yorkshire Evening Post suggested that run-down council tower blocks in Burmantofts would be renovated into luxury flats to house thousands of asylum seekers, marking a shift to media coverage that pandered to xenophobic fears and anxieties over resource allocation.

At that time, I was working at Save the Children UK in Leeds and assisting with a research project on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Stanley, 2001). Among other documents, I read the sparse integration policy, 'Full and Equal Citizens' (Home Office, 2000). In this and other government and media discourse frequent references to community were notable. My undergraduate studies in anthropology, experiences of travel, and of living in Leeds made me question the application of 'community' to both the heterogeneous group of asylum seekers and refugees and the British population. The term was used with reference to multiculturalism and immigration to denote a wide range of different groups of people; and in so doing invoking emotions and notions both of belonging, and of security and control.

¹ She made these comments in a panel debate with Khaled Koser and Ian Ang concerning the contribution of anthropology to the study of refugees published in 2004 in *Social Analysis*.

² Britain offered temporary protection at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist with 'burden sharing' the humanitarian evacuation of Kosovar Albanians displaced as a result of unrest in Kosova (Bloch, 2002).

By the time I began preliminary PhD fieldwork in Leeds in the summer of 2002, immigration and asylum held a position as probably the most prominent political issue of the time. Sensationalist headlines ran daily in the tabloid newspapers; broadsheets were not always negative but lacked critical analysis. The prominence given to immigration and asylum was mirrored across Europe, and, indeed, globally. During the 1990s the numbers of people claiming asylum in the UK doubled from 38,195 in 1990 to 80,815 in 2000 (Zetter et al., 2003). As Zetter et al note: 'the growth in asylum seeking is the outcome of a complex set of factors but driven mainly by increased global mobility linked to the increasing incidence of complex humanitarian emergencies' (Zetter et al., 2003: 4).

The response of the UK government to a sustained high number of asylum applications was a succession of increasingly restrictive policy developments—there have been four major parliamentary acts within a period of six years. In Leeds, as in other UK cities, the population of asylum seekers and refugees rose rapidly following the introduction of compulsory dispersal for asylum seekers in April 2000, under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. The constantly shifting policy context and its impacts across the UK have precipitated a plethora of studies on refugees and asylum seekers in the last decade. Many of these studies feature economic analyses and functional approaches that focus on policy developments and service provision based on secondary data and interviews with professionals working in the sector (Sigona and Torre, 2005). While these studies have provided useful insights for policy-makers and professionals that are vital in the context of rapidly introduced policies with far-reaching ramifications, they routinely fail to address the viewpoint of the people subject to these policies, or the impact on their everyday lives.

1.2 'Refugees' and 'community'

Despite there being little written about the social processes refugees are engaged in, references to refugee community abound in both academic literature and policy discourse. Almost invariably, the term is uncritically applied as a descriptive term for a group of people: the assumption is that putative refugee communities are existing social realities. Post-structuralist critique in the social sciences has long since rejected the binding of community with certain essences. Despite this, the equation of community with culture, ethnicity, language and place, and often also with religion, interests, profession, class or other social category is a remarkably common and persistent phenomenon (Crow and Allan, 1994, Baumann, 1996, Alleyne, 2002, Amit, 2002). In British social policy,

multiculturalism has promoted the assumption of difference contained in the idea of community (Baumann, 1996, Alleyne, 2002), through which approaches to immigrant 'integration' have been shaped, and then thereby applied to refugees (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003).

In Britain, the more established domains of 'black and minority ethnic' discourse and practice have slowly broken down (to varying degrees of success) reifications of the major groups of migrants that arrived from ex-colonies in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Yet, the appearance of large numbers of refugees since 1995 seems to have re-invigorated the uncritical application of the classificatory category of 'community' in emergent literature and policy tackling these new arrivals. Though 'ethnic' and 'migrant' literature has largely been forced to incorporate the deconstruction of reifications, refugee literature often utilizes national and ethnic terms uncritically. Given the dominance of refugee community as a functional paradigm in British policy (Griffiths et al., 2005), the relevance of community to refugee social forms in Britain merits critical attention. Some recent literature addresses whether community is an appropriate label for refugee groups in Britain, given the propensity to apply the term to a very complex social reality (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). The zeal apparently attached to the use of 'refugee community' demonstrates a need to further substantiate well-established critiques that uncouple community from other essentialisms in the field of refugee studies. Recognising the need to theorize the heterogeneity of community rather than deny its existence (Werbner, 2005), my purpose in part is to further elaborate on the complexities and nuances that make use of the term 'refugee community' problematic as a social category.

Simplistic recourse to putative ethnic communities is an approach that can be associated with 'classical', essentializing theoretical approaches. In contrast, post-structuralist approaches have suggested seeing community as a shared symbol (Cohen, 1985), or as imagined (Anderson, 1991 (1983)). Accounting for globalization and movement has required a re-assessment of the relationship of community to place. Moving on from a preoccupation with the loss of community in conditions of modernity, postmodern approaches have proposed alternate conceptualizations of community incorporating fluidity, multiple belongings, and contingency (Delanty, 2003). It has further been suggested that excessive attention to the idea of community as a symbol or as imagined has downplayed the significance of actual social ties, and that the space of community lies in the dynamic interaction of these two (Amit, 2002).

The limited literature that directly addresses 'refugee community' takes a critical stance towards refugee community organizations, demonstrating how 'reality'—the actual divisions and contestations that create social complexity—distances from the implied unity of the symbol of community (Wahlbeck, 1998, Griffiths, 2000, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). In this thesis I move beyond a rejection of community as relevant to refugees to identify nascent social forms among refugees. This necessitates an understanding of the ways that UK asylum and immigration policy affects and shapes social relationships. Hence, I seek to not only expand the critique of the application of 'old' (classical, traditional) concepts of community to refugees, but to consider whether recent theoretical developments that propose community as multiple, fluid and contingent are relevant for understanding refugee social forms in the UK. This thesis occupies a space rooted in anthropology and shared with sociology, social policy, political theory and social justice. These and other disciplines contribute to and constitute the interdisciplinary study areas of refugees, migrants and community that frame the analysis.

1.3 The ethnographic setting

'Community' studies risk excessive reification of ethnic boundaries resulting in depictions of encapsulated 'communities' (Baumann, 1996). In a large, complex urban research context community can be a useful tool to delimit the field (Amit, 2002). Neighbourhood studies provide an alternative approach to avoid categorization of urban populations into ethnic or economic groups. Thus relationships across ethnic groups can be studied within a limited geographic area, for example a street, street corner, or London borough (Whyte, 1955, Baumann, 1996, Bourgios, 1996).

The research was based in (though not restricted to) the city of Leeds in the north of England. Leeds is a 'multicultural' city that has received thousands of new arrivals since the compulsory dispersal of people seeking asylum began in 2000. Refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds can be grouped neither on ethnic nor geographic grounds. Or at least, the transience of refugees would mean that a small-scale geographic area would result in a place-based study with a rapidly shifting research population, making the establishment of long-term relations potentially difficult. The approach taken in this research was to deliberately avoid limiting the research population according to ethnicity or neighbourhood. Given the importance of trust in research relationships with refugees (Hynes, 2003), the research was more guided by the establishment of rapport and serendipity. This resulted in

a mix of around twenty key participants from eleven countries, and a further participant field extending to around a further forty individuals. Through these individuals and through attending events and meetings, and general 'hanging out' I was put in contact with a wider group of participants who have peripherally informed my background knowledge and understandings of refugees in the UK.

Despite great diversity, what did unite the refugees in my research was their shared experience of seeking asylum in the UK, and a broadly shared goal of gaining settlement in the UK. This is irrelevant to categorizations of 'political' or 'economic' motives, labels utilized as organizing tools for policy (Zetter, 1991) and aggrandized in their correlation with 'deserving' and 'undeserving', but which have limited social relevance. All people in my research socialized with people at different stages of the asylum process, and who were in different immigration categories.

1.4 The thesis

The ethnographic material presents a number of themes that might be usefully framed around ideas of choice. On a fundamental level in daily life asylum seekers, and to a lesser degree those with refugee status, have little choice over where they live, and owing to exile are separated from friends and family in their country of origin. These conditions present individuals with novel circumstances which they must learn to negotiate. Refugee community organizations have limited choice about how to form and manage their organizations as they must conform to often unfamiliar hegemonic models of community if they are to benefit from funding. The choices made within organizations and by individuals outside them are often framed as choices about whether, and how to reproduce social divisions and practices, or to incorporate new ways of being.

The organization and attendance of social events, and food and cooking are domains where asylum seekers and refugees make choices to engage with (or avoid) practices that are familiar to them, albeit reproduced in new contexts. The possibilities presented by these activities create sites for negotiating practices and ideas that are associated with adaptation both in 'integration' discourses and by refugees themselves. Social events and food, as we shall see, are two key domains where refugees may assert some freedom in engaging according to the familiar, providing opportunities for contesting social boundaries in a new

setting. Differences between refugees and asylum seekers in social and economic rights and restrictions impact all of these experiences of choice and freedom.

In seeking the social meanings of legal concepts, these perspectives mark something of a departure from studies of policy and social justice that privilege functional-structural and normative approaches. This is especially apparent in the field of refugee studies where the trend of attention to dislocation, trauma, humanitarian management and service provision has resulted from and contributed to the emergence of a generalized, essentialized refugee experience and the construction of refugees as a 'problem' (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 1992, Malkki, 1995b, Sigona and Torre, 2005). In migrant, transnational and anthropological studies, meanwhile, there may be a temptation to isolate social-cultural analysis from polity, underplaying structural limitations on social life (Al-Ali et al., 2001). It has been suggested that anthropologists are uniquely positioned to critically engage with power structures embedded in policy (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 1992, Shore and Wright, 1997, Wright, 1998), and that meaningful engagement with contemporary realities may help preserve the future of anthropology as a discipline (Firth, 1992), while assisting in the task of destabilizing and challenging widely held prejudices and racisms (Okely, 1997, Gledhill, 2000). The arguments presented in this thesis stand with approaches in anthropological and sociological studies that assert a need to understand the roles of power and polity in social analyses. In recognising the need to incorporate political and economic spheres in the study of cultural and social life, this thesis seeks insights into the processes of the radical adjustments refugees make to new social and material conditions. This ethnography contributes intimate explorations of daily lives that may inform understandings of how social policy is experienced, and offers interpretations of how the social life of migrants are impacted upon by structural factors.

The thesis proceeds as follows: chapter two reviews key theoretical approaches to community that inform the analysis in the rest of the thesis, and considers ways that community has been used in social policy and political theory. Chapter three contextualizes the ethnography in three ways. Firstly, it summarises relevant immigration and asylum policy and critiques the classificatory categories of 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee'. It is proposed that refugees must be considered in the migrant spectrum, but that there are also features of refugee migration that differentiate them from other types of migrants. Secondly, it provides an introduction to the ethnographic site of Leeds, and describes the dispersal policy in relation to the city. Thirdly, the key participants of the research are introduced and the methodological approach explained.

There then follow five chapters presenting the ethnographic material. These are ordered intentionally to guide the reader chronologically through the symbolic and actual spaces of interaction usually experienced by new arrivals in the asylum system. The fourth chapter therefore begins where asylum seekers spend most of their time—in their house, in relative isolation. This chapter examines how controlling elements of housing provision imbue the daily life of asylum seekers with a sense of insecurity. This is contrasted with the display of security by those who have refugee status. Chapter five moves from the domestic to the inter-domestic sphere by looking at relationships among friends and family. Social relationships, both those newly formed with people in the UK, and those maintained with family in countries of origin are marked by a strategy of secrecy. Despite secrecy restricting some aspects of association and social relationships, the control of information may also indicate a group of people (both actual and imagined) considered by individuals to be inside a boundary of association—a ‘community of secrecy’.

The dominant manifestation of ‘formal’ community is addressed in the sixth chapter on refugee community organizations (RCOs). It is suggested that a moral framework of good and bad provides legitimation for inclusion and exclusion from forms of ‘community’ at refugee, voluntary sector and government levels. Chapter seven on parties and social events introduces the idea of symbolic identity markers that are discernable to some and imperceptible to others, and presents the notion of temporal and spatial community moments indicated through dress, language, and dancing. Lastly, in chapter eight, more complex, nuanced boundary-making forms emerge through an analysis of food and gender that suggests that the temporary enjoyment of food provides a critical opportunity for freedom and choice.

Finally, chapter nine presents some conclusions about the social experiences of refugees in Leeds in relation to some of the key theoretical themes. While the newness of dispersed refugees and the openness of the term ‘community’ preclude any generalizing statement about the ‘nature’ of ‘refugee community’, it is possible to identify certain salient themes that may provide helpful frameworks for discussion of community among refugees. These include an awareness of the differing scales and roles of place, conversions and diversions between refugee and migrant ‘communities’ and literature, the role of instrumental relations in community, and the interplay of quotidian and performative aspects of community life.

2 No such thing as community?

Community is a key concept in the social sciences, and as such is imbued with rich, 'thick' and contested meanings. Considerations of whether there is any such thing as community and, if so, what form or forms it takes have dominated studies on the topic. Attempts to define community and describe its characteristics were a particular focus in the first half of the twentieth century. Latterly, such attempts have been largely discarded in favour of examining how the notion of community is engaged with, manipulated, and shaped by those who use it, and how it relates to experiences of shared identity, communal activities and feelings of belonging. The popularity of the term reflects and constructs the broader social and political climate, where 'the assumption of enduring and unbridgeable difference contained in the idea of community is now doxa, in Pierre Bourdieu's term'—that is normalized and naturalized (Alleyne, 2002: 607). Indeed, 'community' litters all areas of public policy and discourse, and is widely used, or perhaps overused (Amit, 2002), in academic work. Given such saliency, one might expect that there is a clear and shared understanding of what the term means. However, a lack of coherence, or lack of agreement on the definition of community is widely noted (Hillery, 1955, Searle-Chatterjee et al., 2000, Amit, 2002, Amit and Rapport, 2002, Nash and Christie, 2003). It is nonetheless agreed that community is a key concept or core idea that has a long and continuing importance.

This chapter will provide an overview of key theoretical approaches to community in sociology and anthropology, and will look at some uses of the concept in social policy and political theory. The chapter is broadly divided into two sections. The first, concerning theoretical approaches, will look at defining community in the social sciences, the impacts of modernity and capitalism, urban contexts and the alternative notion of social networks, symbolic and boundary-oriented approaches, the significance of place in conceptions of community, and possibilities of a focus on social experience. The second will briefly assess ways in which the idea of community has been utilized politically in discussions of multiculturalism, communitarianism, community development and nationalism.

References to community abound in current policy and debates on refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. In policy discourse, community is a term used ambiguously to refer to both the internal, social and cultural support assumed to exist among refugees ('refugee communities', refugee community organizations, 'community support'), and to the people already living in the localities in which refugees are housed (the 'wider community' or 'host community') (see for example, Home Office, 2000, Home Office, 2002, Home Office,

2005c). Ill-defined concepts of settlement and integration that privilege simplistic notions of culturally coherent, nationality-based and bounded 'communities' underlie approaches to dispersal, integration and refugee community organizations in UK policy discourse (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). It is assumed that refugees will 'naturally' form themselves into 'community' groups. This process is seen as crucial to the integration and social well-being of refugees (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003). Understanding community among refugees is therefore crucial to address questions of refugee support, settlement, belonging, mobility, and place. However, before looking at community among refugees, it is important to take a broader view, unravelling how the concept of community has been used in the social sciences and in social policy.

The frequent use of community embeds the term in a web of interacting and contested meanings and significances. Its complexity as a concept is mirrored in the myriad ways in which people (including scholars) understand and experience community. In this sense, community can be seen as a key symbol that is widely shared and variously interpreted (Cohen, 1985). It is in the spirit of understanding community as a shared symbol that I will examine some of the ways in which it has been interpreted, explained, constructed, and deconstructed by social and political scientists. Because of the openness of meaning of community, no analysis can be positioned as normative and authoritative (Frazer, 1999). I will focus on some of the most prominent and influential theoretical developments concerning this ubiquitous, yet elusive term.

2.1 What sort of thing is community?

It is now common in social theory to avoid the fruitless search for what, exactly, defines community and instead to focus on its ordinary popular usage (Cohen, 2002). Nevertheless, defining community has been a major preoccupation in theoretical approaches. The variety of definitions is as great as the number of people who have attempted to define community. One of the most famous attempts to pin down the term is Hillery's 1955 essay on 'Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement'. He analysed ninety-four existing definitions, and concluded that the only area of agreement is that communities contain people. There is a further 'core' of key characteristics - social interaction, common ties, and geographic area—on which there is substantial agreement (1955: 118). In total, Hillery identifies sixteen distinguishing ideas or elements mentioned in the definitions.

Even if one includes social interaction, common ties and geographic area to a characteristic of 'people' as defining features of community, these are too broad. Also, although geographic area, and perhaps social interaction, is found in many definitions, it is far from agreed that these are essential criteria of community—especially when applied to 'internet communities' or transnational communities, examples that challenge traditional depictions (Alleyne, 2002: 617). Many sociologists and anthropologists have laboured to locate indices to measure community. However, these labours seem destined to fail, as they are either too broad or too limiting for comparative use. Redfield, for example, suggested that communities must be distinctive, small in size, homogeneous, and economically self-sufficient (in Macfarlane, 1977). But, as Macfarlane points out, by these criteria, many of the so-called 'community studies' are not studies of communities at all (1977: 10). There is also the problem of fixing studies in time and space—many works, particularly in anthropology, have been criticized for representing a community at one point in time and failing to account for historical and social change. Overemphasizing defining features or indices of measurement risks reifying geographical and social boundaries. This is an issue that will be returned to later in discussion on the significance of place.

The question moves from one of defining community towards one of how to handle the concept of community. In an illuminating review, Frazer notes two independent sources of complexity: the concept as a complex structure of other simpler concepts; and the role of evaluation or prescription and the role of normative theory (1999). This results in an openness of meaning being inherent to the concept, yet, she observes 'that a concept's boundaries are fuzzy does not mean we cannot say anything about it at all' (Frazer, 1999: 71). It is common for the variety of views, or lack of agreement on the term, to result in repudiation of analysis (Frazer, 1999) as community is seen as problematic, and certainly vexing. However, it is equally possible to see the diversity of definitions as welcome, reflecting diversity of human experience, and complexity of social realities. As already noted, community is a frequently used, open and malleable concept—and as such, it is both pliable and enduring. Attempting to formulate a precise definition of community is a positivist endeavour that consigned community studies into 'an abyss of theoretical sterility' (Cohen, 1985: 38). A more reflexive era in the progression of intellectual social scientific approaches (Alleyne, 2002) exposes the pursuit of defining community as one that does little to further our knowledge of how people interact, what shared identity is, or why commonality and belonging are desirable or meaningful. Fuzzy boundaries enable contextual and adaptive use, allowing communicators to exploit the openness of meaning strategically (Frazer, 1999). While there is a lack of a definitive definition, the simplistic

view that communities contain, or represent particular irrefutable essentialisms of a (bounded) people or culture endures, or even enjoys increasing popularity in contemporary demotic (popular) domains (Alleyne, 2002; Baumann, 1996). No level of theoretical deconstruction by social theorists can temper the profound connotations of community for both ordinary people and politicians (Werbner, 2005).

2.2 Historical communities? Modernity and capitalism

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a preoccupation in the social sciences, particularly sociology, with the rise of capitalism, modernity, and industrialisation, which were largely viewed as detrimental or potentially destructive forces that would bring about the death of community and 'older' forms of association (Cohen, 1985; Alleyne, 2002). Writers such as Durkheim, Weber, Marx and Tönnies saw major social change unfolding as more people moved to cities to work in mass industry, leaving behind small-scale, household-based production. In particular, Tönnies' theory of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* has been one of the most influential of all theories on the concept of community and its relationship to modernity (Tönnies, 1955 (1887)). Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Tönnies saw the 'old' type of social interaction, *Gemeinschaft* (usually translated as 'community'), which is characterized by face-to-face, small-scale and 'natural' relations, progressing towards a *Gesellschaft*-like society (also translated as 'association'), characterized by larger, contract-based, impersonal relations and rational will.

The *Gemeinschaft*/ *Gesellschaft* dichotomy, and Tönnies' assertion of a progression in society from one to the other was based on the dominant thinking of the time associated with evolutionary theory and debates that posed community as a form of tradition at odds with post-traditional modernity (Delanty, 2003). Those who oppose one against the other and see them as mutually exclusive misuse the terms, however, as this was not Tönnies' intention. Firstly, Tönnies suggests that progress from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* is not inevitable—it could be resisted (with political will), but not by sentimental romanticizing of the past (1955 (1887): xii). Secondly, he says, the two exist simultaneously—'the essence of both ... is found interwoven in all kinds of associations' (Tönnies, 1955 (1887): 18). Tönnies characterizes *Gemeinschaft*-like relations as being dominated by 'natural will' and *Gesellschaft* as guided by 'rational will'. Hence, social groups and characteristics can be classified as 'Gemeinschaft-like' (such as women, peasants, youth, and direct, naïve emotions) or 'Gesellschaft-like' (men, higher classes, the elderly, and consciousness or

convention) (Tönnies, 1955 (1887)). The two terms are frequently misquoted to represent community and modernity as irreconcilable opposites (Cohen, 1985: 11, Delanty, 2003: 32).

Nevertheless, the terms have been appropriated and embedded in an intellectual history that is characterized by a tendency to displace 'community' in time, back into the history of the 'West' (Alleyne, 2002). As Alleyne notes, by the late nineteenth century, the community/ society split—informed by evolutionary thinking that pitted modernity and progress (in 'the West') against the pre-industrial and traditional ('the Rest')—assumed a great significance in the way educated EuroAmericans understood themselves (2002: 610). He further notes that it was not by mere coincidence that this same period witnessed the emergence of the notion of the individual as unique to post-Enlightenment, modern Western societies. The notion of individuality was seen as morally good and causally linked to EuroAmerican supremacy in the world system at the turn of the nineteenth century (2002: 611). Thus, 'the impersonal social relations of modern society, which distinguish them from community classically conceived, both constitute and are constituted by the modern individual' (ibid.). Hence, Alleyne frames both present and past understandings of community in the wider context of social and political thought that both creates and necessitates the conclusion that community is 'dropped' on the way to modernity.

It was precisely this concern - that modernity excluded the possibilities of close, personal social relationships (as traditionally conceived) that most concerned Marx, Weber and Durkheim, who all wrote on the contrast between society and community. Early functional sociological approaches were motivated by an interest in community as either an alternative to modernity or as the real basis of social integration (Delanty, 2003: 29). In particular, the development of capitalism was held, in these classical approaches, to be separating economy from community. The shift towards factory production in the industrial revolution replaced cottage industries that intertwined family, community and economy. In his recent book on community, Bauman focuses on the ways in which the modern world has assaulted community (2002). Bauman, following Marx, suggests that to control the mass work force, workers had to be 'stripped naked of communally supported habits', and thus a war was declared on community (Bauman, 2002: 27). In keeping with classical (and communitarian) approaches Bauman appears to lament the lack of community in the modern world, thereby implying a 'Golden Age' of community in pre-industrial times. Providing reasons for the decline of community contains the assumption that there were 'communities' that existed prior to the development of capitalism. Yet, Bauman, like other authors, doesn't document any historical evidence of this apparent period of 'community-

ness'. His concern is in accounting for the contemporary popularity of the term, and the popularity of 'community-building practices', such as the creation of 'gated communities', which he sees as a reaction to the complete lack of any 'true' community in modern times. Bauman claims that 'we miss community because we miss security', but doesn't provide us with an example or explanation of what the 'community' is that we apparently miss (Bauman, 2001: 144).

Echoing concern about a social malaise brought about by the mood of crisis in the early twentieth century (Delanty, 2003), Bauman paints a picture of modern, urban life stalked by strangers, and beset with fear of unknown risks and dangers that compound the lack of sharing and mutual care caused by industrialisation and modernity (2002). Although, as I have suggested, I would question the implicit assumption that pre-industrial times represent some kind of haven for community living - the experience of which might be found in the 'hidden depths of (a) mythical communal humanity' (Burkett, 2001) and manifests itself in a modern-day longing for communality and sharing - his key points are interesting and potentially useful. Bauman argues that the idea of community is attractive because of the security it offers, but is irreconcilable with individual freedoms which are highly valued in late-modern society that privileges the individual (2002). The assertion that some personal freedoms have to be forsaken to achieve the benefits of co-operation and communalism implicit in positive depictions of community offers a key critique of communitarian approaches that promote a cosy, warm and supportive construction of community. Community has become central theme for both political left and right in the UK and elsewhere, where discourse takes up the conflict of individual rights and group interests at the heart of communitarian-liberalism debate (Delanty, 2003). On the one hand, while a group may be united around locality, religion or interest, for example, other aspects may equally separate people within a group. Furthermore, commonality of interests, goals, kinship and so on, functions at the cost of excluding those who do not conform to consensus views and practices (by practising 'freedom') (Kymlicka, 1990). Hence, Bauman effectively argues that we can't have our 'sharing and caring' community cake and eat it, because 'feel-good', positive depictions of community exclude the realities of balancing security and safety with freedom.

Notwithstanding certain reservations made here about Bauman's apparently modernist approach, his central thesis—that the popularity of claims for community stem from a need for safety in an insecure world—might be usefully applied to asylum seekers and refugees. Arguably, refugees and asylum seekers who have been displaced as a result of persecution

and are subject to continuing precariousness after arrival in the UK are insecure by condition and have confronted more dangers than most. Claims for community coming from asylum seekers and refugees could be interpreted as a search for some security and stability. This may be expressed in a desire to share experiences of displacement, nostalgia for homeland, or sharing familiar food. Likewise, those who disengage from refugees may be choosing to seek security and stability in relationships with members of the (so-called) host society.

2.3 Can community exist in the city?

In his search for perfection of definition, Hillery concludes that rural groups that have steady contact with the soil may be closer to the actual core of the community concept; while urban complexity, with its diversity and abundance of social relationships, 'could well obscure the fundamental basis upon which community rests' (1955: 119). In this way, Hillery echoes the approaches of Tönnies, Weber and Marx that shaped the debate about community as one juxtaposing rural villages (of the past and contemporary present) as a desirable context for close social ties against large-scale urban society where social interaction is assumed to be more superficial, or in Tönnies term, 'rational'. In general, these authors saw industrialisation as transforming social relations, transformations assumed to apply to those working in industry and therefore living in rapidly growing towns and cities. This required inventing new styles of community as change had destroyed 'the oldest and in many ways... the archetypal form of community, the agricultural village' (Minar and Greer, 1969: xi).

The Chicago school tradition, represented in the writings of Park, Burgess, Wirth, Redfield and others developed this dichotomy further. They constructed the notion of a linear continuum from community (religion, face-to-face, familial links) to urban settings (contract relationships, rationality, complexity). Park suggested that social life in the city is lived in a multiplicity of contexts, replicated structurally in the ecology of the city (Cohen, 1986: 26). The fragmentation of social life in the city was causally linked to the fragmentation of the individual into a 'mere basket of roles' (Cohen, 1986; 27). For Chicago scholars:

The vestiges of community are to be found only at the level of the neighbourhood. However, with the single exception of the ghetto, these para-communities are only

tenuous for the neighbourhood itself is undermined by its integration into the city's infrastructure, by social mobility (and therefore, impermanence) and by the plurality of roles borne by its members (Cohen, 1986: 26).

Cohen takes this approach to be broadly Durkheimian, building as it does on the basic distinction he drew between organic and mechanical solidarity. In Durkheim's structure, mechanical solidarity is a property of a society founded upon likeness, and unable to tolerate dissimilarity, while organic solidarity creates society founded upon the integration of difference into a collaborative, and therefore harmonious, complex whole (Cohen, 1986: 22). Like Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim saw organic solidarity and mechanical solidarity as existing side-by-side, in 'complementary opposition', like two sides of the same coin—two aspects of society at a given historical moment (Cohen, 1986). However, writing against Tönnies, Durkheim can be seen as a proponent of 'post-traditional' community enabled by the emergence of organic forms of solidarity in modernity (Delanty, 2003: 37).

Nevertheless, although the *Gemeinschaft*/*Gesellschaft* and organic/mechanical solidarity dichotomies were more ideal types than concrete expression, they tended to resonate with geographical spaces (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995). The rural/urban distinction made by the Chicago scholars was one way of revitalizing the false dualism of society/community and tradition/modernity (Delanty, 2003: 41). Hence, overall, the Chicago tradition can be seen as overplaying fragmentation, emphasizing the separation between parts, (between individuals, and between the different roles within an individual's life), that make up the whole. While individuals may have a variety of roles, these parts are not discrete, but rather inform and influence one another (Cohen, 1986: 27). The Chicago typification of a separation between rural and urban social life as irreconcilable opposites is therefore critiqued on the basis of being oversimplified and being contradicted by empirical reality. Firstly, the depiction of fragmentation fails to account for the overlapping and mutually constituted nature of different roles held by individuals. Secondly, the notion that the continuum toward urban life equates to a loss of ('traditional') 'community' (i.e. face-to-face, emotional, complex social relations) is challenged by the recognition of enduring deep and complex social groupings in urban contexts, and by recognising how people 'make community' symbolically (Cohen, 1986; Alleyne, 2002: 612).

Werbner, for example, in her study of gift economy among Pakistanis in Manchester, UK, demonstrates the complexity and overlapping nature of social relations. She argues that one

type of exchange implies others, noting that exchanges initiated on the 'shop floor' (usually in the context of men's work) extend into domestic and inter-domestic domains (1995). Werbner utilizes social network analysis to map the relationships of exchange between Pakistani migrants. Rather than instigating the dissolution of social relations of 'community', urban contexts - in the case of Pakistani migrants - are shown to contain intense, multiplex and dense social relations. This challenges the notion that in rural or small-scale societies relations are multiplex rather than single stranded, and that the reverse is true of urban situations (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995: 17). However, these multiplex relations may not be with socially 'near' relations, as the novel contexts of migration mean that relationships are extended beyond primary village and kin networks (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995; 17; Werbner, 1995: 214).

2.3.1 Social networks

Social network analysis was developed principally by Mitchell and Gluckman in their studies in urban African contexts at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. It has been described as 'the intellectual isolation of a set of events from the wider social context in which they occur in order to facilitate a logically coherent analysis of these events' (J.C. Mitchell in Rogers and Vertovec, 1995: 6). Rogers and Vertovec propose social network analysis as a tool for empirically testing the hypotheses of the Chicago School that a high level of secondary contacts exists for urban dwellers (1995: 16). Rogers and Vertovec argue that in focusing on the networks that reach out from an individual through their connections to others, social relationships are abstracted and hence cut across institutional boundaries (1995). In this way, social network analysis has the benefit of avoiding methodological entrapment in one or other social institution (such as family, nationhood, kinship or class), makes no a priori assumptions about the type of relationships an individual is involved with, and avoids 'spatial fetishism' (1995).

By taking the social relationship as the primary focus of analysis, social network analysis neatly sidesteps the perennial problem of the representation of social relations as relations between spaces (for example the equation of rural/ urban contexts with types of relationships) (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995: 16). Hence, this approach may be particularly enabling in the study of migrants, as migrants by nature are mobile and so do not fit neatly into 'traditional' depictions of community that tend to equate social relationships with physical fixity (Burkett, 2001; Amit, 2002). Indeed, as Werbner points out in relation to Pakistani migrants, new contexts may reinforce and create social networks (1995). In this

sense, 'community' conceived as being constituted by close, personal, mutually supportive, complex or multiplex relationships is indeed sustained in the city, and in mobility. Complete social network analysis involves the detailed mapping of people's social connections which can then be statistically analysed to demonstrate the 'anchorage', 'density', 'reachability' and 'range' of social networks. While I did not undertake this level of statistical analysis in my fieldwork, the general approach in social network analysis influenced the ethnographic approach: isolating a set of events (social relationships) from the wider social context, cutting across social institutions, viewing social networks as a resource, and avoiding essentializing social relationships in terms of space and place.

The importance of social networks for migrants has also been recognised in terms of providing practical and emotional support (Van Hear, 1998, Simich et al., 2003). Werbner illustrates how Pakistani migrants effectively pool their earnings through socially maintained (informal) financial, interest-free loans to support each other in capital investment (1995). Social networks may act as a way of accessing resources, but may also relate to weak welfare services, as in the case of women being obliged to create new networks of childcare and mutual assistance in the absence of formal provision (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995: 20). This, again, is an especially relevant point in relation to asylum seekers and refugees who often rely upon family, friends and acquaintances for information on the asylum system, translation services, access to support services and employment and help at times of difficulties with housing or benefits (Simich et al., 2003, Omeri et al., 2004, Williams, 2006). Indeed, a survey of clients of advice or support agencies showed that word of mouth was by far the most common way for asylum seekers and refugees to gain information about services (Wilby, 2003). Social network analysis may provide an alternative theoretical and methodological tool for investigating and conceptualizing how 'community' functions (or at least, how interdependent social relationships can be mapped) in urban contexts. The concept of the social network is especially enabling in the analysis of relationships that may be socially close without being geographically near (Marx, 1990).

The approach of the Chicago school can be criticized for its focus on function and structure, and because the separation and opposition of types of social relationships according to rural or urban spheres has been found to be untenable. Despite the limitations of their approach, the Chicago school scholars are recognised as pioneers of urban studies (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995). Their key concern was with the death of community and with the growth of cities, and yet it is precisely the increased significance of urban studies in anthropology that Amit attributes to the emergence of 'community' as an important

concept (2002). In order to delimit a sphere of small-scale study within the wider social and cultural urban context, community became a useful analytic tool (Frazer, 1999, Amit, 2002). This may also be linked to the social status of pioneering ethnographers and sociologists, who were predominately white, male and middle or upper class, which is likely to have influenced the association of community with the 'working classes' of the cities (i.e. displacement downwards in the class hierarchy, similarly as community was displaced backwards into history by classical sociologists) (Alleyne, 2002). The unmarked universalist standpoint of the analyst again enables the attribution of community to 'them'. Thus, it is possible to draw a distinction between the use of the idea of 'community' as an analytical and methodological tool and object, where it signifies the delimitation of a small-scale group (an 'objective' thing), and community understood as a sense of shared identity, belonging or togetherness, a group of people with perceived common ties, being subjectively constructed and recognised by those inside and outside the group (a 'subjective' symbol or emotion). It is toward this second notion of community as a subjectively constructed 'experience' that I will now turn by looking at Anthony Cohen's highly influential proposition that community is a symbolic construction (1985).

2.4 Community as symbolic

Community in urban or complex social arena is significant not solely as an analytic construction. Indeed, Barth, and Cohen after him, contend that people only become aware of their 'community' or shared identity when they stand at the boundaries of it (Barth, 1968, Cohen, 1985). Moving beyond previous preoccupations with the characteristics of community and its existence or otherwise in modern, urban locations, Cohen's analysis of 'The Symbolic Construction of Community' instead emphasizes the meaning placed on community as it is used (1985). Cohen's approach to the study of community is in keeping with symbolic and interpretivist schools of thought in anthropology. Geertz, perhaps the most famous proponent of symbolic and interpretivist approaches, specifically distances his analysis from earlier positivist and structural approaches by stating that the analysis of culture is 'not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning' requiring 'thick description' (Geertz, 1993 (1973)). Definitional problems inherent in objective abstraction are neatly sidestepped by acknowledging the persistent social significance of 'community' and its meaning to people in everyday use. Moving away from discussions of the pitfalls of an ideal type that does not relate exactly to empirical reality, using the notion of a shared symbol enables an understanding that while people may hold a

central symbol (such as 'community') in common, they can and do hold different interpretations of it. Cohen's approach to community hangs around two interlinked concepts: boundary and symbol. Community is constructed around shared symbols and people construct boundaries to differentiate themselves from others (1985: 12).

Cohen asserts that the significance of community for people is that its members have something in common, and that this distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other groups (1985: 12). These two factors of community at once imply similarity and difference, which Barth suggested are marked by boundaries (1968). Boundaries perform a role by marking inclusion in and exclusion from 'community'. Inclusion is based on perceived criteria of shared identity; however, this perception only exists because of interaction with an other entity (Cohen, 1985). Therefore, Barth and Cohen propose, conception of difference outside a group is needed to have awareness of similarity within (1968, 1985). In this sense, shared identity of those included is formed against those excluded, outside the boundary. These boundaries may be conceived of differently by those outside and within: the boundaries perceived by some may be imperceptible to others (Cohen, 1985: 13). The important thing is that the boundaries denote where community begins and ends. Nevertheless, mutual recognition of membership of community does not necessarily carry with it homogeneity of views or interests (Amit and Rapport, 2002:16).

The 'problem' of heterogeneous interests is dealt with through the notion of shared symbol. Symbols do more than stand for or represent something else: those who use them supply part of the meaning (Cohen, 1985: 14). Hence, the same symbol can mean different things to different people. A group of people may share a perception that they are part of a community, and that there are defining characteristics which may be differentiated against an 'Other' community. However, when questioned, people will not come up with the exact same set of defining characteristics, or the same characteristic may be described differently by different people, or considered important for a variety of reasons. A religion, for example, is a shared symbol that may be the source of a strong sense of shared identity among believers, and which is primarily defined as against those excluded ('non-believers'), and yet there may be a high level of variation in how people view and understand their religion. The symbolic approach thereby accounts both for the shared, or communal elements of group identity, while explaining the heterogeneity that exists within shared experience, objects, institutions, attributes, feelings, and all things social. As Cohen puts it, 'symbols do not so much express meaning, as give us capacity to make meaning' (1985: 15).

This decisive shift away from positivist and structural-functional traditions that attempted to objectify community, toward viewing community as subjectively constructed and experienced marked a key development in approaches to the study of community in the latter half of the twentieth century, and still characterizes post-structural and post-modern notions of 'community' today.

Nevertheless, it is appropriate to note that sharing an identity does not automatically create a community. Kelly has observed how the construction of refugee community associations among the Bosnian refugee population in the UK has been imposed from the outside (2000, 2003). Because of religious differences, lack of kin links, and the lack of community identity from the country of origin, she questions whether there are any Bosnian 'communities'. Community associations have formed because there is no other way to get funding, yet 'there does not seem to be a community behind the association'. She calls this a 'contingent community'—formed for specific ends to publicly conform to expectations of the host society to gain benefits (2000, 2003). This discussion will be returned to in chapter six on refugee community organizations.

2.5 Is there such a thing as community without place?

Dominant interpretations of community have two key elements. The first is community as involving close personal relationships, intimacy and shared identity. The second, as discussed above, is an understanding of community as geographic and local (Crow and Allan, 1994, Burkett, 2001). Early twentieth century anthropologists, informed by an imagining of small-scale human collectivities as indicating the past of the modern West, displaced community in space, to places other than their own contemporary modern West (2002:610). Meanwhile, sociologists and anthropologists working in the West, such as the Chicago school scholars, displaced community downwards in the class hierarchy (to the 'ghetto'), or outward from the city to rural contexts. To extend this, place, then, relates to community in two ways—in displacement to 'Other' spaces, and in the anchoring of (a) community to (a) place.

The discipline of anthropology has had a particular role in the emergence of the 'doxa' view that associates community with culture and therefore difference (Baumann, 1996; Alleyne, 2002). It is this notion of difference between communities that is especially relevant to understanding the popularity of the term 'community', in the context of British

multicultural and refugee settlement policies, as a 'privileged marker of difference' (for a detailed examination of the idea of 'ethnic community' see Baumann, 1996 and Alleyne, 2002). Hence, the idea of difference contained in community must be understood in relation to two other related notions: culture (especially cultural relativism) and place.

2.5.1 Culture, difference and cultural relativism

Anthropological understandings of social life are underpinned by culture: something we all have, that makes people and is made by them (Baumann, 1996; Alleyne, 2002). Traditional and classical views link people with a shared culture, language, place and space in a fixed and bounded way. In this framework, a place has people, and therefore culture and community; a community has a culture which is fixed to a place; and culture can be explained by its containment in community and attachment to place. Understanding cultural difference is a pursuit that is at the core of anthropology. Explaining the similarity or seeking internal cohesion within a community has often been the result of attempts to understand the cultural differences between groups (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, Hastrup and Olwig, 1997). Traditional constructions of culture can be seen as emerging out of certain intellectual histories in anthropology. Boas and his followers sought to explain cultural difference as a response to environmental conditions and their specific historical developments (in Wright, 1998). This theory was established in opposition to the dominant evolutionary theory of the time, which placed cultures in a unilinear hierarchy progressing towards Western civilisation. Anthropologists of the early twentieth century, such as Benedict, developed a relativist standpoint on the study of 'other' cultures, emphasizing cultural diversity in an aim to show that apparently irrational beliefs could be explained if only seen in context. As opposed to the notion of 'natural' hierarchy contained in evolutionary theory (a progressive scale), cultural relativism aims to place cultures on equal plain of importance (a mosaic of equal but different cultures). Relativist approaches have led to a tendency in ethnographic research to generalise about the cultural practice of entire communities in order to understand cultural difference (Hannerz, 1996). From these commendable moves to distance from evolutionary racism emerged a view of culture as a set of characteristics shared homogeneously by the members of a community, who lived in relative isolation in a rooted locality.

Anthropological imagining of cultures as bounded, rooted and discrete have been extensively deconstructed and discarded in postmodern and poststructuralist critiques that rather emphasize processes of fluidity, change, transformation and movement (Fabian,

1983, Clifford and Marcus, 1986, Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, Appadurai, 1993, Hastrup and Olwig, 1997, Malkki, 1997a, Rapport and Dawson, 1998). However, understandings of 'culture' and by extension 'community' in contemporary public and demotic discourses have tended to be in keeping with traditional theoretical approaches (Wright, 1998). Anthropologists and sociologists played a role, sometimes directly as advisors or consultants in public policy, other times unintentionally (Okely, 1997), in promoting cultural relativism as a philosophical or ontological position in understanding cultural difference and race (Alleyne, 2002). However, while sociologists and anthropologists came to understand race and culture as social constructions, demotic discourse held on to race as a biological category, premised on notions of group cultural difference (Alleyne, 2002). Culture cannot be separated from power (Fabian, 1983, Wright, 1998), nor can community that is constituted by and that in turn constitutes culture (Alleyne, 2002: 615). Baumann suggests that the idea of 'natural' difference has two strategic advantages, as it appeals to biological reductionism and allows for discursive closure. With the stylisation of ethnic categories into communities defined by reified culture, social complexities are reduced to a simple equation: culture=community=ethnic identity=nature=culture (Baumann, 1996: 17). Alleyne and Baumann also draw a conceptual linkage between contemporary multiculturalism in Britain that attributes 'community' to minority ethnic groups and the control of colonized people in the British colonial history of 'divide and rule' (see also Fabian, 1983, Baumann, 1996, Alleyne, 2002):

It is often in the interests of the powerful to believe that culture is somehow natural, given. It is often a source of comfort to the dominated to share this belief.

Unreflexive notions of community often serve to hide the constructedness of culture, and the culture of community construction (Alleyne, 2002: 615).

2.5.2 Practical issues: globalization and mobility

The connection between community and culture to geographical area, or place, has been paid particular attention in the last few decades, as the implications of increased mobility, rapid communications, developments in image-processing and information systems—in short, globalization—are accounted for in social scientific theory. The equation of community and place, or more precisely, stability, is often assumed to be essential. Because of this, mobility is viewed as incompatible with the creation of 'authentic' communities of depth, significance and meaning (see for example, Etzioni, 1995). These 'hegemonic discourses of sedentarism' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 5) fail to acknowledge that

movement has become fundamental to modern identity (Ong, 1999). Firstly, the tendency in ethnography to capture a snapshot of social entities fixed in time and space (Fabian, 1983) is fundamentally challenged by movement and mobility—both physical movement of people, and social ‘mobility’ through historical and social change. Secondly, the reification of culture and community has been recognised as a product in part of theoretical and methodological priorities, not simply a reflection of empirical ‘reality’.

Postmodern or poststructuralist critiques have deconstructed traditional views of culture that tended to assume people within delineated groups share culture, language, place and space in a fixed, rooted and bounded way. At the same time, the practical challenges of globalization and the awareness of increased, and increasingly rapid movement of people, money, goods, and images fracture structures and have forced a realization that boundaries and borders are malleable, permeable and fluid. At its extreme, some globalization theorists saw an all-pervading force that would destroy regional cultures and language and create global homogeneity (Massey, 1992, Ong, 1999). As understandings of globalization have developed, some authors have argued that while certain cultural practices may be widely exported (especially from economically dominating countries such as the United States of America), these are understood and adopted locally in contextual ways (Ong, 1999, Miller, 2005). For example, Appadurai cites the ‘uncanny Philippine affinity’ for American Motown songs, that is both more widespread in the Philippines, and more disturbingly faithful to their originals, than in the United States of America today (1993). While there may be more Filipinos than Americans singing these songs, ‘the rest of their lives (are) not in complete synchrony with the referential world which first gave birth to these songs’ (1993: 326).

Meanwhile, the emergence of ‘global products’, such as world music and world cups rupture the link between culture and place and contribute to the sense of dislocation, fragmentation and disorientation apparent in debates on ‘home’, ‘place’ and ‘locality’ (Massey, 1992). Further, it has been recognised that any homogenizing tendencies in globalization are matched by the countertendency of fermenting or reinforcing local identities, as it ‘can cause some people to wish to retreat into a more simply conceived community as a defence against globalization’s ceaseless transformations’ (Alleyne, 2002: 618). The perception of dislocation is evidenced in globalization literature by the emergence of place-bound loyalties, such as ‘new nationalisms’ and the exclusive localisms of gated communities (Massey, 1992: 7). Likewise, in reference to the idea of a fully integrated global economy, Massey notes the appearance of the ‘new localisms’ of relatively

coherent and internally networked local economies, for example, in 'the third Italy' (Emilia-Romagna) and Jutland in Denmark (1992:6). Thus, work on globalization often appears to perpetuate the received knowledge that the conflation of place and identity is necessarily static, self-enclosing and defensive (Massey, 1992). The flight from rural villages to urban neighbourhoods that so concerned Western scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century is continued at the end of the century in a similar style, but in a different context. New forms of all pervading and increasing movement are seen, alternately, as both destructive of old social forms and constitutive of new ones. The nature of mobility over the century has changed, but the obsession with understanding the effects of mobility and change on cohesive social units remains.

2.5.3 Culture and community as theoretical constructs

In the last decades of the twentieth century, social sciences have been 'refreshingly' (Alleyne, 2002) subjected to extensive internal deconstruction and discussion around the theme of reflexivity towards the researcher's position. In the realm of anthropology and sociology, understanding the role of the discipline and the backgrounds of individual researchers in constructing their objects of study has shed further light on the manner by which traditional, stable, place-oriented depictions of 'community' and 'culture' emerged (Fabian, 1983, Clifford and Marcus, 1986, Sanjek, 1990, Aull Davies, 1999). Authors subjecting works in the classical tradition to the 'gaze' of poststructural reflexivity have suggested that the intellectual history of the discipline and the class and gender characteristics of the researcher or fieldworker have influenced the emergence and perpetuation of bounded, homogeneous, and rooted community/culture.

In the tradition of cultural relativism, seeking internal coherence may have found homogeneity where it did not exist. By exaggerating social coherence and possibly downplaying difference, anthropologists could more easily come to a theoretical conclusion to explain the practices of the culture being studied (Hannerz, 1996:37). Macfarlane and Baumann both highlight the risk of circularity in research design, fieldwork and theoretical conclusions where anthropologists will find community bonds and sentiments because they expect to (Macfarlane, 1977: 15). The majority of 'community studies' follow a predictable recipe of isolating a community and then concluding that the community is 'encapsulated'—the conclusion seemingly predetermining the fieldworker's starting point (Baumann, 1996). A similar observation might be made about a reliance on refugee community organizations as access points in studies of refugee community in Britain (cf Bloch, 2005a, Griffiths et al.,

2005), as will be taken up in the discussion on methodology in the next chapter. In anthropology, the practice of going off 'to the field' - a place where one went to and came back from - cemented the idea of different worlds (Ferguson in Hastrup and Olwig: 7); while claiming fieldwork as a rite of passage, a transition, depends upon seeing cultures as separate entities (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 5). The imagery of place, regional or national identities is reinforced by political maps showing countries in different colours (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, Malkki, 1997a). The premise of discontinuity forms the starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict and contradiction between cultures and societies (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992).

Massey also suggests that the emplacement of home, which consequently creates 'hype and hyperbole' over the loss, dislocation and fracturing of place and space, reflects the point of view of a (relative) elite: 'Those who today worry about a sense of disorientation and a loss of control must once have felt they knew exactly where they were, and they *had* control (1992: 9, emphasis in original). The assumption that runs through much of the literature is that the penetrability of boundaries is a recent phenomenon, but, she suggests, the colonized have long experienced 'immediate and intense' encounters (1992: 10). Further, she proposes a feminist standpoint that the fascination with boundaries is a male phenomenon, owing to the construction of gender identities. Early experiences tend to build a female sense of self as connected to the world, and the male sense of self as separate, distinct and even disconnected, hence the suggestion that men 'need' boundaries to secure identity (Massey, 1992: 14). Rather than as inducing feelings of fear, disorder, uncontrollable complexity and disorder 'displacement' can be conceptualized positively as a source of opportunity and enjoyment, to incorporate flux, change, complexity and multiple significances and meanings (1992: 15).

Hence, these reflexive positions collectively suggest that there are not so much questions about how conditions of modernity, postmodernity and globalization might build or destroy 'community', but questions about how the assumption of the equation between culture, community, place and space was arrived at in the first place. Massey argues that bounded place has always been a theoretical construction, as movement is not new (1992). Likewise, Macfarlane states that there is probably no historical basis for the isolated, bounded community (1977). There has probably never been an impermeable boundary around any community—as there has always been social change and people who come and go (Augé, 1995). As Massey proposes: 'this does not mean that the past is irrelevant to the identity of place. It simply means that there is no internally produced, essential past' (1992:

14). In fact, there exists a paradox that it is only through transience and displacement that one achieves a sense of belonging (Rapport and Dawson, 1998). Yet, the rate of change, and the speed and scale of movement has accelerated massively in the last fifty years, and it is generally agreed that the last few decades have witnessed a period of profound and rapid change. People, materials, products and objects have always travelled, moved and been shared across community 'boundaries', but the ease and rapidity with which such exchanges are possible is new, fundamentally blurring a delineation of 'here' and 'there' (Augé, 1995, Rapport and Dawson, 1998).

Equally, caution should be exercised in rejecting place altogether. It is now commonplace to acknowledge the increasing, not decreasing significance of place to people - in public discourses, nationalist rhetoric, and so on. There has been a shift towards observing the 'imagined' significance of 'place' and to observe that constructions of land, soil, homeland, borders and country are almost always invoked by nationalist movements (Anderson, 1991 (1983), Malkki, 1997a). However, relationship to land or place does not necessarily have to imply stasis—our perceptions and relationships with landscape, land and soil are constantly shifting and changing. Both individuals and 'communities' can have a relationship to land or place that incorporates movement, mobility, flux and change. Refugees represent an example of people who experience dislocation from their 'home' and 'community', but this movement doesn't necessarily negate their relationships with places. Indeed, places: ones left, travelled through and those arrived at can still provide a strong mode of identification in a relationship that is not fixed and stable, but evolving and changing (Malkki, 1997a). The flexibility of transnationalism and the fluidity of hybridity link emplacement and displacement which is helpful, and indeed vital to understanding everyday aspects of movement and identity among refugees (Malkki, 1995b). Community is not a map or a territory, but an orientation (Burkett, 2001). It is not so much place, but the association of place with stasis, boundedness and territorialization that has been undermined by the practical realities of movement and globalization and by deconstructing theoretical assumptions. Although there is a need to uncouple place from stasis and fixity, place remains prevalent in concepts and experiences of community (Crow and Allan, 1994).

2.6 Feeling the community thing

So, 'community' is not fixed to a place, but is often conceived of in terms of place(s).

Community can be usefully understood as a relational construction, formed by and forming

shared identity, but a shared identity dependent upon subjective (and therefore malleable) boundaries. The search for the archetypal community has long since been given up, along with positivist attempts to locate other 'social realities'. Community, as repeatedly observed, certainly exists as something longed and hoped for. Yet community is not simply a symbolic construction borne out of use and contestation. Community is something we 'feel', want, and experience on a daily basis—whether in lamenting its absence or working for its propagation. Indeed, the very argument that we miss community turns circle on itself and assures its continuing importance—as a mode of counter-identification, if nothing else. Moving beyond the 'death of community', recent attempts to address the methodological and theoretical 'swamp' of community (Burkett, 2001) offer alternatives including attention to friendship, and build on the symbolic approach of Cohen by emphasizing the importance of social experience.

Claims in favour of social engagement and the popularity of notions of 'community' cannot be ignored, and need to be acknowledged by paying attention to lived experience. Community defined as comprehensive and integral can only be an increasing rarity in an increasingly complex and mobile world, yet paradoxically the emotions attributed to collective attachments have hardly disappeared (Amit, 2002:17). Rather than a spatial structure, alternate approaches suggest the significance of friendship (Pahl, 2000) and incorporate contingency, fluidity and porosity of group membership as inherent to contemporary, some would say 'postmodern' times (Delanty, 2003). Indeed Bauman contends that insecurity in the contemporary world is the cause of an increased yearning for the perceived safety of community (Bauman, 2001). This paradox has been accounted for by stressing the imagined or symbolic nature of community, and yet 'when it is not realized in actual social relations, it is difficult to account for the emotive valence attributed to it' (Amit, 2002: 17). As Amit proposes:

The emotive impact of community, the capacity for empathy and affinity, arise not just out of an imagined community, but in the dynamic interaction between that concept and the actual and limited social relations and practices through which it is realized. (Amit, 2002: 18)

Amit is therefore calling for a balance to be struck between stressing the symbolic nature of community and the need to link this crucially with social relations and practices through which it is realized (ibid.). Community thus becomes constituted not by 'coldly calculated contracts, but embodied, sensual and emotionally charged affiliations' (2002: 16). Likewise,

Burkett proposes a repositioning of the sites of community from 'the external to the internal, from the universal to the specific, from objective to contextual' (2001: 237), hence 'community becomes an experience and an expression of subjective, everyday practices' (2001: 238). Finally, I will now turn to the everyday appropriation of community in four prominent political paradigms.

2.7 Utilizing community as a thing

Aside from, (though not entirely apart from), developments in the intellectual history of the concept, community has been utilized as a key framework in a number of political theories and social movements. Multiculturalism, community development (empowerment/ participation/ involvement), the political theory of communitarianism, and nationalism are four key contemporary paradigms where 'community' is seen as a mode and method of solving problems of poverty, moral anarchy and social conflict. In public rhetoric, 'community' is often opportunistically stretched to accommodate a wide variety of categories (Amit and Rapport, 2002:13). Baumann comments that the public appropriation and use of the word community means it is used to refer to contexts so varied—from the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland to 'community-charge' (poll tax renamed) and 'Britain's financial community' of stockbrokers—that it is simply confusing and 'dishonest' (1996: 14). Community becomes a mechanism of governments to encourage certain desired activities or commitments (Delanty, 2003).

2.7.1 Multiculturalism

There are numerous versions of multicultural theory and governance, but all pertain to the question of the management and rights of minority groups in society. Notions of incommensurate cultural communities are embedded in multiculturalism, which in Europe emerged as a means of managing cultural diversity resulting from large-scale immigration of workers in the wake of decolonization (Delanty, 2003). While cultural relativism was initiated in describing and explaining cultural difference in other spaces, in multiculturalism the mosaic of discrete cultural entities is applied to migrant groups (and where applicable, indigenous peoples) within national boundaries. Rather than presenting a laterally placed group of equal but different cultural entities within a nation-state, however, it is assumed that there is a dominant culture to which migrant groups had to adjust but to whom certain concessions could be made (Delanty, 2003: 93).

By equating culture with community, multiculturalism, like Anderson's national imagined community discussed below, fundamentally restructures the idea of community as a small-scale group, as national groups are reified as sharing a single identity, and therefore a sense of 'community'. Baumann, in his study of discourses of identity in Southall, London, demonstrates how community has become a 'privileged container of difference' (1996). In the paradigm of multiculturalism, community is equated with culture, but, Baumann finds that in Southall there are multiple contexts where culture may 'stretch' across 'communities', where there is a sense of shared culture, but not of 'community', and where there are 'communities' within 'communities' (1996). He records that the dominant public discourse about ethnic minorities dissolved the more he got to know Southallians (1996: 10).

The trend of viewing cultural plurality as a competition of winning or losing culture in a bargain between the dominant and minority entities (Ong, 1999) is a continuing feature of media representations, political discourse (Werbner, 2002, Werbner, 2005) and certain approaches to communitarianism. The notion that identity can be 'lost' implies that individuals are receptacles filled with culture, which is emptied in a process of transformation, to be replaced with a new identity that permeates them from the 'new' environment. To question the equation of community with culture is not to suggest that there are no 'cultural differences', or that cultural identity is not a source of commonality that can create a sense of 'community'. But, as has been demonstrated, notions of culture and community need to be understood contextually rather than as a set of fixed and reified 'essences'

Communitarians look to ethnic groups as a vindicating example that harmonious community bonds can be maintained in our otherwise crumbling contemporary society (Etzioni, 1995: 120). The assumption that minority ethnic groups in society represent an anomaly of 'noble' community within urban fragmentation and complexity is well entrenched. Even in 1925, Park excludes 'ghettos' from his urban community apocalypse (in Cohen, 1985: 25). The designation of ethnic groups as communities relates to power. In popularizing the language of community, multiculturalism may be seen as displacing political activity around class or 'race' (Gilroy, 2002 (1987)). Bauman suggests that white English wouldn't want to be designated an ethnic group (although it would, perhaps, be accepted in Belize or Australia) (Baumann, 1996). However, this may be changing given the increasing tendency to refer to 'English' or 'white' ethnicity, especially among far-right nationalist groups and some right wing commentators.

In refugee sector discourse, it is common to refer to the 'host community' or wider community to euphemistically refer to white non-immigrant groups (longer settled immigrant groups being referred to as 'black and minority'). Dominant approaches to the management of the settlement of refugees assume the 'natural' formation of community along national-ethnic lines and this is supported in funding for associations or organizations to represent 'community'. Voluntary sector and government discourse largely presupposes the existence of putative refugee communities of cohesive, distinct, internally shared and externally reified webs of social interaction, agreement and common goals. Recent empirical research questions the essentializing tendencies of the dominant discourse, critiquing the uncritical application of 'community' as a descriptive and organizational tool, unmasking the promotion of refugee community organizations as potentially cloaking hegemonic power and perpetuating marginalisation (Wahlbeck, 1998, Griffiths, 2000, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005).

2.7.2 Community development

Community development has been described as:

Both a practice, with a set of skills and techniques, and a broad philosophical approach to working with people; one which strives to give ordinary people a voice for expressing and acting on their needs and desires and, through the process of participating in this approach to social change, offers people, particularly the most powerless and deprived, support for their empowerment'. (Craig, 2003)

While, as Craig notes, community development is primarily a practice that aims to bring about social change, theoretically it is still dominated by a somewhat simplistic and romantic view of community (Burkett, 2001). In terms of policy implementation, place is central to approaches to community under New Labour, for example in organizing funding under 'New Deal for Communities' on a postcode basis (Nash and Christie, 2003).

The tendency in classical approaches to displace community downwards in the class hierarchy was mirrored in community development practice as there was a growth of social programmes in the 1960s designed to reach further 'into the community', implicitly denoting working class neighbourhoods (Craig, 1989: 8). Indeed, the contemporary voluntary sector is overwhelmed by the prefix 'community' that litters job titles and social projects, continuing a tradition of using 'community' as a 'spray-on additive' (Craig, 1989:

9), especially as a euphemism for poor, disadvantaged, disaffected, vulnerable or dispossessed people. Use of the word community provides a veneer of sociability to otherwise somewhat impersonal social activities (Newby in Crow and Allan, 1994) requiring commendation (Frazer, 1999). These uses demonstrate the universally positive connotations of 'community' (Williams in Baumann, 1996: 15), and show the risk of concealment that 'fuels the dangerous quicksands of nostalgia and idealism' (Burkett, 2001: 241). Meanwhile, the emphasis on action in community development means it is prone to the accusation that processes are reduced to 'battles on immediate issues, single issue campaigns and social movements involving self-selecting interest groups' (Smith in Burkett, 2001: 240).

Reconceptualizing community along poststructural and postmodern lines brings specific pragmatic issues to the fore in community development. Burkett suggests interpreting community as a verb ('embracing the "art" of "doing community"'), rather than as a noun (something that can be 'lost' and 'found') (2001). Rather than producing replicable 'tool kits' for community participation Burkett proposes that community development workers must resign themselves to uncertainty, and to mystery: 'Thus, it is imagination, creativity and uncertainty rather than reason, evidence and certainty which lie at the heart of the possibility for postmodern community development' (2001: 243).

2.7.3 Communitarianism

While liberals and communitarians alike appear to agree that there is indeed no such thing as community, communitarians seek to reverse this perceived status quo and prescribe a 'return to community' as a solution to social ills. In contrast liberalism promotes individual access to wealth and property, and is closely linked to individualism. The phrase 'no such thing as community' is an adaptation of Margaret Thatcher's infamous declaration regarding society, which in Britain epitomized the individualism she espoused (Kingdom, 1992). Communitarianism has seen increasing popularity in recent decades as a political movement, and underpins New Labour governance in the UK summed up in Prime Minister Tony Blair's phrase 'opportunity to all, responsibility from all' (Nash and Christie, 2003, Gilchrist, 2004, L. Morris, 2007: 43). Communitarians argue that the liberal focus on freedom to own property and make wealth does not produce a happy and healthy society and that we need to remember our responsibilities to others and forsake some of our freedom for the common good (Etzioni, 1995, 1996). For example, Etzioni, who has influenced New Labour communitarianism (L. Morris, 2007), contrasts the idea of a

historical site being damaged or destroyed in a (liberal) prioritization of capital gains against the preservation of a historical site with a sense of responsibility to our grandchildren (1995).

Variations in communitarian philosophies are informed by rival moral perspectives that condition understandings of the term 'community'. Frazer suggests that the social and political positions of political philosophers have influenced variable approaches in communitarianism (Frazer, 1999). For Marxists community may mean solidarity and cooperation; for conservatives community is a hierarchically organized human group integrated by obligation; while in socialism community is affected by socialist theory of the role of the state and class; and in anarchism the ideal community affects and is affected by the primary value of liberty (ibid.: 53,54). However, the more common phenomenon in communitarian writings is to dispense with any attempt to define community, assuming value coherence of the term between readers and analyst (ibid.). In fact, as has been argued in this chapter, there can be multiple uses, meanings and contextual adoptions of the term community.

Communitarianism mythologizes the past as a 'Golden Age' of community tending to overplay social harmony and perpetuating traditional depictions. We began this chapter by rejecting the search for the ideal community as outdated and theoretically sterile, but communitarian approaches seem to be engaged in just that search. As previously suggested, an overwhelmingly positive gloss ignores the tension between the security and safety of community and individual freedom (Bauman, 2002). Further, Kymlicka notes that historical examples of community, on which communitarian ideals are pinned, either explicitly or implicitly ensured legitimacy by excluding some from membership (1990: 226). Taking 'early New England town governments' as an example, he demonstrates how, while they may have had a great deal of legitimacy among their members, this was partly because women, atheists, Indians and the propertyless were excluded from membership (Kymlicka, 1990).

Etzioni perpetuates outdated ecological notions of community, suggesting that the return to the suburbs is helping build community relations (1995: 120). This contestation stands in marked contrast to Young and Wilmott's famous study of Bethnal Green and Greenleigh that, back in 1955, found exactly the opposite. Those in Greenleigh, a new suburb built in the 1950s where many Bethnal Greeners were rehoused, commented on the changes from the friendly, close(r)-knit behaviour they had been accustomed to in Bethnal Green, saying

‘When they come down here, they’re not friendly, they keep themselves to themselves’ (1957: 147).

Fixed ideas fail to acknowledge the nature of ‘community’ as a ‘paradoxical experience - it is about difference just as much as it is about unity, about conflict *and* harmony, selfishness *and* mutuality, separateness *and* wholeness, discomfort *and* comfort.’ (Burkett, 2001: 242 emphasis in original) Furthermore, it is implicit that a particular type of community is being promoted—examples such as New Age Travellers, religious-terrorist groups or anti-globalization campaigners are clearly not promoted. Examples of communalism that does not conform to the mainstream are marked as ‘problems’ (Gilchrist, 2004: 9). The ‘rose-tinted glasses’ view of ‘community’ history apparent in communitarianism can also be seen in the construction of nationalism. Again, the notion of ‘place’ is crucial, as nationalism constructs shared identity, language and ethnicity within geographical boundaries and stresses historical continuities.

2.7.4 ‘Imagined Communities’

Apart from Cohen’s symbolic approach to the study of community, probably the other single most influential use of the idea of community in the last few decades is Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991 (1983)). Anderson was addressing what he perceived as a failure in existing theories of nationalism to explain the passion and emotion associated with the nation and nationalism. He describes national ‘communities’ as imagined because members never meet each other, but communication with them exists in their mind (1991). Indeed, in Anderson’s view, ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined’ (ibid.: 6). However, he urges that the term ‘imagined’ shouldn’t be equated with falsity, fabrication or invention, suggesting that communities are distinguished not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Print capitalism made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways as people were joined together by symbolic ritual, such as reading the newspaper in the morning. Anderson suggests that this is also a defining feature of what makes nationalism a singularly modern phenomenon, as the invention of the printing press and the distribution of books meant people could read something in their own language (not just the Latin of learned classes and ruling elite) and makes possible mass, collective identity. Language was standardized on national scale, creating unified fields of exchange; these invisible readers formed the embryo of the nationally imaged community (ibid: 44).

This allows for the idea of nation conceived of as 'solid community' moving down (or up) history (ibid: 26). Anderson's central argument in the use of the idea of 'community' is that it may help to explain how people can identify with and even be prepared to fight and die for strangers.

Amit notes that Anderson thus drew on a conception rather than an actualization of solidarity, much as Cohen employed the notion of symbolic community (2002: 6). The concept of imagined national community 'unabashedly' severs the linkage between community and face-to-face social relations (Amit, 2002: 6). Nevertheless, the depiction of a national cultural group exploits 'common-sense' understandings of togetherness assumed to exist in a local, close 'community', and hence perpetuates the myth of communal humanity. She also notes Herzfeld's critique of imagined communities, that questions how it is that people should be willing to die for a formal abstraction. Herzfeld uses the concept of 'cultural intimacy' to highlight the interplay between official and social discourses: 'the daily performances, expressions of scepticism, invocations of stereotypes, the uses of irony and humour as means of cultural critique and collective self-deprecation which subtly subvert official discourses of nation, state bureaucracies and citizenship' (Amit, 2002: 7). She argues that what is imagined can only be truly felt and claimed by its potential members if they are able to realize it socially, in their relations and familiarity with some, if not all other constituents (Amit, 2002: 8). 'To treat the idea and actualization of community as if these are in essence independent elements is to leave us and our analyses with only one hand clapping' (Amit, 2002: 8).

2.8 Conclusions

The idea of community contains within it a sense of interconnectedness and interdependency between members, and the familiarity of small-scale groups. It is an idea that can be applied to, and perhaps exploited by, the appropriation of the term to refer to much larger-scale groups that share an identity (the nation, 'Muslim' community, or 'language' community). Although the national or cultural 'community' can patently not be considered a small scale-group, it is the intimacy, sense of sharing and mutual support imagined to exist in a small-scale 'community' that is politically useful to nation-builders and multicultural policy makers. While eschewing any fixed definition, I would follow Burkett's suggestion that 'community' (as people believe it to exist) is a set of processes and

actions that are dialogical and relational—‘a never-ending-story’ (2001). As Frazer puts it in her comprehensive summary:

‘Community’ is a concept with open frontiers and vague contours, which seems to extend across a very heterogeneous class of things, which conveys a wealth of meaning - it appeals to people’s emotions, it is shot through with value judgements, it conjures up associations of images from a wide, wide range of discourses and contexts (1999: 60).

Community exists as a highly contested concept, as a lived or longed for experience actualized through and in everyday social affiliations, and as a tool of political discourse.

Kelly notes that the idea that refugees will form community groups has rarely been challenged (2000, 2003). While I set out to question the assumption that refugees form themselves into communities, and that these ‘communities’ are always a source of support, sharing and exchange, the resulting ethnography in fact developed into an exploration of what forms of association that may be considered relevant to the practice and concept of community could be found among those in my research. The fieldwork took as its starting point the possibility that theoretically distinct approaches may overlap and intersect in social life—and, following Amit, that these places, moments or experiences of intersection may be the points at which community is ‘realized’ (Amit, 2002).

Community is relevant to a study of refugees in the UK in four salient ways. Firstly, as suggested at the outset, community is a term widely used and ill-defined in refugee policy and thus deserves attention. Secondly, through the championing of the establishment of refugee community organizations as conduits for resources and information, community becomes an organizing principle for resource distribution, and management of power and politics by the voluntary sector and the state. Thirdly, to delimit a research population for social scientific study community may be relevant to refugees as an analytic tool; and because of their precariousness and mobility, refugees are a social group that present immediate challenges to traditional conceptual and theoretical applications of the term. Finally, community, as outlined in this chapter, has been chiefly used in the social sciences to refer to two social phenomena: as a social structure formed from actual social ties (a thing) and as a feeling or identification (a sense).

It is hoped that this thesis may contribute towards understandings in all four of these ways, but in particular, in relation to the last point, in the interaction between social ties and imagined 'communities'. Before moving on to exposition of the ethnographic material it is necessary to provide some context to the study by outlining relevant policy and by describing the fieldwork and research population. The following chapter will therefore examine issues to do with people who come to the UK to claim asylum and provide an overview of the methodology and individuals involved in the research.

3 Refugees in Britain and Leeds

To properly understand the lives of people applying for asylum in the UK, it is first necessary to consider key aspects of recent policy. For a large part of the research, conversations rarely progressed beyond discussing the asylum system—from day-to-day negotiations with a disorganized and inflexible bureaucracy, to wider political and philosophical musings on the apparently illogical and unjust nature of UK and global management of migration. The overall life-project for people entering the asylum system is to gain leave to remain. This mission is largely in the hands of the Home Office, leaving individuals seeking asylum with a sense of lack of power and insecurity. The Home Office presides over asylum decision-making in an environment of negative media portrayals and supposed public concern about immigration and asylum. The government has responded with a succession of reactive and increasingly restrictive Acts of Parliament (Schuster and Solomos, 1999, Sales, 2002, Robinson et al., 2003, Dwyer, 2005, Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Robinson and Reeve, 2006), although the level of public concern may be lower than assumed by the government (Sales, 2002). After arrival in the UK, people seeking asylum cannot fail to quickly become aware of the political prominence of asylum. Through the asylum application process and support systems, and public debate and the media, policy shapes daily life.

This chapter has three tasks: to provide a critical introduction to the policy and research context of studying refugees in the UK; to describe the fieldsite of Leeds and its refugee population; and to outline the research methodology including presenting the lives of the people who participated in this research. Each of these topics would justify extensive exploration of their own; the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview sufficient to contextualize the subsequent ethnographic material. Further policy information is interwoven with the thesis where pertinent to the topic at hand. Immigration and asylum policy in the UK has undergone extensive and rapid change, particularly since the late 1990s, and this has generated a substantial literature on the topic (for example, Schuster and Solomos, 1999, Bloch, 2000, Zetter et al., 2003). While the context of this thesis is the dispersal policy, it does not review that policy, a task that has been taken up by others and that is likely to attract continuing attention (Boswell, 2001, Robinson et al., 2003, Anie et al., 2005). As a significant site of dispersal, Leeds has been the focus of a number of recent studies concerning refugees and the services that support them (Wilson, 2001, Phillips et al., 2004, Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Lewis, 2007). There remains a concerning lack of critical consideration of ‘the refugee’ as a research subject/object in many studies in the

burgeoning field of refugee studies and in 'grey' literature, though two notable contributions addressing the social construction of refugees provide greater detail than will be possible in this chapter (Zetter, 1991, Malkki, 1995b).

3.1 Immigration and asylum policy and practice in the UK

In the last decade there has been a sharp rise in the number of people seeking refuge as a result of forced migrations worldwide. For much of the 1990s, asylum applications in the UK hovered between 30,000 and 60,000. After a sharp rise in 1998 and 1999, Britain, as other European countries, saw its highest ever numbers of asylum applications in 2000 (80,315), 2001 (71,025) and 2002 (84, 130) (Home Office, 2004). This rise, and sustained media attention, has helped secure immigration and asylum as one of the top priorities of the Labour government that has been in power since 1997 (Robinson and Reeve, 2006, Somerville, forthcoming). Yet the discussion on asylum and immigration in Britain, and indeed around the world, often ignores the historical perspective of migration, which will now be briefly considered. That will be followed by an overview of the contemporary policy environment.

3.1.1 A very brief history of UK immigration

Britain has experienced immigration throughout its history, though this is not acknowledged by historical theologies that present a stable and durable national character, ignoring the deep level of settlement by migrants (Winder, 2004). Britain has also long been a destination for people seeking refuge, such as the Huguenots fleeing from France in the late seventeenth century (see also Wilmott and Young, 1957), when it is believed that the word 'refugee' entered the English language from the French (Bloch, 2002: 22). It was not until the twentieth century that policies attempting to restrict and control immigration began to be put in place, with the first attempt to regulate being the 1905 Aliens Act. This, and the timing of immigration policies that came after it, can be closely mapped to immigration flows, internal and external politics, international relations and media coverage, providing a pattern of reactive policy-making rather than long-term management (Nicholson and Twomey, 1999, Schuster and Solomos, 1999, Karpf, 2002).

In the nineteenth century the largest minority group in Britain was the Irish (Bloch, 2002). From the 1880s onwards there were a series of Jewish migrations, including many forced out of Russia by Tsarist persecution. Late nineteenth century industrialisation created a

need for labour and attracted migrants from Ireland, Germany, Russia and Poland (ibid.). The first and second world wars generated mass movements of forced migrants from Europe, including Germans, Belgians, Polish, and other Eastern Europeans (Kushnor and Knox, 1999). By 1914 the Jewish population had reached around 300,000, yet, despite great threat from persecution under Nazism in Europe, anti-Semitism and immigration controls restricted entry in the period running up to and including the second world war, when around 65,000 Jews settled in Britain (Bloch, 2002).

After 1945, the period of post-war reconstruction created a need for labour, which encouraged fewer immigration controls and generated large migrations in the 1950s and 1960s from Ireland, the Caribbean and South Asia (ibid.). Around 84,000 people displaced from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Yugoslavia as a result of the second world war benefited from the European Volunteer Workers scheme (Kushnor and Knox, 1999, Bloch, 2002). Migration from the West Indies reached a natural peak of 23,000-30,000 per annum in the period 1955-57 (Robinson et al., 2003). Migration from the Indian subcontinent was slower to develop, but numbers arriving from both regions rose sharply before the much-heralded introduction of immigration controls in 1962, removing the right of Commonwealth citizens to enter to the UK. In this 'beat the ban' rush, migration in 1961 reached 66,000 from the West Indies and 47,000 from India and Pakistan (ibid.).

The development of immigration policies targeted at Commonwealth migrants began a pattern of increasing restriction that characterized immigration policy since (Bloch, 2002), and created a clear distinction in official thinking:

'Immigrants were black and came from former colonies and the Commonwealth (regardless of their motives for leaving), while refugees were white and came from Communist regimes (regardless of their motives for leaving) (Schuster and Solomos, 1999: 58).

While, in 1958 and 1967 respectively several thousand Hungarian and Czech nationals were admitted as refugees (Fanning, 2000, IPPR, 2005), the response to large numbers of East African Asians arriving in the early 1970s was rapid and dramatic, forcing new legislation and attempts to control settlement (Schuster and Solomos, 1999). Having been ordered to leave by President Amin, around 29,000 Ugandan Asians arrived in the UK in 1972 and were housed in military camps around the UK. This policy was a precursor to the present dispersal system, designed to steer Ugandan Asians away from areas of existing Asian

settlement, (Robinson et al., 2003: 111). In 1973, 3,000 Chilean refugees were granted settlement, and since the 1980s, the UK accepted refugees as part of organized UNHCR resettlement programmes from South East Asia (1985-1995), Vietnam (1975-1992), Bosnia (1992-1997) and Kosova (1999) (IPPR, 2005). Dispersal was attempted for these groups, though insufficient planning led to poor reception and high rates of secondary migration (Robinson et al., 2003).

Since the 1990s, the influence of increasing mobility and cheap air travel has resulted in refugee migrations increasingly dominated by 'spontaneous' refugees from a diverse range of countries making their own way to the UK to apply for asylum (Bloch, 1999a, Zetter et al., 2003). In the period between 1991 to 2000, the top five source nationalities for asylum applications were Somalia, Sri Lanka, the Former Yugoslav Republic, Pakistan and Turkey (Zetter et al., 2003). Since 2000, countries in the top five of asylum applications include Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe (IPPR, 2005). While rises in applications from many of these countries show a close correlation to the onset of civil war and state collapse, they do not simplistically reflect global refugee populations, indicating the influences of travel arrangements, smuggling routes, social networks and existing settled populations on choice of destination for refugees (Crisp, 1999, Day and White, 2001, Koser and Pinkerton, 2002, Robinson and Seagrott, 2002, Zetter et al., 2003, Gilbert and Koser, 2006). Importantly, the influence of immigration and asylum policies (including welfare) on asylum applications has been found to be fragmented, difficult to assess, and possibly marginal (Zetter et al., 2003, National Audit Office, 2004a, Gilbert and Koser, 2006), except for creating an increasingly restrictive regime and a likelihood that many thousands of refugees are excluded from entering 'fortress Europe'.

The 'problem' of asylum in Britain can be interpreted as a result of a rapid shift in immigration policy from post-war active recruitment of workers in Commonwealth countries—that saw around half a million migrants settle in the UK by 1962 (Stalker, 2002: 29)—to progressive immigration restrictions that have gradually imposed visa restrictions on nearly all countries outside of the EU, curtailing labour migration (Bloch, 2000, Bloch, 2002). There is now a gradual move back to addressing labour needs through greater acceptance of migrants in the UK and Europe, in recognition of a need for workers in an ageing population, and in an attempt to separate 'economic' migration and asylum claims.

3.1.2 Key asylum policy developments since 1996

From the 1990s onwards policies have targeted deterrence measures and restrictions on welfare provision, and have increasingly sought to differentiate between genuine, 'deserving' refugees, and 'undeserving' asylum seekers. Debates around the 1996 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced the notion that 'bogus' asylum seekers came to the UK to exploit the welfare state, rather than escape persecution (Bloch, 2002). The Act removed access to mainstream benefits for asylum seekers, causing widespread destitution, justified by a potential mass influx from Eastern Europe and post cold-war USSR (though these countries were not in the top ten list of asylum applications in the early 1990s) (Schuster and Solomos, 1999). The 1996 Act also introduced the White List—applicants from countries on the list could be fast-tracked, with the underlying assumption that their claims were unfounded as their countries are judged safe. The list has since grown, and the fast-tracking and segregation of claims at the outset according to their perceived legitimacy is now central to the New Asylum Model introduced in 2007³.

The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act removed provision for asylum seekers completely from mainstream systems, establishing a new agency—the National Asylum Support System—to administer accommodation, and, initially, voucher payments. Widely deemed punitive, stigmatizing, and poverty-inducing by refugee support agencies, vouchers were repealed in 2002 after a sustained campaign (though their use remains in provision of 'hard case' support for refused asylum seekers complying with removal under Section 4 of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act). After 2002, NASS cash support could be collected from Post Offices.

From April 2000, NASS organized the provision of accommodation on a 'no choice' basis through dispersal to cities and towns across the UK, discussed further below. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2005 at least 100,000 people were dispersed nationally (Somerville, forthcoming). An increasing differentiation between people who claim asylum 'at port' and those who claim 'in country' has created a further 'undeserving' tier within the asylum seeker group. Section 55 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act controversially allowed the denial of asylum support for people who claimed asylum in-country more than twenty-four hours after arrival and caused another surge in destitution (Webber, 2004). Following a legal challenge, routine denial of support was found unlawful, and use of the rule restricted. A continued concern to separate asylum from economic

³ The White List is now called the 'Non-Suspensive Appeal' or 'safe-country' list.

migration, and a faster rate of determination of asylum claims was used in 2002 to justify the removal of the right to work for asylum seekers.

A pattern of externalizing borders has emerged with increasing attention paid to carrier liability and criminalizing entering without papers, while the expansion of immigration enforcement within the UK has been assisted by restricting access to services, requiring health professionals and local authorities to check the immigration status of people approaching them (Webber, 2006). This is coupled with deterrence measures aimed at encouraging the return of people whose cases are refused, including, in the 2004 Immigration and Asylum (Treatment of Claimants) Act, the introduction of measures to enable the removal of children from families not making attempts to leave 'voluntarily' ('Section 9') and attempts to introduce enforced 'voluntary' work in return for support offered to those refused asylum. However, both of these policies proved difficult to implement as a result of local opposition and non-compliance in pilot schemes (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2007).

The political sensitivities of immigration and asylum policy encourage rapidly shifting policy. This thesis reflects the ethnographic present of the 2002-2004 fieldwork period. The experiencing of policy explored in this ethnography is relevant to understanding the continuing themes of restrictionism and deterrence, though the shifting policy environment means that some of the detail of practice may have changed since that time.

3.2 Defining and labelling refugees

3.2.1 Defining refugees and the asylum process

Asylum seeker is the legal term for someone who has claimed asylum and who is awaiting a decision by the Home Office on whether they will be granted refugee status. As the type of support and rights granted to asylum seekers are different from those for refugees, clarity of this distinction is important. At the time of this research, asylum seekers had no right to work, no right to education (except some specific college courses in English language and computing), no right to travel or stay away from their designated accommodation for more than seven nights without permission, were required to carry a photo-identity card, and received support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) in the form of cash collected from post offices. Refugees are considered as citizens, so, theoretically, have full

social rights and access to employment, welfare and education⁴. There are other forms of leave to remain that are granted for five years or less including (formerly) Exceptional Leave to Remain, Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave. These forms of leave to remain do not enable full rights, for example, there is no right to family reunion.

Defining 'a refugee' may appear relatively unproblematic in terms of legal language. The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee in the following terms:

(T)he term 'refugee' shall apply to any person who(,)... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Malkki, 1995b: 501)

On the basis of the information a person provides at their asylum interview, the Home Office decides whether a person's claim will entitle them to refugee status under the criteria of the UN Convention ('owing to a well-founded fear of persecution'). The asylum process begins when a person claims asylum. This may be at their port of entry (at port application), or if they enter the UK under another immigration category or clandestinely, they may claim asylum later and are classified as having applied 'in-country'. Following the initial application a date is set by the Home Office for the first 'substantive' interview. For the people in this research, this involved completing a 'SEF' (Statement of Evidence Form) at an interview in Liverpool or Croydon. Some time later—weeks, months or even for some, a year or more—the Home Office responds with a decision. The majority are refused (83% in 2003, 88% in 2004 (Home Office, 2004, Home Office, 2005a)).

If the decision is negative, the applicant may appeal the decision within fourteen days of the date of the refusal. In 2002 80% and in 2003 76% of those refused appealed the decision (Home Office, 2006a). If the application to appeal is accepted, an appeal date is set some months later. The applicant may bring fresh evidence to the appeal relating to the

⁴ Since August 2005, 'Indefinite' Leave to Remain has been reduced to five years pending a review of the case, clearly restricting full participation in the labour market and limiting a sense of belonging or security that could facilitate settlement.

claim they made at the initial interview. The capacity of individuals to act as agents in their own asylum claim is limited, and heavily dependent upon the quality of legal representation and interpreting (Asylum Aid, 1999, Refugee Action, 2006). If dismissed, a right to appeal further to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal existed prior to 2004 (when a single-tier system was introduced) (Ward and Henson, 2006). However, the experiences of people in this research indicated that achieving legal representation to this level was extremely difficult, even before a reduction of legal aid in 2004 that further restricted legal representation at appeal level, and so the likelihood of success (Refugee Action, 2006).

3.2.2 Asylum support and control

When a person claims for asylum, if they are destitute and appear to have no means to support themselves, they may apply for government cash support and accommodation under NASS. It is possible to just get the cash support—this is known as ‘subsistence only’ support—if the applicant has friends or family who they can live with. At the time of this fieldwork adults received around £38 a week in vouchers redeemable for cash (later replaced by a card system). The level of asylum support offered is set at 70% of income support (Temple et al., 2005: 3). There are special arrangements relating to children and young people. Unaccompanied minors— asylum seekers under 18 who arrive in the UK without a parent or guardian—are brought into mainstream systems for looked-after children and young people under the 1989 Children’s Act. When they reach 18, they are required to re-apply for asylum and fall under the NASS system.

The settlement process has come to be directed by the principle of ‘no choice’ accommodation (Boswell, 2001, Sales, 2002). Yet the lack of choice in housing extends well beyond deciding the location where a person may be accommodated—this will be explored in the following chapter on housing experiences. Since the late 1990’s, asylum legislation has become increasingly tied to welfare provision, and conversely, the provision of support is thereby dependent upon complying with the asylum process. In 2003, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 made the receipt of support conditional on regular reporting to an Immigration and Nationality Directorate office (Temple et al., 2005). In Leeds the immigration office is at Waterside Court in West Leeds, several miles from all the major dispersal sites within the city. Reporting requirements have become more regular and more frequently used since this fieldwork was conducted and have become a central feature of immigration control (Home Office, 2005b).

As asylum seekers are not allowed to work they are forced to depend on state cash support. Collecting cash payments at the Post Office was a source of shame and stigma for those in this research, forming a weekly experience of exposure of surviving on cash handouts and perceived resentment from queuing onlookers (see also Sales, 2002: 457). The imposed nature of the poverty brought about by living on low levels of state cash support was made all the worse for people in the asylum system because they wanted to contribute, occupy themselves and earn money by working. This frustration was exacerbated by exposure to resentment and abuse from members of the public and newspaper headlines objecting to welfare support for asylum seekers. The relentless media offensive on asylum seekers in the period of this fieldwork during 2002 to 2004 is widely noted, and has been dominated by financial concerns over resources, welfare, and state expenditure (Bloch and Schuster, 2002, Craig et al., 2004, Craig et al., 2005).

While Home Office-funded research has indicated that people seeking asylum are unlikely to have chosen their destination country (Robinson and Seagrott, 2002) and that poor information in the migration process indicates lack of knowledge about support systems in destination countries (Gilbert and Koser, 2006), asylum seekers confront daily hostility fostered by media and politicians that subscribe to the notion that people come to the UK to seek asylum motivated principally by a desire to profit from welfare systems. This is despite participants in this research saying they found the notion of welfare support strange as it was not offered in their country of origin and despite their great desire to work, also noted in other studies (Craig et al., 2005, Dwyer and Brown, 2005). It is difficult to overstate the harmful impacts of negative media portrayals on the daily lives of asylum seekers. Several studies echo the connection between headlines and hostility, and the general sense of embattlement and alienation for people claiming asylum (Craig et al., 2005, Robinson and Reeve, 2006).

Following a positive decision, whether at the interview or appeal stage, the Home Office gives 28 days notice of removal of cash support and accommodation—refugees may apply for mainstream benefits and have the right to work. Those refused asylum (after exhausting appeal rights—being ‘Appeal Rights Exhausted’ or ARE) are liable to forced removal by the Home Office at any time. However, difficulties in arranging travel documents or conditions in a person’s country of origin may not allow return (Refugee Action, 2006, Lewis, 2007). Families with children under 18 years old should not have support removed and mostly

remain on NASS support⁵. Adults over 18 have support removed following a 21 day notice period. Many stay without the right to work or to receive any form of welfare support (Lewis, 2007). In 2006 the Home Office estimated that there may be 450,000 people who have been refused asylum who remain in the UK (Refugee Action, 2006); seven key participants in this research lost their claims during fieldwork or shortly afterwards and remain in the UK at the time of writing.

3.2.3 Legitimacy: refugees in the migrant spectrum

Questions relating to the legitimacy of asylum policies and of claims made by individual asylum seekers are highly sensitive and topical in the current socio-political climate. In an attempt to differentiate ‘genuine refugees’ those not granted asylum are branded ‘bogus asylum-seekers’ or ‘economic migrants’ by media and politicians. This delineation is used to justify differences in access to welfare and rights at various stages of the asylum process, and to help legitimise detention and other forms of surveillance (such as electronic tagging) (Sales, 2002, Malloch and Stanley, 2005). Ideas of legitimacy were also prevalent in refugees’ perceptions of each other and impact upon social interaction (cf Bloch, 1999a, 2002)—this will be a continuing theme developed throughout the thesis. The distinction adopted by refugees towards one another reflects, and is perhaps shaped by, the distinction made in official thinking between political refugees and immigrants. The saliency of questions of legitimacy highlight the significance of trust, or lack of trust among and towards refugees, and the social construction of refugees as dangerous or polluting (Malkki, 1995a, 1995b). Perceived hierarchies of worthiness or legitimacy operate—certain refugees are seen to be more or less ‘valid’. This differentiation is one of many factors that demonstrate heterogeneity within the ‘refugee group’, a group often treated as cohesive and homogeneous from the outside. Hence, it cannot be assumed that refugees from the same country, region or even village view each other as equals, or that they will automatically trust each other. This militates against any automatic sense of ‘community’.

It is doubtlessly the case that at least some of the people who claim asylum are principally attracted by potential economic gains given there is now virtually no legal way for non-EU

⁵ Families may have NASS support removed if a) they were part of the ‘Section 9’ pilot exercise in 2005 that enabled the government to remove support from families not making ‘reasonable steps’ to leave the UK (Kelley and Meldgaard, 2005) (though in Leeds the Social Services Department refused to separate families and supported those who remained in touch with families together under Section 21 of the Children’s Act 1989 (Lewis, 2007)); b) if they become a family more than 21 days after refusal, i.e. if a pregnant woman is refused asylum and later gives birth; c) if they remove themselves from support or breach their housing contract. The Section 9 pilot caused widespread fear among parents that their children could be removed and placed under care of the local authority (Lewis, 2007).

migrants to enter the country⁶ (Bloch, 1999, 2000). Equally, some of those refused refugee status have a legitimate claim under the UN definition. Additionally, many forced migrants may have had experiences that fall outside of the tight Geneva Convention definition of persecution and are not granted asylum, yet would face danger if returned. Some were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain. However, since ELR was changed to Humanitarian Protection and Discretionary Leave in the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, the government substantially reduced the proportion of people granted this form of leave (Refugee Action, 2006).

It has been suggested that rejection has more to do with the vagaries of the decision-making procedures than the legitimacy of any particular application (Black, 1993, Bloch, 1999a). Any lack of consistency in an immigration interview is usually considered by officials to demonstrate that the applicant must be lying (Hayter, 2000). One way of measuring the quality of initial decisions is to look at the proportion of successful appeals. Between 2000 to 2004 the percentage of successful appeals remained at 20% (Ward and Henson, 2006). The National Audit Office found that caseworkers were too sceptical; some failed to make a proper assessment of the likelihood of persecution if returned, and that mistakes were made in drafting refusal letters (National Audit Office, 2004b: 38-39). Asylum Aid have documented cases where they consider refusals to have been based on poor judgement, inaccurate information (see also Morgan et al., 2003) or dismissal of critical evidence, even medical evidence of torture, resulting in refugees being refused whatever they say (Asylum Aid, 1999).

Additionally, it has been argued that the level of protection afforded to refugees is as much controlled by the ideological posturing of states than as any sense of individual rights (Nicholson and Twomey, 1999, Schuster and Solomos, 1999). There is political capital attached to affording the refugee label to those fleeing ideological foes, which was particularly apparent during the Cold War (Kushnor and Knox, 1999: 11, Nicholson and Twomey, 1999). In the light of such observations, one could conjecture that such posturing influenced sharp drops in refusals for applicants from Afghanistan and Iraq at moments

⁶ Indeed, the Home Office itself admitted at point 4.16 of the 2002 White Paper on Immigration and Asylum, 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain': 'The government accepts that it is often very difficult for those who do have a well-founded fear of persecution to arrive in the UK legally to seek our help.' (Home Office, 2002: 52)

when the UK government had a leading role in military or political intervention⁷.

Furthermore, as indicated above, at times when labour is needed, refugees are subsumed within general migration because of the primacy of economic interests (Nicholson and Twomey, 1999, Bloch, 2002). Migration undertaken with a primary economic motive may also have a 'refugee aspect' (Rex et al., 1987: 8).

People seeking asylum are aware of these deficiencies in the system, and quickly develop a growing sense that decisions are not fair or equitable, but subjective, political and illogical. This view is sometimes bolstered by voluntary agencies equally incredulous at the reasons for refusal provided by the Home Office in some cases. The lack of trust in Home Office decision-making held by those claiming asylum and voluntary organizations, and the irony of seeking safety in a country that seems hostile to those in need, makes the powerlessness of seeking asylum all the more difficult to bear.

This discussion hopefully illustrates that there are indeed no clear-cut boundaries between refugees, asylum seekers, and economic or other migrants in contemporary Europe. As Malkki has argued, it may not always be useful to separate refugees from other types of migrants, and it is important that people considered refugees are seen as part of the migrant spectrum (1995b). However, she also highlights the need for a contextual understanding of the conditions of refugee migration that are often less voluntary than is the case with other types of migrants. 'Spontaneous' asylum seekers are less likely to be part of chain migrations, producing fragmented and tentative social networks, and are subject to highly restrictive policies. More people seeking asylum come single than as part of a family, in contrast to organized government programmes to resettle UNHCR refugees under the 'Gateway' programme that favour families (Home Office, 2006c). While comparisons with other migrant groups are often illuminating, these caveats must be taken into account (Joly, 1996, Bloch, 1999a, Brettell, 2000).

⁷ Refusals following initial decisions made on asylum applications were 74% in 2001 and 66% in 2002 overall. Refusals of applications from Afghanistan dropped from 59% in 2000 to 21% in 2001. Refusals of applications from Iraq dropped from 70% in 2001 to 25% in 2002. In contrast, despite a steep rise in applications from Zimbabwe in 2002, for example, the rate of refusals at initial decision in the same year was 65% (Home Office, 2006a).

3.3 Leeds

Leeds was the principal research site, though the research was not confined to Leeds (see methodology below). Leeds is the largest city in West Yorkshire with a population of around 715,000. Some consider it the fastest-growing city in the UK in terms of population, economy and construction; though the benefits of this growth are unequally shared, with many excluded from the opportunities of economic growth and prosperity. This results in a 'two speed city' (Unsworth and Stilwell, 2004: 15). Leeds is called a 'multicultural' city—58,300 or 8.2% of the population are non-white (2001 census) (Stilwell and Phillips, 2006). However, certain areas are more mixed than others. One third of the black and minority ethnic population live in just three electoral wards: Gipton and Harehills, Hyde Park and Woodhouse, and Chapel Allerton (Leeds City Council, 2005).

Leeds already had a significant Irish population when Jewish people, including many from Poland, arrived in numbers from 1880s onwards (Phillips et al., 2004). The Leeds Jewish population made a marked economic contribution to the city. Prominent Leeds businesses set up by Jewish refugees include Marks and Spencer, and clothes retailer Burtons. The city's art college is named after Ukrainian-born artist Jacob Kramer who fled to Leeds in 1902 (www.movinghere.org.uk). Similar to other major UK cities, the main ethnic minority populations in Leeds are Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Caribbean. There is also a small Latin American population, including Chileans. Chinese people make up 0.5% of the city's population (2001 census). While these migrant groups may predominantly be seen as coming for economic reasons (see, for example, Knott, 1994), the populations were also likely to have a 'refugee aspect', including people, such as East African Asians, forced to migrate.

Leeds was part of the Vietnamese resettlement programme in the 1980s, and since the 1990s has played a prominent role in refugee resettlement in the UK. The Bosnia programme that began in 1992 led to the establishment of a regional office of the Refugee Council. At the start of dispersal, languages identified as already spoken by significant numbers of people in Leeds were Albanian, Bengali, German, Hindi, Italian, Punjabi and Urdu (Wilson, 2001). Before dispersal began, countries with high numbers of asylum applicants were not previously represented in significant numbers in Leeds, (with the

possible exceptions of Iran, Zimbabwe, Iraq/ Kurdistan and Former Yugoslavia⁸). It is therefore likely that almost all new arrivals coming to Leeds through compulsory dispersal are 'spatial pioneers' (Robinson and Reeve, 2006) in the areas where they are housed. Since dispersal began Leeds has been the city with the third largest population of asylum seekers supported by NASS (varying between 1,500 and 2,300 from 2000-2005), after Glasgow and Birmingham. The Yorkshire and Humberside region has consistently supported at least 20% of those in NASS accommodation over the six years since dispersal began, proportionally more than any other region.

3.3.1 Leeds as an asylum seeker dispersal site

Dispersal was introduced with the intention of relieving strain on London and the South East, where the majority of asylum seekers were concentrated, by sharing the burden of costs of supporting asylum seekers with local authorities across the UK. In the Yorkshire and Humberside region, dispersal was initially to the main urban centres: Leeds, Hull, Bradford and Sheffield. Over time, dispersal extended to most towns, especially Doncaster, Wakefield, Kirklees (Huddersfield), Calderdale (Halifax), Barnsley, and Rotherham. Latterly as numbers of applications dropped after 2003, dispersal to some of the smaller towns was reduced, but in Leeds a capacity of around 2000 places has been maintained. Dispersal was also intended to reduce social tensions resulting from the high concentration of asylum seekers in the southeast, but succeeded in dispersing social tensions, racism and xenophobia (Institute of Race Relations, 2000, Boswell, 2001, Robinson et al., 2003). Arguably dispersal has also had positive impacts. Leeds City Council highlight the regenerative impact of NASS housing in certain areas of Leeds where formerly bordered-up shops have reopened, while some schools with refugee children have benefited from increasing diversity and improved attainment levels (Cooper, 2004, Westmoreland, 2004).

The immediate precursor to the dispersal system was the Kosova programme of June 1999. Leeds was the first place to receive Kosovan refugees from UNHCR camps in Albania, who were placed in various reception centres across the region. The expansion of refugee services to respond to the Kosovan resettlement programme placed Leeds in a relatively strong position to respond when the dispersal of asylum seekers began in April 2000. The dispersal policy was rapidly introduced and effectively forced upon local authorities with

⁸ The 2001 census counted 400 or more people in Leeds whose country of birth was Iran, Zimbabwe, Iraq and Former Yugoslavia (National Statistics Online). The census cannot reveal when people came or why, so it should not be assumed that all of these people are 'refugees'.

little preparation so other cities in the region, notably Hull, were less prepared (Dawson, 2001). Because local authorities struggled to meet the housing requirements set by NASS, many private providers were contracted to provide housing (Zetter and Pearl, 2000)—often profiting from letting out inferior quality housing without providing a level of services adequate for the funding they received (Carter and El Hassan, 2002). While dispersal was designed for areas that have available accommodation, existing multi-ethnic populations and the scope to develop voluntary and community support services, in practice securing accommodation in areas of low demand has taken precedence over other factors (Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Robinson et al., 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005, Robinson and Reeve, 2006).

Under dispersal, most asylum seekers were received at the Hillside Induction Centre (formerly called a reception centre) in West Leeds before being dispersed across a limited number of areas in Leeds (see maps, figures 1 and 2), usually after a period of around two weeks (Wilson, 2001). Leeds City Council managed a planned programme of dispersal within the city to avoid high concentrations in areas of existing minority ethnic populations and to house language groups in broadly the same area. However, the local authority provides only around half of the NASS accommodation in Leeds, the other half is provided by private providers, which at the time of the research included three profit-making companies and one non-profit company. Housing offered by private providers, (see map, figure 3) demonstrates the acquisition of a large number of properties in a small number of inner-city neighbourhoods that already had high minority ethnic populations, including Harehills in the East of the city and Beeston in the South. Meanwhile, one of the highest concentrations of NASS housing is in Lincoln Green in Burmantofts, formerly known as a 'white' neighbourhood with high deprivation.

Asylum seekers dispersed to Leeds, therefore, experience the city as 'multicultural' to differing degrees, depending on the characteristics of the places they live and visit. The national picture is one where dispersal areas can broadly be correlated with areas of deprivation in cities where there is available vacant housing (Anie et al., 2005). Although the local picture is more nuanced—not every resident of a deprived area is deprived, for example—the view that asylum seekers have been housed in deprived urban areas is repeatedly voiced by both refugees and those who support them. Anie et al note that there is an increased likelihood of incidents of harassment and assault of asylum seekers in deprived areas (Anie et al., 2005). This reinforces the strong anecdotal evidence among refugees in Leeds, and it must be emphasized that individuals in this research experienced

racism from white, 'black' and 'Asian' Leeds residents. Barely a week of fieldwork would go past without me being regaled with stories of assault or harassment experienced by those in the research or their friends and associates. Feelings of threat and fear permeated people's daily existences. Other studies similarly emphasize asylum seekers' reports of threatening behaviour and racially motivated attacks (Institute of Race Relations, 2000, Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Robinson et al., 2003, Craig et al., 2005, Robinson and Reeve, 2006, N. Morris, 2007)

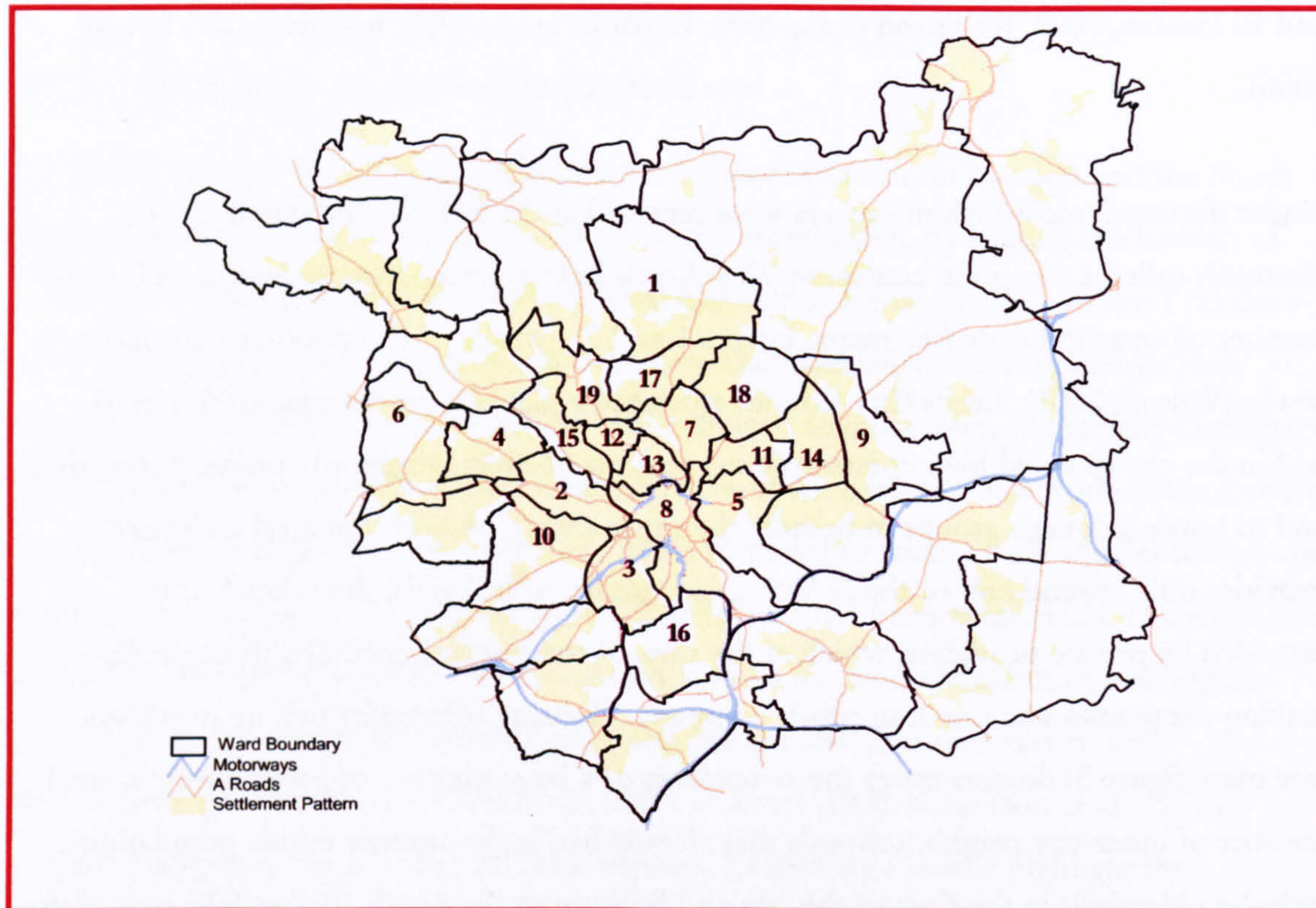


Figure 1 Map of Leeds: council wards with NASS dispersal housing

1	Alwoodley	10	Farnley and Wortley
2	Armley	11	Gipton and Harehills
3	Beeston and Holbeck	12	Headingley
4	Bramley and Stanningley	13	Hyde Park and Woodhouse
5	Burmantofts and Richmond Hill	14	Killingbeck and Seacroft
6	Calverley and Farsley	15	Kirkstall
7	Chapel Allerton	16	Moortown
8	City and Hunslet	17	Roundhay
9	Cross Gates and Whinmoor	18	Weetwood

LCC Properties Accommodating Asylum Seekers - Oct 04

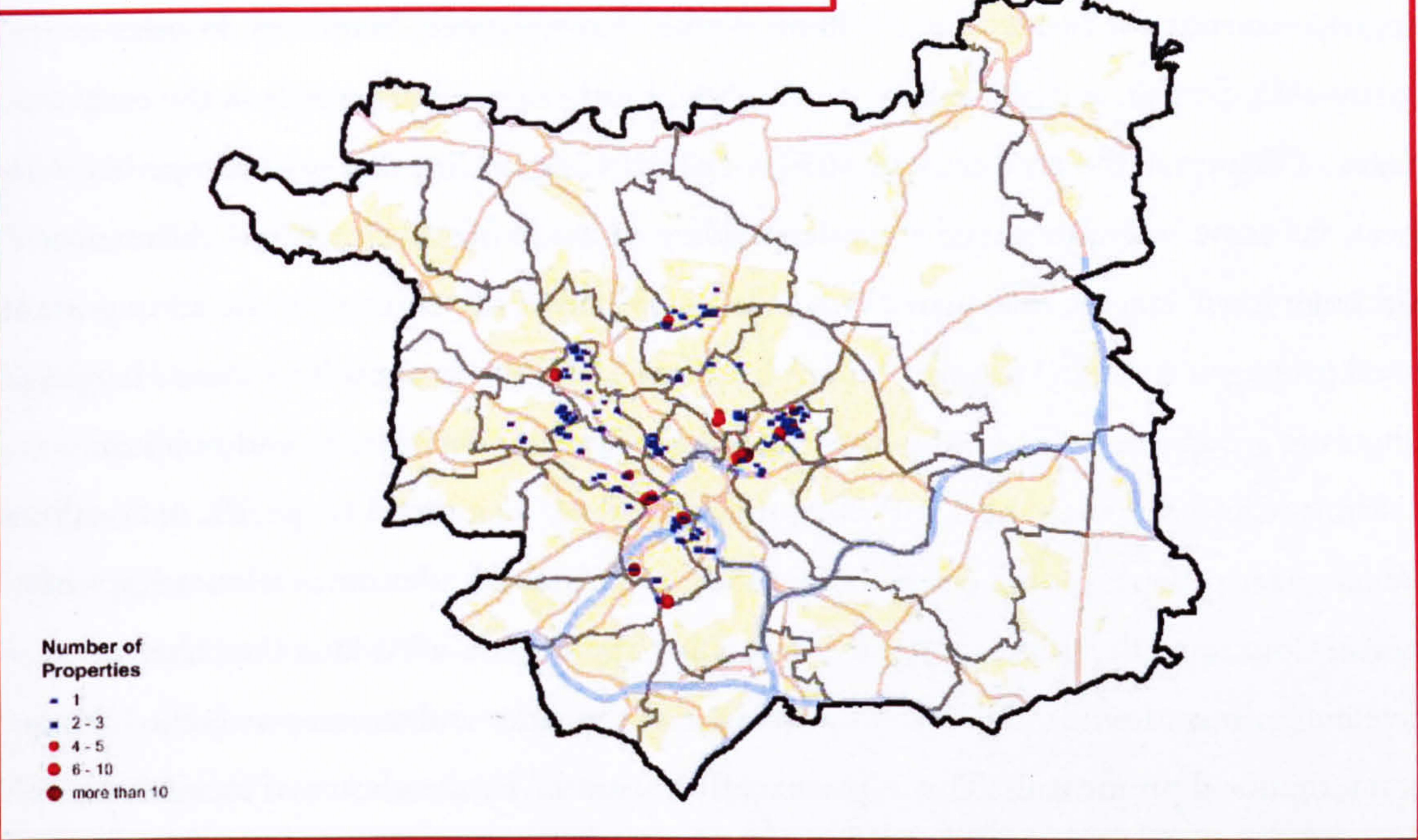


Figure 2 Map of Leeds: NASS housing owned by Leeds City Council, October 2004

Non LCC Properties Accommodating Asylum Seekers - Oct 04

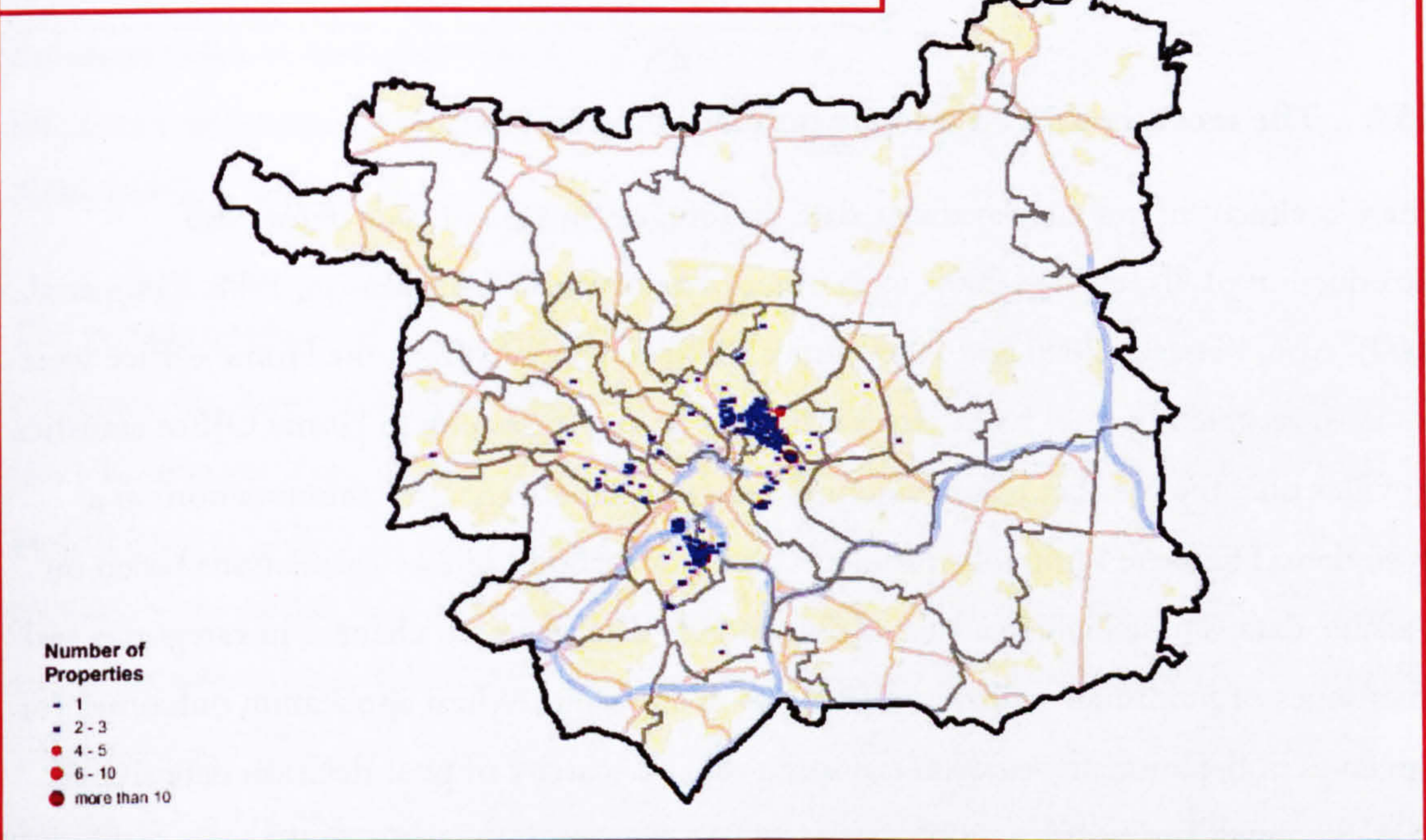


Figure 3 Map of Leeds: NASS housing provided by private providers, 2004

[Maps kindly supplied by the Refugee and Asylum Service, Leeds City Council]

The dispersal system attempted to cluster people according to language groups, and to the extent to which this was possible or successful, this may go some way to assisting the formation of RCOs and informal networks. However, clustering worked only marginally

because private housing providers paid little attention to the plan⁹. The initial agreed language clusters for Leeds were Amharic, Arabic, Farsi, French, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Somali, and Spanish (Wilson, 2001). Furthermore, particularly in the early stages of dispersal, the notion of assisting social networks by housing people together who speak the same language lacked an understanding of issues of tribal or ethnic differences. Although it will emerge that shared language was found in this research to be an important social propagator, mutual support cannot be assumed simply as a result of shared language. Linguistic groups are cross-cut by national, ethnic, gender, generational, and political divisions. Clustering may assist with the provision of services aimed at specific nationalities and language groups, yet the compulsory nature of dispersal undermines relationships of choice. Consequently, those able to move around often spend what little they have in travelling to meet friends, relations or acquaintances in cities and towns across the UK, or on international phone calls. This is particularly illustrated by the choice of location made by asylum-seekers who receive subsistence-only support from NASS, the majority of whom choose to live in London where there are long established and numerous migrant groups (Zetter and Pearl, 2002, Phillips, 2006).

3.3.2 The recently-arrived refugee population in Leeds

There is almost no publicly available data on refugees living in Leeds before the introduction of dispersal in 2000, as in other parts of the UK (Robinson, 1998, Craig et al., 2004). Also, between 2000 and 2003, annual statistic bulletins from the Home Office were not disaggregated by city. Even afterwards, city-level information in Home Office statistics provides only the number of asylum applicants housed in NASS accommodation on a given date. There are numerous problems with attempting to make calculations based on available data. These include a lack of comparable data owing to changes in categories and timeframes of published statistics, difficulties in assessing asylum application outcomes for a given period, nationality or dispersal location, and scarcity of post-decision data (ICAR, 2004, National Audit Office, 2005, Lewis, 2007). However, focusing on the main fieldwork period, and in order to attempt to give some indication of the population, the following estimate draws together data from diverse sources.

In 2004, the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium estimated that there were 10,000-11,000 NASS bed spaces in the region (Westmoreland, 2004). In the Yorkshire and

⁹ The new dispersal housing contracts that began in 2005 have abandoned language clustering to maximise flexibility in housing arrangements and to reduce void spaces.

Humberside region 49% of asylum applicants were receiving positive decisions (in comparison to 39% nationally), resulting in around 7,000–11,000 positive decisions per annum. Of these, it was estimated that around 50% stay in the region: approximately 3,500 to 5,500 new settlers in Yorkshire and Humberside annually (Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Westmoreland, 2004). In 2003, there were 2150 asylum seekers supported in NASS accommodation in Leeds, and in 2004 there were 2420 (Home Office, 2004, Home Office, 2005a). It was estimated in 2004 that between 1396 and 1956 people in Leeds received a positive decision annually, of which 50% were believed to stay (Cooper, 2004). The estimate of 50% was based on an analysis of the number of 'move-ons' (new refugees) applying for council housing (Cooper, 2004). Some of those supported in NASS accommodation are families who have been refused and are a relatively stable population owing to the low proportion of returns for certain countries (National Audit Office, 2005). Combining this data I have arrived at the highly tentative estimate of a population of new arrivals between 5000 and 15,000 in the period 2000 to 2005. The actual figure could easily be higher. While the mobility of the population means some leave, others arrive as asylum applicants continue to be dispersed, and those receiving both negative and positive decisions come to stay with friends in the city. Little is known about these forms of secondary and tertiary migration (Zetter and Pearl, 2002, Robinson et al., 2003, Craig et al., 2004, Phillips, 2006).

The refugee population is characterized by large proportions of people from a few countries that have remained consistently in the 'top ten' list of numbers of applications in the UK, and small populations of people from a great number of other countries (Carter and El Hassan, 2003). In Leeds at the end of July 2005, for example, of the 2590 asylum seekers supported in local authority accommodation in Leeds, there were over 150 from seven countries; these were Iraq (273), Iran (251) Congo (191), Afghanistan (174), Eritrea (172), Somalia (170), and Zimbabwe (165). A further 66 nationalities were represented among the remaining 1377 accommodated asylum seekers, as well as 19 whose nationality was not known (Leeds City Council Refugee and Asylum Service). In the Yorkshire and Humberside region, by the end of September 2002, 103 different nationalities were represented within the region; for 21 of these, more than 100 people had been dispersed to the region; for 48 of the nationalities, less than 20 people were in the region (Carter and El Hassan 2002). Thus compulsory dispersal of asylum seekers from numerous countries has significantly altered the social topography of the city, moving Leeds from being 'multicultural' towards showing characteristics of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2006).

3.4 Research sites and methodology

A summary of the approach taken in this fieldwork follows; in the rest of the thesis particular points will be expanded. However, the methodological and ethical challenges of undertaking this research with people who were frequently depressed, traumatized, isolated and untrusting are such that they could easily absorb a study of their own. While the majority of studies undertaken on refugees say nothing of the methodological quandaries encountered (Kelly, 2004, Kelly, 2005), it may be considered that refugees constitute a 'special case' in research methodology, requiring a tailored approach considered in an emerging body of literature (Bloch, 1999b, Robinson, 2002, Hynes, 2003, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit, 2004).

3.4.1 The dominance of RCOs in research about 'refugee community' in the UK

This research was intended as a study of 'community' among refugees dispersed to Leeds. An initial literature search quickly revealed there to be very little written about community among refugees in the UK, though there is a fair amount of literature on 'refugee communities'. The term 'refugee community' is used in two main ways in the literature: to refer to a national or ethnic group (for example, Wahlbeck, 1999, Al-Ali et al., 2001), or to in relation to community associations or organizations (Rex et al., 1987, Gold, 1992, Zetter and Pearl, 2000, Griffiths et al., 2005). The latter use constitutes the bulk of studies that pertain to refugee community, and despite exceptions (Wahlbeck, 1998, Griffiths, 2000, Kelly, 2000, Kelly, 2003), there is a tendency to overlook any critique of the concept of community, thereby perpetuating the simplistic, bounded, 'classical' view of community. The relationship between researchers, research and refugee community organizations (RCOs) has become an intimate, if not always mutually beneficial one—discussion of research near, with, about or on community organizations and refugee 'community' deserves interrogation into the concomitant issues.

The tendency for refugee research in the UK to use RCOs as gatekeepers for all types of research that includes refugees and asylum seekers has been criticized (Kelly, 2004, Bloch, 2005a, Kelly, 2005). Pitfalls include causing research fatigue through overuse of a limited number of access points, and participant selection for expedient rather than methodologically appropriate reasons. The rapid implementation of dispersal and multitudinous changes of four major government immigration and asylum Acts in six years has had significant impacts on people, regions, service providers and policy-makers. In this context, it is not surprising that there has been an equally large explosion of research about

(or 'on') refugees and asylum seekers (Kelly, 2004, Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit, 2004, Kelly, 2005). The rush to analyse these impacts has meant that much research is undertaken within tight parameters of time and funding. In this research, gaining access to RCOs, and finding out about public and formal understandings of community was much easier than building up relationships and managing research with individuals in informal settings. From a pragmatic perspective, the focus on formal community and use of RCOs as gatekeepers is not surprising. To study community among refugees, formal or public community contexts are tempting as they provide opportunities to overtly talk about 'community'. People involved in such contexts are likely to have given at least some consideration to meanings and definitions that are harder to find in informal settings where people were unlikely to talk directly in terms of 'community'¹⁰.

There are clear advantages in accessing this 'hard-to-reach' (Robinson, 2002) research population through community organizations, without whom much research would be impossible. Because of issues of trust, high mobility, and their precarious status, research with refugees can pose particular methodological and ethical challenges (Hynes, 2003, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). In terms of trust and rapport once access is achieved, community organizations may provide a level of credence and endorsement that smoothes interactions and potentially aids validity by increasing the likelihood that respondents are honest. Community organizations, community researchers and figures of respect, such as 'community leaders', may assist with language problems, translation issues, idiomatic and colloquial terminology, and 'cultural' or 'regional' information invaluable to the researcher. While it is not necessarily 'bad' to use RCOs as gatekeepers to participants, even where the role of the RCO, or issues of 'community' are not directly relevant to the research question, to rely on RCOs provides access to a 'particular, and limited population of respondents' (Dwyer and Brown, 2005: 373). The impact of these limitations on research findings should be made explicit and potential bias can be partly alleviated by the use of multiple access points, or nodes, from which snowballing begins (see Bloch, 2005a). Nevertheless, it is not surprising that many studies demonstrate a circularity in research about refugee community (cf MacFarlane, 1977) wherein using RCOs for access to refugees confirms the importance of the role of RCOs (e.g. Carey-Wood et al., 1995, Duke, 1996). The championing of RCOs in the literature needs to be considered with prevalent research methodologies, and hegemonic communitarian discourses in mind.

¹⁰ This contrasts with Baumann's experience in Southall, London, where his participants were members of well-established ethnic minority groups who courted discussion and contestation of dominant multicultural discourse (Baumann, 1996).

For these reasons, this research was planned from the outset to approach an interrogation of community largely outside of the RCO context. Because the other common usage is to uncritically apply the term 'community' to groups sharing national or ethnic identity, the research was also designed to include people from different nationalities. The bulk of my research time was spent with people not closely connected to RCOs. Often RCOs were not mentioned or known about, or their activities and services were criticized as unsatisfactory, leading me to question the overwhelmingly positive gloss of their role presented in much of the literature. Korac has noted a tendency for refugee research to take a 'top-down' approach—focusing on structural and organizational aspects of integration, to the exclusion of focusing research on the 'voices', feelings and experiences of refugees (Korac, 2003). Taking an open-ended approach to the question of community by largely distancing from RCOs and being non-prescriptive about the forms 'community' might take was fundamental to guiding the research. The relatively unstructured, reflexive and grounded nature of participant observation involving long-term, day-to-day engagement with a small number of people was well-suited to exploring refugees' feeling and experiences of informal manifestations of community-like practices and imaginings.

3.4.2 Access: finding refugee community in Leeds

This research is an ethnography of asylum seekers and refugees living, or who lived in Leeds and surrounding towns. The principle method of data collection was participant observation—long-term interaction in the daily lives of research participants. The main fieldwork period was August 2003 to September 2004. However, it is not possible or desirable to draw discrete boundaries around a period of data collection, there being multiple influences, and relationships that begin and end before and after 'fieldwork'. In particular, a period of preparatory research was undertaken between June and September 2002, and all key research relationships have continued, albeit with much less frequent interaction, beyond the 'end' of fieldwork. The ethnographer's path is both the determinant and outcome of the research process (Aull Davies, 1999)—this is outlined below and elucidated reflexively throughout the text.

Access was achieved through a number of points. In 2002 I had become involved in Student Action for Refugees in Hull and came to know some Kurdish musicians. One of them, Alan, moved to Leeds at the time the main fieldwork period began. Through him I met his cousin's family who arrived in October 2003. I was linked to Ana as a Befriending

volunteer in Hull. I developed a good relationship with her, attending the birth of her child Damien only weeks after she had arrived in the UK. Before I moved to Leeds to begin fieldwork she decided to move to London to be with her ‘community’—I stayed in touch with her because we had developed a good rapport, she had consented to being part of the research, she was seeking ‘community’ and, knowing the significance of secondary migration to London, I wanted to include her perspectives.

I first met most of the key participants in Leeds through volunteering for Leeds Asylum Seekers’ Support Network (LASSN) and British Red Cross. I acted as a Befriending volunteer for LASSN, and as a Tracing and Message volunteer for British Red Cross. Initial contact was made in this way with seven individuals, leading to sustained research relationships following discussion of informed consent. I came to know Najma through my own social contacts. Contact with RCOs was made in a number of linked ways. Initially I was introduced to the Zimbabwean and Iranian organizations by Merlo Michell, the community development worker at LASSN, who acted as a ‘gatekeeper’. She also invited me to attend the Refugee Forum of RCO representatives, where I was given permission to attend for the year of my fieldwork. Here I formed my own relationships with RCO leaders, and was invited to events leading to further contacts. Interviews and informal discussions were conducted with leaders of four RCOs (Central African Women’s Education and Health; Leeds Great Lakes Community; Leeds Afghan Community; Black Integration Group and Advice Services), three refugee community development workers, and the Refugee Council’s Refugee Development Advisor. I attended numerous parties, launch events, public meetings, cultural performances and Refugee Week activities, as well as strategic multi-agency meetings and forums. Information gathered while I was employed by LASSN to write the Directory of Services in Leeds for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (Lewis, 2003) provided useful insights and an invaluable opportunity to familiarize myself with the sector. Through these individuals, including RCO leaders and members, I came to know a further 40 individuals who contributed to the research. In all of these spaces I met with numerous others who provided essential background data and opportunities for triangulation of emerging themes.

3.4.3 Researching ‘refugees’

There is an increasing trend in concluding that the term ‘refugees’ denotes an objectively self-delimiting field of study (Malkki, 1995b: 496). However, forced population movements have diverse historical and political causes, which result in displaced people living in

qualitatively different situations and predicaments (Malkki, 1995b). Therefore, the term 'refugee' is useful only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric, and not as a label for a special, generalizable 'kind' or 'type' of person or situation (Malkki, 1995b). This is vital to keep in mind, as any study that takes refugees as a topic of study by nature of their ascribed label (Zetter, 1991) cannot fail to contribute to reifying refugees as a group. The people involved in this research came from diverse countries and each had unique experiences of getting to the UK, and of being processed through the asylum system. The common feature between them is that they applied for asylum in the UK, and at some point lived in Leeds or another town in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

This research is qualitative, and is not intended to be representative of the wider population of people who have claimed asylum in the UK, or of particular national or other types of groups. Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity it is sometimes helpful to use the terms 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' in a generalizing way in cases where analysis of data found there to be similar or comparable experiences across those involved in the research in these two legal groups. The intention is not to fall into the pitfall of pathologizing the refugee experience, but to offer a partial, situated series of interpretations of the experiences that people who took part in this research shared with me during fieldwork.

As volunteering for refugee agencies was a key mode of access, this shaped my research. At least in the early stages of research, I was likely to be constructed as some kind of support worker. However, given issues of trust or rather, mistrust, among refugees this association also brought great benefits owing to the awareness of the organizations I was associated with as being distant from government and officials (cf Hannerz, 1969, cf Agar, 1996, cf Okely, 1996, Hynes, 2003). The reputation of the Red Cross as impartial and its international presence in conflict situations doubtlessly assisted in this respect. Being 'on-side' also required constant management of expectations, particularly among RCOs who quickly realized that I was dedicating my study to 'community' and often constructed me as an expert who might be in a position to help, and perhaps validate their organization by acting as an intermediary. I constantly negotiated boundaries by discussing my position as a researcher, and my limited capacity to assist.

Nevertheless, participating in the daily lives of asylum seekers does involve attending services for assistance, and at times my role became similar to those more established refugees or asylum seekers who newly-arrived people turn to for information (Van Hear, 1998). This meant I sometimes became involved in brokering contact with an organization

that might be able to provide support for a need that had emerged through research conversations. While this may sometimes have created confusion about my role, it also provided valuable opportunities to engage alongside my participants with the daily challenges of living as an asylum seeker (a form of work in the field (Okely, 1992)). My fieldwork was conducted through a complex insider-outsider dynamic: while I 'know' the locality of Leeds (my home town), I did not have 'local knowledge' of being an asylum seeker or refugee negotiating a new place (Okely, 1996). Participating in negotiating support services was elucidating for the purposes of research, but was also required, I believe, as an ethical obligation (Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit, 2004). It is not straightforward to associate extended or 'action' research relationships with contamination of validity (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003) since there is no informant of unmediated cultural truth (Okely, 1992: 23). In fact, I would suggest that the prolonged, iterative nature of participant observation enables ongoing discussion and developing understanding of the nature of consent and the research remit for both participants and researcher (ICAR and UNHCR Postgraduate Network, 2003). Lastly, I will sketch the lives of the people who feature in the ethnography to provide a background to chapters that follow.

3.5 Refugee lives: portraits of central figures

Key participants are presented in two groups: women, then men, listed roughly in the order I met them. These fourteen people, and their family, friends and associates with whom I spent most of my time, came from eleven countries. Their ages ranged from seventeen to mid to late thirties and their children ranged from babies to teenagers. Seven key participants were within a year of my age, reflecting the predominance of young adults between 20 and 30 years old in the asylum seeking population, and perhaps also indicating a propensity towards the development of good rapport with people of a similar age to me. Three had refugee status when I first met them. In the fieldwork period, four were granted leave to remain, and seven were fully refused. Those in Leeds each lived in a different neighbourhood in the east and west of the city—some in housing provided by the local authority, others in private provider accommodation. Some lived in run-down tower blocks in 'white' areas, some in terraced 'back to backs' in mixed areas, some in semi-detached houses in council estates. The names used are anonymized—in most cases, people elected their own pseudonym, one or two choosing to use their real names.

As noted in much of the literature addressing ethnographic methodology, particularly following 'Writing Culture' debates in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), the practice of writing tends towards 'slick description' (Sanjek, 1990: 404). In the process of disciplining rich, thick and voluminous fieldnotes, 'voices merge, losing their timbre and intonation' (Sperber, 1985: 6). I have aimed as far as possible to present dissonant viewpoints where I found them. Yet, the process of analysis and the writing of a coherent, marshalled text inevitably results in a loss of certain valuable experiences of fieldwork, and a concentration on central narratives that does not always allow for a full exploration of each turning point of a series of cross-roads. There are several other individuals who have greatly informed my analysis, but for simplicity I profile only people who appear as key characters in the ethnographic chapters.

Sara, Cameroon

Sara, from Cameroon, arrived in June 2002 as an unaccompanied minor aged 17. She was smuggled on a long journey directly from her village to the capital city Yaounde, and onto a plane that stopped in another African country before landing in London. She was met by a couple at the airport who brought her by car to Leeds and left her outside the Refugee Council offices. As an unaccompanied minor she was provided support under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989 and given a room in a vulnerable young people's hostel. I first met her there in the summer of 2002 having been matched to her as a Befriender with LASSN. At that time she spoke almost no English and was attending counselling. She went to college to study English, then in 2003 enrolled for a course in 'Care' but struggled to keep up with assessments because of language difficulties. When she turned 18 she had to apply for NASS support and was accommodated on the 13th floor of a high rise block of flats in a largely white, deprived area in Leeds. She lived there alone and told her housing worker she didn't want anyone moving in with her. It wasn't until September 2004 that she was finally granted her first interview for her asylum case in Liverpool, so throughout the fieldwork she was outside the asylum process, unable to take even the first step. She tried to trace her mother through British Red Cross but has received no result, and was not in touch with people in Cameroon. She had a few French-speaking central-African friends in Leeds and none elsewhere in the UK.

Deka, Somalia

Deka was dispersed to Glasgow with her two sons at the end of 2001 when she first arrived. In 2003 she was aged 27 and her children were about 2 and 3. After she received a positive decision in the summer of 2002, she came to Leeds because she was told there was work

available, and because it is closer to Sheffield where she heard there is a large Somali population. I was linked to her as a Befriending volunteer with LASSN when she was initially housed in a women and children's hostel. After some time a suitable house became available with a housing association. She was happy with the location, being close to the Mosque and a community centre where she attended a women's Qur'an reading group. Despite it being a black/ minority ethnic area she and her children experienced racial abuse and she applied to be moved. The process takes a long time, however, and after some months the abuse abated. She went to English college in Mogadishu and is very proficient in English. Deka took up training opportunities in Leeds, including attending the first pilot citizenship course, assisting with translating materials for a nearby women's training organization, and completing a college course in 'Care', gaining a distinction in some of her course work. She was learning how to drive and had a number of good friends who are Somali women with children who mostly lived nearby.

Najma

Najma applied for asylum after managing to get a place to study English at a summer course in 2003, aged 27. She was dispersed to Wakefield where she shared a house with a succession of women from different countries and met others living nearby, or through attending mosque. I was put in touch with Najma through personal contacts. She had been about to enter the final year of a law degree in her country of origin. She was refused asylum and then used her legal experience, working closely with her solicitor, to provide a thick dossier of evidence of her political activities at her appeal. After being granted asylum in the spring of 2004 Najma was confused about what to do and moved around a few different cities before gaining a place in Higher Education in Edinburgh. Najma was in close, regular contact with members of her family, and continued to provide support to activists in the activities that had forced her to leave. This also kept her in contact with a network of supporters in different cities around the UK. In this respect she was exceptional among my participants in having a number of ongoing friendships with non-refugee UK residents. She speaks fluent English. Her country of origin is omitted for reasons of confidentiality.

Ana and Damien, Colombia

Ana arrived from Colombia seven and a half months pregnant in May 2003. She was 30 years old in 2004. After three weeks spent in emergency accommodation in London, she was dispersed to Hull speaking no English. She was provided accommodation in a shared house with an African woman who later disappeared. I was put into contact with her as a

Befriender through a project run at the University of Hull. She underwent antenatal care in Hull and gave birth to her son, Damien. Soon after giving birth she moved to London to be among Spanish speaking Latin American people, where she moved around houses staying with various friends and acquaintances. While still awaiting a decision on her case she worked undocumented as a cleaner, earning £2 an hour to try and contribute rent to those accommodating her. She attempted to attend English classes but found it hard without a crèche place for Damien, and because of her high mobility. She spoke little English; I conversed with her in Spanish. In December 2003 she attended the Appeal Court in Bradford and won her case, self-representing. This was disputed by the Home Office and went to Tribunal, which she lost, but in an irregular development she finally won at the High Court in spring 2005 because of a mistake made by the Tribunal adjudicator. She spoke regularly on the telephone to her parents in Colombia, who helped arrange her to be smuggled to the UK following the murder of her husband. Ana had been in the final stages of completing her training as a solicitor in Colombia, specializing in human rights. She sends photographs of Damien to relations at home and receives letters from them.

Christna, Cameroon

I met Christna for the first time in August 2003 when I was matched to her as a Befriender with LASSN. At that time she was 27 years old. She has two children of around 8-10 years old who she left with her sister a couple of years before she arrived in the UK. She was not in contact with her children, family, or ex-husband in Cameroon. Christna arrived in the UK in March 2003 and was housed in a high-rise apartment in a tower block in an estate with high concentration of NASS housing. Christna shared the flat with a French-speaking woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who was re-housed in autumn 2003, due to being pregnant. During most of the fieldwork period Christna lived alone, until another French-speaking African woman was housed with her in autumn 2004. Christna has a quiet and retiring character and rarely left her flat. She is deeply Catholic and often attended morning mass, as well as always attending Sunday morning mass, usually followed by a shared meal with one of the French-speaking women who attended her church. In May 2004 she had her Appeal hearing, which she lost. Her case was not allowed to go to Tribunal and she was finally evicted from her flat in Leeds in the first week of January 2005.

Sanai, Eritrea

Sanai arrived from Eritrea on 31 August 2003 and was immediately taken to Hillside and later housed by Leeds City Council in a small terraced house in a mixed student/ South

Asian/ white area. Sanai was around 30 years old in 2004, though not entirely sure of her birth date. I met her only days after her arrival when she was referred to the Red Cross Tracing and Message Service. Sanai had no English when she arrived and quickly signed up to classes, attending three different colleges. Sanai was the only person I met throughout my research to be granted refugee status after her initial interview. Her case was a 'fast-track' success—she completed the process and received her papers within 3 months. Before leaving Khartoum (where she was in hiding after fleeing Eritrea) she was provided with a contact in London who assisted Sanai from the time of her arrival with telephone translation and personal advice. This link, political contacts and the established Eritrean population in London attracted her to move there when evicted from her NASS house in January 2004. She spent several months living in emergency accommodation—first in a women's hostel, then in a hotel—before being offered a flat. She attended the Eritrean Orthodox Church and often went to the weekly meeting of the political cell she was part of in Eritrea. When her husband was murdered owing to his political activities, Sanai left her children with a friend and fled the same night. The wife of her London contact visited Eritrea in the winter of 2003 and found her children to be with her parents. With the assistance of friends, family and the Red Cross she arranged family reunion and her children, then aged 15 and 5, arrived in the spring of 2005.

Vivi and Aaron, Angola and UK

Vivi was dispersed to Leeds in October 2003 after seven years living in London. At that time her son was four and a half and she was 27. She had arrived in the UK with her brother after fleeing her house when it was attacked. She doesn't know if her parents, her other six brothers and sisters or her aunt are alive. I met her first when she was referred to the Red Cross Tracing and Message Service in October 2003. When she arrived in Leeds Vivi was very isolated and her son, Aaron (who was born in London) was not at school. After several months Aaron was admitted to the local primary school and Vivi's life improved considerably as a few of her friends came to Leeds, either through NASS dispersal, or following positive decisions. She developed a close-knit group of female Angolan friends who have young children, and most of whom started relationships with Angolan men living in Leeds. Vivi was divorcing her husband, Aaron's father, from Côte d'Ivoire who has refugee status and works as a bus driver in London. In Leeds she developed a relationship with an Angolan man with Portuguese nationality. As an asylum seeker she lived in a house in a very white council suburb with some NASS housing and a high level of reported racial abuse and attacks. Late in 2004, after waiting 8 years, she was granted leave to remain through the family amnesty. Vivi's English is fluent.

Her friends Riqui and Gonguita were often around when I saw Vivi, and became part of the research.

Riqui and Richa, Angola

I met Riqui, who was in her mid-twenties, through Vivi for the first time when she visited for the weekend from London. She was later dispersed to Leeds early in 2004 with her son Richa who was then three years old. She and her son lived in a NASS house of appalling upkeep, and after developing a new relationship spent much of her time at her boyfriend's place which was a few streets away from Vivi's house. Riqui struggled to learn English and I spoke with her, Gonguita and their friends in a mix of Portuguese and English; Vivi often assisted with translation.

Gonguita and Xana, Angola

Gonguita was dispersed to Hull in the spring of 2004 with her infant daughter, having failed to influence her dispersal by requesting to come to Leeds. Given her isolation as a new mother at 19 years old confined to the house with a baby, she reported a surprising lack of involvement or support from housing, support or health professionals in Hull, and was downcast about her prospects of creating social links there. She rarely spent a whole week in Hull and frequently travelled to Leeds to visit her friends. She started a relationship with an Angolan man who had refugee status and lived as a single father in a council flat with his three year old daughter (in the same tower block as Christna).

Daniel, Ethiopia

Daniel came to the UK from Ethiopia at the end of 2001 when he was 25. He was dispersed to Sunderland where he had a poor solicitor who didn't inform him of his interview in Liverpool, and where he suffered a racially-motivated physical attack. He applied to NASS for re-dispersal and I met him when he had first arrived in Hillside in the summer of 2002 having been linked to him for Befriending through LASSN. Later that year his case was fully refused—he was denied a right to appeal because he had not attended his first interview. He went to stay with his cousin's family in Sheffield who had been there for about 9 years. Since the winter of 2002/3 he moved between various houses in Sheffield and Rotherham. He has brothers in the US and in South Africa, and stays in touch with his mother in Ethiopia. He had been imprisoned in Ethiopia on refusing national service owing to his mixed ethnicity. One of his brothers is possibly still detained for the same reason.

Alan, Zahra, Sarah, Lana, Dime and Asrean, Kurdistan (Iraq)

On gaining a positive decision, Alan moved to Leeds from Hull in the autumn of 2002. He stayed for some months in a B&B while on the housing register and was then allocated a flat in a high rise block in a predominantly white estate. Some months later one of his first cousins, Zahra, arrived from Kurdistan with her four daughters. They had finally gained family reunion with their husband/father who has been living in London for 10 years, but when they arrived he rejected them, apparently owing to mental health problems. They lived together in Alan's one bedroom flat for around 8 months before getting their own council house. Alan is an accomplished professional musician (violinist) and did not work for a long period after gaining status as he said he did not want to do a low-skill job. He is highly educated, speaks reasonable broken English and prefers to disengage from active involvement in Kurdish politics. He wouldn't tell me his age, but I calculated it to be mid-thirties, old enough (he and his family assured me) to need to urgently address finding a wife. To this end he conceded to working in a clothing catalogue depot. Since his cousin's family found their own house Alan gave up his flat as he hated living there and thought it was quite dangerous. Since then he lived between his cousin's house, and those of other friends. Alan spent a lot of time with his friend Kojir, who organizes big Kurdish parties with famous musicians.

Nzou, Zimbabwe

Nzou was the chair of the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds. I believe him to be in his late twenties/ early thirties. He actually entered as a spouse on his wife's HSMP (Highly Skilled Migrant Programme) nursing visa, along with their two daughters sometime in 2002. However, he maintains that he adopts the refugee label as he felt forced to flee owing to political problems—he was just lucky enough to have an alternative mode of immigration. He was a high school teacher who became of interest to government intelligence because of his active membership in the teachers' trade union (the union had a pro-opposition stance). His life was made very difficult and he and his family came to the UK. He worked in a budget catalogue store, Tradex, but applied to begin training as a social worker. He is a well-educated, intelligent political activist and a gifted public speaker.

Thomas, Zimbabwe

Thomas was involved in the creation of the Leeds MDC branch. In the spring of 2004 his case was fully refused. Thomas, in his mid-thirties, spent many months being supported by friends. After some time and soul-searching he decided to take the risk and personal moral

compromise of working illegally in the hope that he could bring his wife and children to the UK to join him. His social life reduced considerably following threats to his family in Africa as a result of his political activities in the UK, and because of the strain of precarious undocumented status. Following a spot check on the property where he was staying with some undocumented South African immigrants he was detained in January 2005. Without explanation he was released two months later and was attempting to launch a fresh claim. He had a cousin ('sister') in Leeds who came under NASS dispersal in the summer of 2004. However, later, she was also fully refused.

Nice and Easy, Liberia

Nice and Easy was around 22 years old when he arrived in the summer of 2004. I met him when I visited him for a Red Cross Tracing and Message interview. He was housed with another Liberian and two other Ethiopian men in the area of Leeds with the largest black and minority ethnic population in the city. His claim was quickly refused and he went directly to appeal in September 2004. After hearing of the murder of many in his family in Liberia he fled to Sierra Leone, where he stayed for some months but was unable to make any contact with his family. He was advised to come to the UK. When he attended his interview in Liverpool he met a friend from Liberia in the waiting room who was staying in London with other Liberians. He enjoys football and met some other people from West Africa living nearby to play with. Nice and Easy speaks fluent English.

4 Housing experiences: 'People like us don't have choices'

This chapter forms the first of five that present ethnographic material from the research. The house is the place where people spend most of their time, and was thus where I spent most of my research time, so this is where presentation of the ethnographic material will begin. Housing arrangements are central to understanding the establishment of social life for recently-arrived refugees in dispersal areas. Access to housing and other services depends upon immigration status which therefore influences capacity for 'home'-building. Asylum seekers are housed by National Asylum Support System (NASS) in accommodation managed by either private or statutory housing providers. Those whose cases are refused (or who opt for subsistence only support) are reliant on friends for housing, while people who gain refugee status can access mainstream social housing. The impact of these three categories of immigration status— asylum, refusal and refugee status— on housing experiences and possibilities for 'home'-building will be dealt with in turn.

The ontological lack of security brought about by the refugee experience extends into domestic life through restrictive housing policies. While the initial allocation of housing on a 'no choice' basis is a disempowering element of accommodation, ongoing monitoring and instability in housing arrangements extend this sense of lack of control continuously through the asylum process. I will first present two cases that demonstrate this point, before going on to look in more detail at power and control through housing.

4.1 The power of housing workers

Christna, a young woman from Cameroon, had her cash support stopped in May 2004 after her housing worker reported her to NASS, accusing her of being absent from the property and subletting to another person. Her housing worker claimed to have visited the property three times when Christna had not been present. On a fourth occasion the door was opened by a 'strange man' not known to the housing worker who said he did not know when Christna would be back. Although the housing worker had Christna's mobile telephone number, she did not telephone Christna, but reported her for breaching her contract and Christna's cash support was subsequently stopped. Two and a half months later her support was reinstated following considerable effort to disprove the speculations of the housing worker, involving several parties including a Refugee Council advice worker, Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network, myself and others.

A Refugee Council advice worker assisted Christna in appealing against the accusations, which required her to travel to Croydon (south London) to attend an Asylum Support Appeal tribunal. Owing to my regular visits to see Christna as part of my research, I was asked to write a supporting letter. My fieldnotes recorded the dates and times I had seen Christna in her accommodation in the period she was accused of being absent, and her evolving relationship with the 'strange man' who was in fact Christna's boyfriend (to whom she had fallen pregnant). Christna was also able to supply a note completed by a person who had entered the property to make a repair during the period she was accused of being absent (the repair had been organized by the housing provider). This evidence meant her tribunal passed quickly in her favour, but having waited several weeks to get a date for the tribunal, the reinstatement of her cash support equally took several weeks, all of which resulted in ten weeks without regular cash support for Christna that coincided with the first two months of her pregnancy.

Christna had not been at her house when her housing worker visited as she was searching for legal representation to appeal against a negative decision on her asylum case. Christna had just received a letter of refusal from the Home Office in response to her initial interview eighteen months previously. The solicitor who represented her through her case said they could not support her to appeal the decision¹¹. Christna spent several days approaching every solicitor on a list she was provided seeking urgent assistance in completing her appeal papers within the fourteen day time limit. For Christna, securing legal representation to appeal her negative asylum decision was her first priority, easily overriding the prospect of waiting in the house for the regular check-up visit from her housing worker.

After having her cash support stopped, Christna survived on food from friends, and small cash gifts. Once her application for an Asylum Support Appeal had been received she was eligible for emergency payments, but these had to be collected from the office of the housing provider about four miles away. Being pregnant, Christna found walking this distance tiring. The emergency payments amounted to £15 per week. This period without support impacted greatly on Christna's life. In some respects she was isolated from going

¹¹ In 2003 Legal Aid for asylum appeals was reduced. At that point many solicitor firms stopped taking immigration work. Those that continued were required to submit applications for legal representation at appeal level to a 'merits test'. Legal Aid is only available in cases where the solicitor considers there to be a 50% or greater chance of success.

out much as she didn't have money to go shopping for food, or to pay for the bus fare to attend English classes. On the other hand, she was forced to visit other asylum seekers living nearby to find food. She said at the time that she mostly survived on a plate of rice a day. Occasionally, friends or acquaintances who knew her support had been stopped might come by with some left-over beans or stew, also providing social contact. I would bring fresh fruit and vegetables when I visited, and a lay Christian brother (long-term UK resident French national) who supported her brought small payments from a church collection. However, shortly after her support was reinstated Christna miscarried. Following this her boyfriend became annoyed with her having lost the baby and severed their relationship.

While previously Christna seemed indifferent to her housing worker, this coincidence of factors greatly embittered her against her housing worker and the whole apparatus of the Home Office, UK government and asylum support systems. Christna was furious that her housing worker had wrongfully accused her of absenteeism and subletting as a result of her being out of the house desperately trying to resolve her crisis of legal representation. Because her housing worker had accused her with no evidence or proof and made little effort to contact Christna to verify her speculations, she interpreted her motives as deliberately punitive and discriminatory:

She is really a wicked person. She is racist. She doesn't like black people. They think we come here to beg just for this £38 a week? She is not the Home Office, and even if she is, you can treat people like human beings.

Although the housing worker found out almost immediately that her suspicions were unfounded, reporting Christna to NASS began the process of removal of support that could not be stopped before the full process was completed. However, when I spoke to the housing worker she was unremorseful; expressing her view that Christna had to learn to behave by keeping to appointments and treating them as important. Although removal of support had devastating consequences for Christna, the housing worker felt that to have phoned her to attempt contact before submitting the report would have been asking too much of her stretched workload, especially as she believed Christna to be deliberately not conforming to her expectations of client behaviour. The housing worker clearly demonstrated her sense that receipt of support was dependent upon asylum seekers' obedience: Christna did not conform to her stereotype of client loyalty (Zetter, 1991: 44). The notion that asylum seekers, rather than policy, are to blame for hardships resulting

from not 'choosing' to conform to expected behaviour appears well entrenched in the asylum system, and has even been used at ministerial level to defend the highly unpopular Section 9¹² 'family exercise' (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2007: 289). The sense of powerlessness in relation to housing workers expressed by Christna and others in my research is echoed by the assumption of power made by this, and other, housing workers. For almost all of the people involved in my research I was the only other non-refugee person that they had regular personal contact with apart from their housing worker. Housing workers held great power and influence as usually the sole conduit for information about UK systems and services. Housing workers thus hold a crucial reticulating role between individual asylum seekers and service providers, and more broadly with the state and wider society—a role which if mishandled or abused can have seriously negative consequences for people seeking asylum who often have few other sources of support or local knowledge with which to counter misinformation.

4.2 The power of complaints

Another woman I knew well, Vivi, a young mother from Angola with a six year old son, was twice threatened with the removal of her cash support and accommodation. One day she received a call from her housing worker saying that her next-door neighbours had sent a complaint letter to their MP. They complained of loud noise from Vivi's television and stereo, noise from children in the afternoon after school, and added that they had seen black men coming and going from the house, sometimes using a key to get in. Her housing worker informed Vivi that a noise complaint could jeopardise her right to support, and if upheld, could affect her eligibility for leave to remain being considered under the amnesty for families¹³. Although likely to have been untrue, this threat terrified Vivi. The news was devastating to Vivi who had at that point been waiting eight years for her case to be resolved. Because the neighbours had sent a letter to the MP instead of approaching Vivi, her housing worker, or their housing office, the complaint was instantly taken to a serious level. The MP represented a constituency with a high density of NASS dispersal housing, and the 'white' estate where Vivi lived was known for tensions and incidents of racial

¹² Section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 allowed the Home Office to terminate support to families with children under 18 unless they take active steps to return 'voluntarily' (Kelley and Meldgaard, 2005).

¹³ In 2003 the government announced that people with outstanding asylum cases who claimed asylum before 2 October 2000 and at that time had at least one dependent aged under 18 would be considered for an amnesty (Refugee Council, 2004). Exclusions included having a criminal conviction, being subject to an anti-social behaviour order. I found no evidence for breach of NASS conditions affecting consideration for the family amnesty. It was unclear on what basis the housing worker made this threat.

harassment. These sensitivities triggered a series of phone calls and visits from the housing worker and NASS representatives keen to monitor whether Vivi was adhering to the contract, though none had a remit to visit the couple who complained to hear their concerns, and potentially to reconcile the situation.

Apparently in response to Vivi's experience of the noise complaint, I noticed how visits from housing workers became feared by Vivi and her friends. They seemed to become less likely to want to raise complaints about the poor condition of their housing with their housing workers, fearing negative reprisals or detrimental impact on their asylum case. On a couple of occasions Vivi and one of her friends asked me to be present when they expected a visit from their housing worker to arbitrate. Vivi lived close to a primary school which her son attended. Other associates and friends of Vivi's successfully influenced their dispersal by requesting to be dispersed to Leeds, and others came to the city on gaining refugee status, and they registered their children at the same primary school. However, some of the parents lived a few miles away or had English classes which conflicted with the end of the school day. Vivi arranged to pick up her friend's children and bring them to her house after school until the parents could come to pick them up. Vivi's house was often a social hub as the parents would gather and eat together while the children could play upstairs. Also, Vivi had Portuguese language satellite television which provided a constant backdrop and made her house a popular place for her friends to pass time. If Vivi was left in the house caring for several children, her boyfriend or friends might go to the local shop taking the key so they could let themselves back in without Vivi needing to leave the children unsupervised. This was the apparent cause of the neighbour's insinuation that Vivi was subletting (or other insinuations that could be attached to the complaint of 'black men coming and going from the house with keys'), which, if substantiated could have resulted in the withdrawal of cash support and accommodation.

Vivi's success in breaking the social isolation she experienced in her first months in Leeds were penalized by the noise complaint. The threat posed by the complaint made Vivi extremely nervous. The convenient practice of Vivi picking up her friends' children from school stopped, meaning the parents sometimes missed their English classes in order to collect their children. Vivi asked her friends to stop coming to her house and she saw them less frequently. Her six year old son became upset and frustrated as he didn't understand why he didn't have his friends visiting the house regularly. Despite the noise complaint having a lasting impact on the social lives of Vivi and her friends, the elderly couple who made the complaint refused to even answer the door when on future occasions Vivi sent

her brother and friend (being too scared of physical attack to go herself) to ask them whether the children, or the television or music was too loud. This lack of direct communication with the couple caused great anxiety for Vivi as it was impossible to make the children be quiet all the time, and on the less frequent occasions she did have friends visiting she felt at constant risk that any noise could lead not only to losing her house and support, but even her asylum case.

At around the same time, Vivi received a visit from immigration officers to check her papers that could also have been a result of the neighbours reporting her to immigration (at the time the government was advertising a telephone hotline to report suspected 'illegal immigrants' or 'terrorists')¹⁴. Following that visit, the case was referred to NASS representatives, coinciding with the accusation of subletting. This accusation was not followed through, but when NASS representatives visited, they questioned the electronic goods she had in her house. She was consequently sent a letter explaining that a pre-condition of NASS support is destitution, and that having her own furniture and electronic goods indicated additional income. Vivi was asked to account for how she acquired these items, or risk losing her support. Vivi sent a letter to NASS explaining that she had been given the items by her ex-husband who was employed in London as a bus driver. It was following their divorce that Vivi was forced to approach NASS for support, stayed in emergency accommodation in London and was then dispersed to Leeds. As indicated above, the possessions she had acquired during her relatively long stay in the UK and, in particular, her television, stereo, and satellite reception box made Vivi's house a preferred place to spend social time. In contrast, for example, one of her closest friends, Riqui, lived in a street about a mile away with her three year old son in a house in a state of appalling disrepair. Riqui spent months receiving little attention from her housing provider to whom she complained of problems with her house including mice, silverfish, flammable, ripped furniture, a broken window on the top floor boarded up leaving an inch gap, a bath which leaked into the light fitting in the kitchen, a faulty washing machine half full of rank water, and damp in the cellar. Though NASS accepted Vivi's reasons for having electronic goods and did not stop her support, the relatively stable and positive environment that her house had previously offered her, her son Aaron, and her friends was unpicked by these interventions.

¹⁴ Introduced in the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act.

The message seemed clear to Vivi and her friends—in the UK their status meant that their views did not matter. It seemed that the speculations of long-term, white residents were more important than their fear of persecution if removed to Angola, and that asylum seeker children deserve to be housed in poor, potentially life-threatening squalor. This was usually communicated through humour and joking. A caustic ironic wit afforded Vivi and her friends some control and power in the face of injustice. Of course the sense of being unwelcome and unwanted was encouraged not only by problematic interactions with the Home Office, but also through negative media coverage and public hostility. After eight years of delay and appeals in her asylum case, Vivi was already very despondent about her prospects and lacked trust in Home Office decision-making. Having been told that the complaint could potentially threaten her consideration for the amnesty and therefore her long-term safety, Vivi's sense of powerlessness became entrenched. Vivi had been waiting so long for a decision, her ability to get on with things with a smile despite adversity had been well developed. Following her experiences surrounding the noise complaint, however, she became less able to outwardly make light of her situation. As she said at the time: 'I don't have any power. What God wants will happen. I don't hope for anything.' This statement expresses a common sentiment among those in this research, indicating the development of self-disciplining measures to curb expectations and desires in response to the hegemonic power of pervasive policy (Foucault, 1991 (1977), Shore and Wright, 1997). The regulation of asylum subjects by the threat of sanctions makes asylum housing policy an effective controlling tool that functions by fostering daily forms of normalized self-regulation (Shore and Wright, 1997). Housing workers are fundamental to transmitting the power of policy into daily lives through monitoring and controlling measures.

4.3 Housing, housing workers and control

These women managed to develop social lives and (fragmented) social networks against the odds of precariousness and depression stemming from the overall refugee condition and isolation brought about by the dispersal system. Yet these social efforts were thwarted by the inflexible application of punitive elements of the occupancy agreement by housing workers visiting houses without supervision and operating unilaterally. The regulations attached to provision of housing under the NASS control the domestic sphere. NASS housing is a key mechanism among others by which the state monitors asylum applicants.

Houses are provided to asylum seekers under NASS through housing providers. At the time of the research in Leeds, housing provision was split between the city council and three other private companies, one of which was non-profit. Leeds City Council Refugee and Asylum Service explained to me that it is a condition of the housing contract between NASS and the provider to monitor this provision in terms of their requirements to provide accommodation and support at a certain level, and in terms of the requirements of the asylum applicant ('service user') to adhere to an occupancy agreement. This monitoring was normally undertaken through housing workers making regular visits to their clients. It was usually expected that these visits would take place at least once a month, though the extent to which this was adhered to varied between providers and housing workers.

In addition, during the course of this fieldwork, NASS was regionalized and regional representatives began making quarterly visits to NASS clients in Yorkshire and Humberside. I was informed at the time by local refugee supporting agencies that these visits were billed as an opportunity for NASS to enable clients to raise any concerns they might have with housing provision and housing workers. However, for those in my research, visits by NASS representatives presented simply another intrusion, generating even more fear than visits by housing workers. NASS representatives were not trusted owing to their perceived seniority, closeness to government and surveillance role.

In terms of their influence on social life, the most significant restrictions of the occupancy agreement were requirements to not stay away for more than seven consecutive nights and to not have overnight guests. Housing providers were obliged to inform the Immigration and Nationality Directorate if such requirements appeared to have been breached. In this sense, housing workers operated as sentinels for the Home Office and were certainly considered as such by the asylum seekers I knew. Visits made by housing workers had the potential of enabling clients to raise any concerns about their housing and ask questions about support services, but, importantly, also provided an opportunity for the housing workers to assess whether clients were adhering to their requirements of the contract. Housing workers thus embody a tension between the support and surveillance elements of asylum support housing, being mediators of both.

I interacted with a number of housing workers as a result of their involvement in the lives of people in my research. They often had large, varied caseloads, and expressed the difficulties of holding support and surveillance roles in tension. They felt under pressure to meet the demands of managers working to targets to keep in line with the housing

contracts set by the Home Office, and expressed frustration at the burden of dealing with complex life issues confronted by their clients. Housing workers play a significant role in the early settlement experiences of people in the asylum support system, and variations between individual housing workers and housing providers thereby shape people's daily lives. Housing workers had the potential for being helpful, and indeed could be a crucial source of information and access to services¹⁵.

In both of the cases outlined above, it was immediately apparent that the housing worker took on the role of top-down mediator between the Home Office and their client. In Vivi's case, the support element of the role of the housing worker could have allowed for her to act as an advocate for Vivi helping to communicate up to the housing provider, MP and other relevant bodies. The housing worker decidedly did not interpret the role as ambiguous, however, and adopted a sentinel/ surveillance position. This event cemented the association of housing workers with punitive elements of NASS support for Vivi and her friends, and served to enhance perception of the Home Office as an adversarial structure. The effective silencing of Vivi and Christna's lives through the top-down approach taken by these policy mediators furthers a process of objectification that Shore and Wright have compared to Foucault's concept of the panopticon—where the objectified person 'is seen but does not see' (1997: 6). Their daily lives and relationships were under scrutiny, affecting how they conducted their social lives, yet they had little capacity to influence the negative interpretations of their behaviour that led to the threat or exercising of punitive measures.

While visits by housing workers and NASS representatives were held by housing providers and NASS to be primarily for reasons of support, the surveillance and controlling element of visits tended to obscure any notion of 'support' and assistance for asylum seekers. Also, the idea of 'help' and 'support' imagined by housing providers is culturally constructed, and may not translate to the direct forms of instrumental assistance that refugees tended to associate with helpfulness. Although in the above cases these housing workers did make proactive decisions that resulted in a negative impact for Christna and Vivi, the more common experience was one of inaction. One day Sara, who was a timid young woman who came to the UK from Cameroon as a minor, was explaining to me why she had not appeared when we had arranged to go to an event the previous week. It became apparent

¹⁵ After the fieldwork period ended the first five year NASS contracts came to an end and new contracts were negotiated in 2005. Under the new contracts the level of support provided by housing providers has been reduced.

that she had barely left the house for a couple of weeks after being verbally attacked and spat at when standing on a busy bus stop in the centre of town in the middle of the afternoon. No bystanders offered any comfort or assistance. I asked if she had told anyone else about this incident: she said she told her housing worker, 'and they wrote it down in their notes'. She was holding back the tears, apparently shocked at the indifference with which the housing worker responded to her testimony of an experience that had been devastating to her. The housing worker, most likely, was keeping to the guidelines he had been given to monitor the social-wellbeing of clients and might categorize note-taking as a form of support.

This discussion is not intended to assess the need or otherwise for the surveillance of asylum seekers through housing regulations, important though it is to engage critically with policy developments that aim to control people seeking asylum (Malloch and Stanley, 2005). Neither is it my intention to simply criticise the role of housing workers and the housing providers that employ them, albeit that asylum seekers in this research (for reasons such as those outlined in the cases just presented) rarely considered them in a positive light. However, it must be noted that there were variations, and, though the exception rather than the rule, I did encounter examples of housing workers going beyond the call of duty to assist their clients. A critical assessment of the housing policies under NASS dispersal and their linking to asylum support and the legal decision-making process is an exercise that cannot be undertaken in the context of this chapter. Rather, the purpose of exposing in detail certain experiences of two women in my research is to demonstrate how housing regulations and subjective actions undertaken by housing workers impact the social lives of people seeking asylum, and those around them.

In the two cases just outlined, in effect, the successful efforts made by two women to break social isolation were counteracted, or diminished by the exercising or threat of punitive measures. For Vivi and Christna, it was not only the surveillance element of housing conditions that created instability, but the apparent influence of subjective and ill-founded accusations made by individuals (the housing worker, the neighbours) who by nature of their status and role could have so much power over their state-less lives. The chanceful experience of seeking asylum and the decision-making process was exacerbated by this intrusion into domestic life of the chance of subjective judgement. This insecurity and lack of control is disempowering and severely hampers the possibility for a NASS house to be considered a 'home'. Despite the destabilizing features of NASS housing, the house was nevertheless a safe haven. Thus, the support/ surveillance tension experienced by housing

workers is reproduced in the paradoxical space of NASS housing that offers a refuge from the wider world, but lacks privacy and a sense of control.

4.4 House: a safe place or a trap?

Nice and Easy, a young man from Liberia, one day described to me how his weekend had been: 'I got the letter on Saturday from the solicitor saying they will not support me to appeal. I've been very depressed. I've been sad. I stayed the weekend in my room, crying.' Feelings of depression and despondency encouraged my key participants to stay at home, lacking the will or confidence to confront a world they often experienced as hostile, or at least uncomfortable and challenging. I gradually learnt not to make morning arrangements. Sara, for example, eventually explained to me that on days she didn't have to go to college she would stay in bed until midday. Once a certain level of rapport had been achieved (and I began to move away from being constructed as similar to some kind of support worker who comes and asks questions and writes things down), my interactions became less formalized. It became commonplace for me to find someone I had gone to visit sitting under their duvet on the sofa in front of the television well into the afternoon. The devastation of negative events in their asylum process, such as a refusal of an asylum decision or being refused legal representation, would invariably leave people feeling unable to face the world, wanting to barricade themselves in the house. People might spend hours or days on the sofa in their accommodation watching television and contemplating their fate.

Hence, at times of depression, the house did provide a refuge from confronting the world. However, asylum seeker housing provides only tentative security and privacy. In NASS houses housemates may come or go, and people may be re-dispersed to new housing in the same city or elsewhere for a variety of administrative reasons. For those in shared houses, if someone left because they won or lost their case, a new person could be placed into the house at the discretion of the housing provider creating a constant sense of uncertainty. In addition to regular visits by housing workers and NASS representatives, workers could enter the house if repairs or maintenance were necessary. These factors combine to provide an overriding atmosphere of lack of control over personal space for asylum seekers. Constant intrusion and mechanisms of surveillance in the domestic sphere extend broader immigration controlling systems into NASS-provided houses. Hence, although a house can provide a private space away from the outside world, a NASS house doesn't ever afford

any real privacy. Housing for asylum seekers therefore provides a domestic sphere that represents a disconcerting opposition. A house may be both a safe zone—a place to hide from the world, and a type of prison.

For new arrivals, securing shelter and basic survival is clearly the primary and urgent concern. Induction centres and afterwards, one's accommodation, are fundamental to people's initial experiences and impressions of life in the UK and of the asylum system. Housing arrangements often provide the first opportunity to make initial social links to create new relationships once in the UK. Yet housing regulations also restrict socializing, association and the ability to help others because it is not permitted to have overnight guests to stay. This makes it difficult for asylum seekers to visit friends, especially those in other cities around the UK, or to develop relationships, share childcare, or support those in need. Asylum seekers tend to be dislocated from their geographic surroundings and the people living there. Social and physical isolation results in restriction to the domestic sphere much of the time. In these respects, housing may both enable social links and limit capacity to socialize. The house is both a principal site of social engagement and a literal and symbolic place of exclusion and isolation. The sense of entrapment associated with being in the house stemmed not only from limited social relations and exclusion from wider society, but was also a result of isolation caused by poverty, which will be considered next.

4.4.1 Poverty

As asylum support is set at 70% of income support, this creates enforced poverty that severely limits the sense of choice in many aspects of life (cf Lehtonen, 1999, Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Robinson and Reeve, 2006). As Christna, said 'it's not much, but it's ok, you have no choice'. As shown by the maps in the previous chapter (see figures 1, 2 and 3), NASS housing is located in various areas in the city of Leeds, and very few people in my research had friends living within walking distance. A ticket to travel on the buses for one day was about £2, a cost that had to be balanced against all other needs. Travelling to see friends was therefore not considered a daily possibility, restricting people's ability to socialize. The mobile telephone was a tool vital to maintaining social relationships given geographic dispersal and restricted capacity to travel, making telephone credit a sought after and carefully guarded expenditure¹⁶. In other ways too lack of funds restricted people's capacity to engage socially.

¹⁶ This has a substantial practical impact on conducting fieldwork, as contact was usually initiated by me calling someone to arrange to meet up. Otherwise, I could call back if I got a missed call from someone. My

People seeking asylum paid great attention to budgeting and learning about where to find bargains. Particular moments of hardship were retold to me repeatedly by certain individuals, indicating how poverty marked people's experiences of seeking asylum. For example, Deka, a mother from Somalia with two young children, spoke about how she struggled to sustain herself and her two infant sons in the four week gap between her NASS support ending and her mainstream benefits starting when she received a positive decision on her asylum case. She said that the children (then aged two and three) went three days without any food, 'not even milk'. The low level of NASS support payments provided only enough to get by on, making it difficult to accumulate money to buy more substantial items such as cooking utensils, electronic goods, and warm clothes. Some people were concerned that it was difficult for them to pay for telephone bills, or to save to send money home. A television was often the only adornment to the basic provisions of bedding and a few cooking utensils provided in NASS houses.

People in this research expressed shame at their limited capacity to offer food and drinks as hospitality to guests or to pay for snacks and beverages when visiting the city centre or other places. Although I desired that people involved in my research would, at minimum, not be worse off economically as a result of taking part, my offering to pay for drinks or food was invariably refused, and created a perpetually awkward and significant issue for both incidental and long-term research participants. It seemed to be particularly the case that men, who I was more likely to meet in public places such as cafes or bars, simply would not accept for me to pay for drinks or food. With research methods that involve short-term engagements (such as interviews) one-off payments to research participants are considered as good practice in research, especially with people on very low incomes. The protracted nature of participant observation, however, may mean that an initial payment, gift, or even just a cup of tea can begin an extended gift exchange between researcher and participant. It is important to consider the economic impact on households when conducting research (Hynes, 2003) and on occasion I brought gifts such as imported food items, international calling cards and sometimes cash (especially for those without support).

It was made abundantly clear to me by all of my research participants that their desire to offer hospitality was a matter of pride and I had to concede to receiving far more in food

mobile phone was my most important research resource. The importance of mobile phones is also discussed in chapter seven on events.

and drinks than I was ever able to return. Indeed, the importance placed on sharing food alerted me to the central significance of buying, cooking and eating food to social engagement among asylum seekers and refugees—a form of ‘now’ community possible in the context of precariousness and insecurity, which is explored in chapter eight. On one occasion, Sanai took me to meet some of her Eritrean friends in London—a man living in a temporary hostel awaiting housing, and a woman who had been ‘destitute’ without support for several months who was sleeping in the park near the flats. I bought some fruit juice. The woman who did not have support was surviving on food vouchers from the British Red Cross—she had spent half her weekly allowance on a selection of ‘Tesco Best’ sandwiches (a supermarket ‘deluxe’ range) to honour my visit. Within the confines of being homeless and without any income, the only choice available to this woman was how to spend the supermarket vouchers given to her to keep her alive—she chose to maintain the pride of offering hospitality to a visiting guest considered in Eritrea, as she explained, as a minimum requirement of social engagement.

As noted elsewhere, insecurity and poverty impede the possibilities for building a sense of ‘home’ or ‘belonging’ (Sigona and Torre, 2005, Phillips, 2006, Robinson and Reeve, 2006). The locations of dispersal housing in towns and cities across the UK have been found to correlate closely with areas of high deprivation (Anie et al., 2005). This is considered a critical determinant of health, well-being, quality of life and settlement experiences (Robinson and Reeve, 2006), especially given the likelihood of incidents of racial harassment being higher in deprived areas (Anie et al., 2005). The isolation, poverty, and poor quality of life experienced by asylum seekers is recognised in social policy literature that notes the relationship between social exclusion and housing, as well as lack of rights and restricted access to public services (Bloch, 1999a, Sales, 2002, Zetter and Pearl, 2002, Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Phillips, 2006, Robinson and Reeve, 2006). Social exclusion is noted as an intentional government policy designed to impede the settlement of asylum seekers and to separate ‘deserving’ refugees from ‘undeserving’ asylum seekers (Sales, 2002).

The government conceptualizes integration in legal terms, and limits its policies to those who have been granted refugee status (Phillips, 2006: 541). This division based on legal status does not, however, reflect the efforts made by people seeking asylum to learn English, understand the UK and to engage socially. ‘Integration’ and development of knowledge of the UK clearly starts from the moment of arrival, and even before, given global cultural flows. In reference to housing, the preference of refugees to request housing in Leeds areas that correlate with NASS dispersal areas has been taken as demonstrating

the possible importance of familiarity with the area, social networks, appropriate shops and sites of worship (Cooper, 2004). Hence, familiarity gained as an asylum seeker with certain locales influences ongoing decisions about settlement. Yet, the emerging pattern of new migrants opting for housing in low-demand areas characterized by poverty, community tensions and crime also perpetuates their marginal position in British society (Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Phillips, 2006). Experiences while an asylum seeker of asylum and immigration policies designed to communicate a message of deterrence and control (Bloch and Schuster, 2002, Sales, 2002, Dwyer and Brown, 2005), as Phillips notes, 'are not conducive to engendering a sense of belonging' (2006: 551). The destabilizing experience of life as an asylum seeker in Leeds needs to be taken into account when considering government efforts to promote integration through 'community' by supporting the establishment of refugee community organizations. Furthermore, restrictions and lack of choice over housing have been extended into refugee status as, since 2003, newly homeless refugees may only register for social housing in their NASS dispersal area where they have a 'local connection'. This extends the operation of involuntary dispersal and severely limits housing choices for people who may want to live near friends or family in other towns or cities.

I have so far emphasized some of the ways in which housing under the asylum support system can be restrictive to social life, but it is important to recognise the central role of housing in creating social relationships and providing a site of socialization, to which I will now turn.

4.5 Housing enabling social links

Despite the restrictive elements of housing that frame the arguments presented in this chapter, the house was nevertheless the most important location of social interaction for people at all stages of the asylum process. NASS houses therefore offer social opportunities as well as restrictions. Indeed, the suggestion that the punitive actions of housing workers have a detrimental impact on people's social lives itself highlights the fundamental links between housing support experiences and socializing. As already indicated for Christna and Vivi, and all others in my research, the house was the main place to pass time both in isolation, and with others sharing food, watching television, in sharing childcare, and finding other ways to pass the time. For some individuals the shared experience of arrival, induction and shared housing created a camaraderie that formed lasting relationships. The

forced nature of housing arrangements throws strangers together to share intimate space that can be a disconcerting source of insecurity for some, especially when different languages are spoken, making communication difficult. If relationships go well, however, a shared house enables the creation of initial social links and can become a social hub. The formative experiences associated with arrival and negotiation of a new country and culture might present moments of openness to new social relationships with those who share or provide assistance with crises and confusions.

Television formed a constant background during fieldwork and provides a focal point to passing time alone, and with guests. Following her miscarriage, Christna fell deeper into a depression and began complaining often of neck and back ache. It transpired she had been sleeping on the sofa with the television on in an attempt to create a sense of being around people because of feeling lonely. The television that helped to get Vivi into so much trouble with her neighbours seemed to actually be more important to her as a social propagator than as a pastime. One day when I wanted to talk to Vivi about how she seemed to be quite popular and had developed quite a network of friends she dismissed my suggestions, saying 'they like to come here for the television. They just come here and sit in front of the TV changing channels. I don't really watch TV.' As well as a distraction, television provided the illusion of social interaction and company, and was significant in shaping people's perceptions of the UK.

One of the most important intra-domestic social activities engaged in by those in my research was the sharing of food. Sharing food is not only economical, but is a crucially important feature of association among asylum seekers and refugees. Although poverty restricted the capacity of people to buy imported, familiar food products regularly, food may provide a sense of choice and freedom (Mintz, 1996) in lives otherwise ostensibly marked by powerlessness. The ephemeral nature of food allows for a sense of home-building in temporary NASS houses otherwise marked by their sparse interiors.

Furthermore, Christna, Vivi, Sanai and other women in my research used cooking as a way to pass the time, staving off boredom. Food as a mode of choice is explored more in chapter eight on 'food, gender and power'.

People who learn faster to successfully negotiate with British people and structures are often like nodes in a social network around whom other people congregate, and from whom social circles stem (Van Hear, 1998). Consequently, their houses are important places for social networking. Vivi, with her eight years in the UK, fluent English,

accumulation of consumer goods, and socially outgoing personality was an example of such a person. Another was Kojir—successful entrepreneur in event management, music promotion and party organization. People turned to those with refugee status or who had been in the UK longer for knowledge and guidance. The significance in social relationships of exchanging practical help and knowledge about the UK and support systems is particularly relevant to note given the suspicion towards housing workers as a source of trusted information. The critique of the notion of support provided by housing workers offered above highlights the importance of instrumental help in social relationships among refugees discussed further in the following chapter.

However, nascent social groupings are under threat from the mobility inherent in the linking of housing to asylum cases, and the relocation of people for administrative reasons creates a transient population (Phillips, 2006). Mobility is a source of great disruption in fragile, emergent social networks as it is difficult to stay in touch with people when they move house, especially if someone changes their mobile phone number, or it breaks or stops working. Visiting friends in other cities is made difficult and risky because of the restrictions on overnight guests, and the rule of not being away from a NASS property for more than seven consecutive nights, or a total of fourteen nights over the year. While initial links could be made through induction and housing arrangements, maintaining successful social relationships often meant avoiding, flouting, and ignoring housing rules. The rules about having overnight guests are probably most frequently flouted in response to the need of friends without statutory housing support.

4.6 Homelessness, lack of support and choice

A large amount of discussion and debate across all different groups and individuals in this research, including voluntary agency support workers and indeed housing workers was dedicated to living with and living around housing rules and regulations. During the time of this research I heard how housing workers might occasionally overlook signs that tenants had friends staying with them because of the lack of support options for those made destitute: to do otherwise would be to force those destitute onto the streets. When an asylum case is fully refused (following appeals), accommodation and cash support is removed with 21 days notice. Others may elect to receive ‘subsistence only’ support and are reliant on friends for somewhere to stay. People without support depend upon friends for somewhere to sleep, and for food. This does mean that people who are ‘destitute’ are

likely to always be around people, but these relationships are very imbalanced. Lack of support may also leave people vulnerable to exploitation (Lewis, 2007). Despite the high stakes—NASS accommodation and payments can both be removed if clients are found to have friends staying with them—the preference for staying with friends or family compels both those without accommodation and those in a position to provide help to ignore the rules.

Supporting those made homeless means that weak, fragile or isolated relationships are put under considerable strain. Cousins or neighbours who previously in the country of origin might have been only superficial acquaintances become closer in the UK in the ‘crisis’ context of seeking asylum and losing accommodation. New friendships are tested for loyalty when someone made homeless looks around for support. However, despite the relative lack of resources, power and ‘social capital’ held by other asylum seekers and refugees, they were often chosen over contacts who are more established residents for support at difficult times. This is exemplified by the decision made by Ana to leave her dispersal accommodation in Hull shortly after giving birth to her son, Damian:

Here the house is empty. [Some long-term residents who had been assisting her in Hull] they are all nice people, they have a lot of things. I can get help with NASS, with clothes. You are all very generous, kind people. Hannah, you have helped me a lot. But I don’t like to go and ask. You are all busy people. I’m alone in the house. I have to go out if I want to see people. In London those friends don’t have much, but they’re like me. I know they can’t help so much with problems, with NASS. They don’t have things to give me, but they have time. They are at home like me. They are there all the time. It’s hard to be in the house day and night with a baby. I don’t know what to do, but I think I might go there [to London]. I know it will be hard, I won’t have a house, but there are people there.

The differentials in power and wealth between Ana and those long-term migrants and UK-born citizens offering help in Hull made it difficult for her to accept the help and maintain pride. Although she knew that her same-national friends in London were financially worse off than her support ‘network’ in Hull, Ana chose to become effectively homeless in favour of the social and emotional support of those ‘closer’ to her in experience and current socio-economic standing. Though poor in some resources, they were rich in time and were similarly ‘at home’, able to break the isolation of early motherhood.

Those who are homeless are often highly mobile, moving from house to house when relationships become strained, and to reduce or spread the 'burden' of support. Of the fourteen people central to this ethnography, six moved away from Leeds/ Hull. Of these six, three moved at the point of losing their asylum cases (and so their accommodation and cash payments), and sought support from contacts in Manchester, Rotherham and London, either during the fieldwork or since it ended. Ana, after some time in London, felt the strain of transience and lack of personal space:

It's difficult, staying with other people. If they do things one way, you can't complain, it's their house. With Damian [toddler child], it's not good for him—moving houses all the time. He knows one place, then we go to another. It's difficult, living somewhere. I don't have money to pay rent. I pay what I can. You're always in someone else's house, living how they want.

In some respects, people without support may live more social lives than those isolated living alone in NASS houses. However, the nature of friendships and relationships are likely to change with the continued pressure of supporting people who do not have the capacity to contribute. The support offered to those made 'destitute' is routinely referred to as support 'in the community' by the voluntary sector. Indeed, asylum seekers and refugees, including refugee community organizations considered it a matter of pride that those left without support were not pushed onto the streets and considered this type of support an indicator of 'community' (see also Lewis, 2007). This again highlights the significance of instrumental interpretations of community, a point that will be returned to in the following chapters. Yet the lack of choice for those reliant upon others for support is profound, which, combined with the constant threat of deportation, creates an even greater sense of insecurity and precariousness. The insecurity of statelessness makes planning difficult for asylum seekers, and it may only be for those who succeed in gaining leave to remain that 'home'-building can begin. Lastly, these two concerns will be addressed: firstly, the problem of planning with an uncertain future, and secondly, the marking of security with consumer goods in the homes of refugees.

4.7 'Home', planning and transition to refugee status

Vivi once said to me with slight annoyance when I attempted to arrange to meet her the following afternoon: 'each day we wake up and see what happens. We don't have plans. We

don't know what we're doing until we're doing it.' For those awaiting an asylum decision, life was lived in the present. People awaiting a decision on their asylum case actively stop themselves from thinking about the future when it is so uncertain, and because the asylum system seems so arbitrary. Planning even a few days into the future or the following week often seemed impossible, leading to a short-term, opportunistic approach to daily life and social engagements. Typically people would express directly that they don't know what the future holds from one day to the next, if they'll still be in the same house, whether they will be deported. The British obsession with making appointments was a much talked about phenomenon and a mainstay of conversations about adjusting to life in the UK and learning about the culture of support services. Talking about past experiences, separated friends and family, own 'culture' or 'society' was rare, but likewise attempts to talk about aspirations, plans, the future were usually rebuffed. This temporal telescoping might be compared to the experience of old age, noted by Hazan in his study of a Jewish elderly care centre. He notes how time was manipulated and reconstructed as present-focused inside the centre, offering a solution to the irreversibility of old age and enabling some control against existential crisis and uncertain future (Hazan, 1980). Hazan presents time not as a reflection of a social reality, but as a 'viable, manipulable resource, open to infinite possibility of handling and management through people's attitudes and behaviours' (1980: 181).

Intense boredom characterized the lives of those awaiting an asylum decision. 'I don't do anything. I just sit here all day. I'm bored' was a common response to any question I might pose about social life and activities. Overall, seeking asylum presents itself as a life of waiting that might be punctuated by dramatic events. Pregnancy, births, deaths and marriages were 'normal' life events, which alongside crises in the asylum application process and changes in support, created a rash of social interaction and visits to services, organizations or other bodies. This creates a variable sense of time—time mostly seemed interminable so a key task in waiting for an asylum case to be resolved was handling time—thinking of ways to pass the time, ensuring that life is lived in the present. Days merged into one another, making keeping appointments with people like housing workers difficult. Then, at times of changes in the asylum process, legal decisions, or support issues time suddenly became very short given the tight timeframes always attached to bureaucratic deadlines.

Vivi did eventually get leave to remain through the Family Amnesty. Prior to this decision, I asked her what she might do if she did get a positive decision: 'I just don't care any more.

I can't worry or think about it. When I get my decision ... I don't care what I do, as long as I have a job doing something to earn some money and get me out of the house.' It is significant that Vivi associated the rights attached to being granted leave to remain with possibilities that would free her from the house, expressing the association of asylum status with entrapment in the domestic sphere. At one point Vivi mentioned her intention to throw a big party if she was granted leave to remain. In the event, the day before she received her decision she learnt that one of her friends had been detained and was threatened with removal, and she did not feel like celebrating. Similarly, when Najma gained a positive decision, having previously spoken about what an event it might be, she said the day just passed by as she felt overwhelmed by the uncertainty of losing her accommodation and cash support, and as she contemplated the risks to some of her friends who had been refused and were working in an undocumented job.

While the people in my research who gained status talked of what a disappointment that long-awaited moment was, it seemed that this highly significant transition—in many ways the ultimate success for people seeking asylum—may sometimes be indicated through conspicuous consumption. The condition of being an asylum seeker legally denotes limbo status: someone who has recently left 'there', but who is not yet allowed to be fully 'here': betwixt and between (Turner, 1969). In the prolonged ritual process of claiming asylum, the liminal period is legally finalized if refugee status (or another form of protection) is granted¹⁷. The insecurity of asylum status makes the acquisition of goods or homely adornments nonsensical, while in this research the increased security of leave to remain was marked conspicuously by refugees who acquired furnishings, electronic goods and mementoes. The three people in my research I knew best who had not only gained status, but also had been successful in getting housing (in two cases a Leeds City Council flat, in one case, a housing association maisonette) celebrated their growing security with the purchasing of conspicuous furniture and other material goods.

4.7.1 Conspicuous consumption

After gaining a positive decision, Kojir from Kurdistan—a musician and organizer of parties—waited for a period of some months before getting a house in an area in which he wanted to live. Over several months bought a computer, a coffee table, a sofa, a fake fire

¹⁷ Since this fieldwork was undertaken in 2003 to 2004, the asylum decision-making process has become faster, but people in this research waited between two months and eight years for their cases to be finalized, with most waiting one to three years.

surround to attach to the wall, and an elaborate pine mini-bar comprising a quarter-circle standing bar complete with holes for pressurized beer dispensing and two shelving units. Vivi's friend Gonguita had a boyfriend who benefited from a pilot project run by Leeds City Council to allow people receiving status to remain in the place where they had been accommodated as NASS clients. He put in wood-effect linoleum throughout the flat, bought a massive flat screen television and media system, a quantity of hi-fi equipment, two Romanesque lamps on pedestals, a glass coffee table, a fake leather cream sofa suite, and a substantial white and glass mini-bar not dissimilar to that described at Kojir's place, but with the addition of two shelf-end tall corner cupboards containing fake crystal cut glass wine glasses. Coincidentally, Christna's flat was directly underneath his flat, so I could imagine well the sparse interior that would have been there before he started buying things and making improvements. Meanwhile, Deka, a Somali woman who came to Leeds from Glasgow after getting a positive decision, bought a slightly more sedate, yet in the scheme of asylum seeker houses, plush dresser and sofa suite when she received £1000 in child support back payments.

Of course, there is an important practical issue at hand—as already indicated, the short-termism and insecurity of asylum status means people feel unable and unwilling to invest economically and emotionally in home-building of this sort. As discussed above, those surviving on NASS support are quite poor, and find it difficult to accumulate any significant wealth beyond, perhaps, saving up to go to a musical event, or to buy special (imported) foods. It is unlikely that either Kojir or Gonguita's boyfriend paid in full for the items they bought given the amount of time that elapsed between them gaining employment and buying these expensive items. Vivi agreed with me when I speculated that Gonguita's boyfriend probably bought the electronic equipment and sofa suite on credit. Gaining refugee status and housing (many people get the former and struggle for a long time to get the latter) creates a level of security and stasis whereby it starts to make sense to engage in home-building through acquiring furniture and consumer goods. In addition, it is likely that both Kojir and Gonguita's boyfriend were able to buy items by engaging in another important benefit of gaining status—the ability to have sufficient identity documents to make credit agreements, get loans, and so on.

The understanding of new things was a source of power in social relationships, and, broadly, the people in my research valued and awarded adaptation, or integration. Adopting local dress styles, purchasing (or acquiring) consumer goods (like upgrading your mobile phone), having a car, knowing how to eat a sandwich or a bag of chips, and so on, were

ways of accumulating cultural capital. Adopting practices and products similar to the people you see in the dominant culture can be an outward way of becoming less visible, or displaying 'sameness' (Malkki, 1995a). To some degree, these forms of 'small' power gained through proficiency in 'UK' foods, goods and practices replicates the 'big power' structures and moral overtones of the Home Office and integration policies and discourse. Both see the idea of 'integration' or adaptation as success, and reward it. The 2005 UK National Refugee Integration Strategy (Integration Matters) promotes eight indicators of integration: employment, English language attainment, voluntary work, being in touch with community organizations, British citizenship take up, levels of reporting harassment, accessing housing, and parental satisfaction with their children's education (Home Office, 2005c). These measures form the outline of 'big power' integration, and could be called socio-economic factors. While many, and sometimes all of these elements might be valued by people who are refugees, there are myriad other ways that 'integration' success would be measured. Speaking a sufficient level of English to get a job, or engage successfully with services is obviously important to all, but speaking colloquial enough English to chat someone up in a bar can be just as important, or even more important, to 'integration' success on socio-cultural measures. Similarly, in a comparative European study, Korac notes how social participation and a desire to 'be normal' were paramount to refugees' feelings about successful integration, and that these are often not met by functional approaches promoted by host country policy interventions (Korac, 2003).

The association of consumer goods, car ownership, and quality or dapper clothing with power and status was evident in the way women spoke about men and gauged potential or imaginary boyfriends. In an extreme and highly alarming case, I heard how a male housing worker had (ab)used his position to get sexual favours from women. One headstrong woman who managed through sheer wit and aggression to evade his advances told me she had heard other victims talk of how they either believed his manipulative lies or felt incapable of denying his advances because of his evident status and power. They said his power was demonstrated by having a nice mobile phone, wearing a suit and driving a new car—factors which meant the women even believed his assertion that he could have their asylum cases rejected or have them deported from the country if they did not agree to his sexual demands. The woman who told me this is a student of law, and therefore knew this was totally untrue, but lamented how her friends believed this, as she saw it, because of lack of education.

However, it would be wrong to conflate consumer goods simplistically with UK culture, or indeed, with cultural adaptation or integration. While people often commented about the valuing of money, wealth, and hi-tech electronics in the UK, and although the level of exposure people experience in the UK to such items is very likely to be far above what they have seen in the past, the equation of conspicuous consumer goods with power and success is hardly an exclusively British thing. The question of the 'traditional' being confronted with the 'modern' is not something which just occurs in Europe (Augé, 1995). As Gardner has shown in her ethnography of Talukpur, a Sylheti village in Bangladesh where most households are involved in migration, the movement of food, people and goods are of central importance in conceptualizations of power, and of home and other countries (Gardner, 1993, Gardner, 1995). Gardner shows how goods brought from home ('desh'), especially foods and clothing, are very important to UK migrants because they create a link to the homeland, while goods brought from foreign countries ('bidesh') to home transmit power and status. The houses of families involved in migration are visibly distinguishable from those that do not benefit from remittances. They are built of stone, painted in bright colours, have indoor latrines and bathrooms, pretty verandas, and are their owner's 'pride and joy' (Gardner, 1993: 13). Gardner explains:

Conspicuous consumption is of course commonplace as a mark of status and power...If the principal differentiation in the village is between migrants and non-migrants, through their display of bideshi goods and housing styles, migrant families clearly indicate their success. (Gardner, 1993: 13)

It is possible that Kojir and Gonguita's boyfriend are engaging in a similar kind of status-building activity which clearly indicates their success in winning their asylum cases, as well as performing to perceptions of migrant aspiration created at 'home', but existing in the UK among peers. This movement towards home-building also demonstrates the close link between settlement and housing security. It is widely noted that refugees are one of the groups most vulnerable to homelessness, and that housing insecurity severely hampers integration and settlement (Zetter and Pearl, 2002, Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005, Phillips, 2006). Kojir had at first been housed in a flat in an area where he felt unsafe, so it was only on managing to move to an area where he felt able to stay that he began to acquire goods. This was also true of Sanai, who was in temporary accommodation for several months in a hotel room in London, and of Najma, who moved between several towns and cities before successfully gaining a university place in a city in Scotland. It is useful to differentiate between the rights and support experiences

of people still in the asylum process and those who are granted leave to remain (Bloch, 2002, Zetter and Pearl, 2002); and clear that refugee status denotes access to resources (Zetter, 1991, Malkki, 1995a). Yet, insecurities may extend past the transition such that being granted status is not so much an end-point as a marker in a continuing process of balancing opportunities with restrictions.

4.8 Conclusion

Former experiences that precipitated forced migration are likely to create mistrust and insecurity at numerous levels for refugees (Hynes, 2003). It is widely noted that the precariousness of the refugee experience extends after arrival and is even made worse as a result of asylum policy (Bloch, 2000, Silove et al., 2000, Sales, 2002, Hynes, 2003, Temple et al., 2005, Robinson and Reeve, 2006). There is a large body of literature that focuses on changes and development of restrictive policies towards asylum seekers, and it is commonplace for commentators to note that the rights and social inclusion of asylum seekers are severely undermined by these policies. Much policy literature provides a useful overview of the broader aspects of policy implementation and importantly critiques advancing restrictionism from a social justice perspective.

However, a 'top-down' approach to analysing policy often does not address the way that policy mechanisms permeate every-day life, serving to extend the lack of choice and disempowerment of exclusion. While the government has sought to increase the use of detention and associated controlling devices such as tagging (Home Office, 2005b, Malloch and Stanley, 2005), more insidious forms of disciplining shape daily life for all asylum seekers, mediated through the housing and cash support systems. Furthermore, engaging in discourse around the efficacy of policies in achieving their regulatory intentions risks reproducing dominant constructions of people seeking asylum as policy objects rather than social actors (Shore and Wright, 1997, Korac, 2003).

Consideration of housing experiences suggests an interlinked set of binaries that may usefully expose salient features of asylum and refugee housing experience in the UK: control/ deviance; opportunity/ restriction; and safety/ entrapment. These binaries are apparent in the two central aspects of housing experiences dealt with in this chapter—the ways in which housing may both enable and inhibit possibilities for meeting people and socializing; and choice and security attached to immigration status.

The management of asylum housing infuses lack of choice for people accommodated in the asylum support system, damaging tentative social links, and undermining privacy and power on a day-to-day basis. This lack of power severely constrains an individual's capacity for home-building. The isolation and negative impacts on social relationships caused by housing varied among those in this research, but the dictation of social relationships by housing was nevertheless common. Spatial dispersal, not just across the UK, but also as a result of city-level dispersal makes the possibility of building neighbourhood-level social interaction difficult. Even within Leeds, poverty restricts travel, and so social life. As such it is paramount to explore the experiences of housing and 'home' in consideration of 'community' among dispersed people seeking asylum. People are left to maximise on the opportunities available within a constrained environment, placing pressure on a limited set of social relationships to provide support for basic needs at times of crisis.

Though the impact of the asylum system, poverty, and housing regulation were experienced as disempowering, this undermining was also challenged by forms of resistance. Learning how to settle in the UK for those awaiting a decision largely involved learning how to have a social life in spite of restrictive regulations. Yet the sense of lack of choice and precariousness is pervasive and should be considered as a precursor to the rest of the thesis. The balancing of restrictions and opportunities characterizes life for those seeking asylum. Exploring the daily impact both of controls, and of the survival mechanisms and choices possible in the context of living everyday with controls constitutes a major theme of the following chapters.

5 Social relationships: community of secrecy

We don't just leave everything behind when we arrive at Heathrow [airport]. You can't expect [people] to forget why they came here.¹⁸

Refugees are migrants who maintain relationships with friends and family in their countries of origin and in other countries of settlement. While relationships in the UK are partly shaped by accommodation arrangements, former and ongoing events relating to forced migration influence the decisions made by individuals about who to socialize with. This has an impact on the depth and quality of social relationships both locally and transnationally. By examining the intimate, day-to-day decisions among a small number of individuals about who to socialize with and why, I will illustrate some of the ways that structural influences impact social relationships, and thereby wider forms of association or 'community'.

This exploration raises some key themes that will emerge repeatedly in the interrogation of community among refugees. These include secrecy, trust, practical help and the all-encompassing nature of the process of seeking asylum. I propose that the key features of social relationships among refugees are strategy and contingency. After considering how and why contingency affected Christna's life, the importance of information in settlement, the limitations of language, and the normal sites of social interaction are proposed as factors that encourage primarily instrumental new relationships. Following this, the contingency of relationships upon unfolding events in both the UK and the country of origin is examined. Finally, the impact of immigration status, balancing local and transnational relations, and the size of the co-national population are proposed as central to strategic negotiations of social life.

5.1 Lives there here: leaving life behind?

Christna, a young woman from Cameroon, arrived in the UK without any contacts, and was not in touch with anyone she left behind. Her social life in the UK was built up from a relative *tabula rasa* in terms of social relationships. Although there was a large population of people from Cameroon in Leeds, she said she never met anyone she had known before

¹⁸ This is a quote from the Zimbabwean RCO leader Nzou, made during a discussion at the Refugee Forum of RCOs about working to shift adversarial perceptions among refugees of the police and other officials, for example, in encouraging trust that the police can offer protection and assistance in the event of racist attacks.

coming to the UK. Her daily interactions were with people whom she had known for only a short time, and were necessarily somewhat superficial. Not only had she severed contact with those left behind, but her past experiences dictated the nature of new relationships formed in the UK.

Her asylum claim centred on the stigma attached to her past membership of a cult accused of beating a baby to death. This incident had been well publicized, and she and the rest of the cult group had been publicly pilloried, and later arrested and imprisoned. While in prison for a few weeks, Christna was subject to beatings and intimidation. A friend bribed a prison officer for her release, and she stayed in hiding for six months (there being a warrant for her arrest) before being smuggled out and travelling to the UK. I met her in the autumn of 2003 around six months after she arrived in the UK. During much of the fieldwork period she was awaiting an initial decision on her asylum claim. She eventually received a negative decision which she appealed. Her appeal was heard in May 2004. I attended, and it was only at this point that the details outlined below became clear. Before this she had only hinted to me aspects of her story.

Christna had joined a Catholic cult after escaping to the city from a village where she lived with her witchdoctor husband and two children. She found out from other people in the village that her husband had two previous young wives who met untimely deaths so she thought it best to leave with her children. Her parents had both died some years ago and she had one brother and a sister living in her home village. When she moved to the capital escaping from her ex-husband she left her children with her sister and visited them at weekends. Christna had no contact with her children since sometime before going into hiding, six months before arriving in the UK. 'They don't have a phone and I don't have their address', she pointed out. Furthermore, her fear that her husband could kill her through casting spells if he learnt she was in the UK made her reluctant to make efforts to contact her family. I noticed that Christna withheld information about her true origin from people from Cameroon she met in the UK. She told me that she would never speak her tribal, mother-tongue as people would know her ethnicity.

This total severance of contact with her former life had a profound effect on Christna. She complained continuously of minor health problems—headaches, digestion problems, or an vague 'I don't feel good'. Christna was on various anti-depressants and sleeping tablets and frequented her GP, or more frequently the Health Access Team for Asylum Seekers and

Refugees, whom she felt understood and believed her more. Christna rarely talked of her former home, but framed her present life in terms of loss, saying:

Sometimes I don't know if I'm really living. I don't know if I'm alive. I think 'will I ever live again?' You know? Have a normal life, with family, and, you know, like that. Sometimes I think I might be dead. I think I've lost all my life. I look back at my life, I think I've ruined my life. I can never go back to how it was before. Sometimes, when I think about it, I just cry. I just cry all night and all day. Just crying all day, you know.

Christna told me that no-one apart from me, a Christian brother (French-born long-term UK resident) who visited her, and the Home Office know of her cult membership and background. The importance to her of secrecy in social relationships with other asylum seekers and refugees was evident. It was very difficult to discuss her reasons for being so secretive, but she implied that she did not want people to know about the cult membership that had led to her persecution, or for information to leak back to her ex-husband about her whereabouts.

For Christna, stigma, secrecy and fear compounded the transience and short-termism of asylum in the UK to create new relationships that were marked by the strategy of secrecy. Her relationships were protectively fragile owing to uncertain immigration status. She had seen people who lived nearby leave without explanation—'they are giving negatives [asylum decisions] to everyone now', she said. One day when I asked whether she could tell me about her friends by drawing a map of who she felt closest to, she said she had no friends. She included church contacts and workers at support agencies alongside a couple of fellow-asylum seekers she knew as a result of sharing accommodation. When I asked Christna what she had been doing or who she had seen, invariably the answer was 'nothing, no-one'. I might later find out she had been to the 'hospital' (any form of medical practice), or the shop, or the market, or that neighbours had passed by to watch television or share in cooking and eating.

It is possible that Christna enhanced her sense of social isolation in the hope of getting my help, or encouraging me to spend more time with her—there is no doubt that she was very bored, though the extent of her conscious manipulation is impossible to gauge with any certainty. Nevertheless, that she visibly did associate with people yet said she had no friends suggests two points. Firstly, these interactions couldn't assuage her overwhelming

feeling of a life of 'nothing'. Christna sometimes laughed dejectedly at my insistence to ask questions and to try to understand her life—why would someone want to know about a non-existent life? Secondly, if emphasizing to me her loneliness was a strategic move intended to encourage me to visit, this might be an active response to a situation of social isolation. This can be compared to the concept of 'transformative coping' and hardiness as offering control and a sense of purpose for refugees suggested by Omeri et al in their study of Afghans in Australia (2004), which will be returned to below.

5.1.2 Secrecy as a survival mechanism

For refugees, talking about friends and family either here, or left behind, can be distressing. Talking about those left behind means remembering and confronting separation and a life in exile. Talking about relationships formed here exposes people's usually highly isolated and lonely existences. Forgetting, or downplaying feelings associated with loss, separation and present isolation are key survival tools. It is not, then, surprising that my questions were more often than not met with silence, aversion or spoken or gestured refusal to respond.

I spent much of my fieldwork being struck by two salient elements of the social lives of my research participants: social isolation and secrecy. Some people did spend a great deal of time together and shared in most daily activities. However, I never ceased to be amazed that even people who did consider some of their social relationships to constitute friendships knew little of each other's backgrounds or status beyond their nationality (and sometimes not even this). A tendency for people to maintain relationships only with people from a similar background in very similar circumstances to their own quickly became apparent to me. I therefore routinely asked people about the situation of their friends, for example, whether they had received a decision on their asylum claim, where they came from, and so on. Invariably they did not know (or weren't prepared to tell me), and it was only by directly asking their friends that I would find out. Questions about origin, asylum claims, or details about family members were effectively taboo topics and this made the task of conducting research about community and social relationships difficult.

The contingency of social life upon a constantly shifting backdrop means that the social worlds of refugees are best understood as a process; one which cannot neatly be defined and described. The concept of the social world may be useful to encompass the possibilities of boundless social universes beyond the scope of the individual social

networks that one study can manage to look at (Marx, 1990). This research attempted to investigate the factors affecting the possibilities for creating and maintaining social relationships, not just in the UK, but which people perceive as important in their country of origin. As Marx describes:

A social world is not confined to a particular place or limited by territorial boundaries. Some of the relationships may be very important, but physically distant, while others may be almost insignificant although located close by. What is important is which social relationships play a role in a particular situation. (Marx, 1990: 194)

While this chapter discusses social relationships and socializing, it must be remembered that the predominant daily experience of the people in my research was of isolation and loneliness. The experience of isolation, as suggested in the case of Christna, may not simply be about the level of contact a person has with others (quantity of friends and time spent with them), but relates to the quality of relationships. Control of information or secrecy enables social relationships in the context of precariousness, albeit that these relationships may be 'weak' and relating to specific purposes (simplex).

5.2 Making new links: the need for information and practical help

The practicalities of settlement and the precariousness of asylum status encourage relationships that are pragmatic, instrumental, and opportunistic. Most people seeking asylum arrive in the UK without family¹⁹, and this was the case for all but a few of my research participants. Even for those who do have close or distant family or friends already in the UK, the compulsory dispersal system means they are unlikely to be living near them. The difficulties of adjusting to life in a new country can be made easier by establishing social relationships that are of practical use to the negotiation of the settlement process. This includes finding out about the asylum process and support services, as well as practicalities of daily life such as shopping and sharing childcare. Without family, forming new relationships is important to the negotiation of life as a new arrival. As mentioned in the previous chapter, new relationships often form as a result of sharing accommodation.

¹⁹ Exact figures for single or family applicants are not available from Home Office statistics. However, data on child dependents to principal applicants indicates that the figures equate to an average of one dependent for every five principal applicants (Home Office, 2004). However, this figure includes dependents that arrive subsequently, and does not include families of adults over the age of 18.

Otherwise, the main locations of social interaction are often limited to those that relate to settlement or basic needs: English classes, church or mosque, refugee support services, accommodation and nursery or school for those with children.

Many of the people in my research socialized on the whole with people from the same country of origin. The main exceptions to this were language-based affiliations between French speakers, English speakers and Arabic speakers, demonstrating the significance of a linguistic bridge in social relationships. This is further evidenced by the formation of refugee community organizations (RCOs) in Leeds which tend to either represent a country or a linguistic group, as in the case of Yorkshire African Refugee Community Organization and the Central African Women's Education and Health organization, both of which bring together people from French-speaking African countries. As discussed further in the following chapter, RCOs tend to begin as a social, friendship group. The emergence of community organizations based on linguistic affiliation demonstrates the primacy of shared language in socializing. An awareness of shared language would often be the first point of contact in newly-formed relationships—people approaching one another in the street on the bus, at support services, or college after hearing or guessing they spoke the same language. Hence, relationships based on instrumental and informational support are engendered both by practical needs and the requirement of mutual comprehension. In addition, because sites of social interaction tend to be related to settlement or immediate needs, this too encourages initial social links based on practicalities.

The need for instrumental support means that language is an important tool, and is also a mediator of relationships. For anyone who does not have a reasonable command of English when they first arrive, making an alliance with someone who can help mediate with services is of primary importance, at least until some English can be acquired. The dependency of people who cannot speak English so well on those who can means that people with a better command of the language may find they quickly become a social nexus. These individuals are likely to have 'migratory cultural capital' (Van Hear, 1998)—adaptive capacity and knowledge of support systems which is useful to others. However, constant demands for assistance can become an irritation, as they did with my key Angolan participant, Vivi, who had been in the UK for eight years and spoke fluent English. Vivi was dispersed to Leeds after seven years living in London where she had many friends. By contrast, in Leeds she initially felt isolated and lonely. Over a period of nine months several of her friends followed her to Leeds, and she made new friends, but she found that some of them depended greatly on her because of her familiarity with UK systems and fluent

English. She felt that as a result they were not making enough effort to learn English because her assistance reduced their urgency to develop language capacity, and she began to refuse requests to accompany them to support services, GP appointments and shops. In this way, earlier migrants may shift the burden of helping newcomers onto others, by introducing them to their own network, thus extending the social links of those recently arrived (Marx, 1990).

Friendships might be struck up at moments of openness as a result of shared experience. For those awaiting a decision, actions are based around survival strategies in the project of seeking asylum and becoming familiar with life in the UK. In the settlement (or integration) process informal networks may be the most important source of useful, trusted information, in preference to official sources (Simich et al., 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). The confusion created by complex legislation and regulations means that 'information is at a premium—and indeed essential if refugees are to order their lives' (Williams, 2006: 868). Focusing on planning and action, and finding instrumental help can create a sense of control in the context of adversity (Omeri et al., 2004). In addition, not just the instrumental and informative support, but also the affirmational support of relationships with those who have been through similar experiences may be critical in coping with the stresses of migration and adaptation (Simich et al., 2003).

These types of newly-formed relationships among recently-arrived refugees have been termed networks of 'weak ties' (Granovetter in Simich et al., 2003 and Williams, 2006). Simich et al contrast networks of weak ties with more intimate 'strong ties' that are particularly important for emotional support (2003: 886). Similarly, Williams suggests that networks of weak ties represent flexibility and opportunity, whereas stability and safety comes from transnational networks with family, group or tribe members (2006). Simich et al suggest that validation from people of a similar background who have been through similar experiences is important for refugees' mental well-being (2003: 888). Omeri et al introduce the concepts of hardiness and 'transformational coping' to demonstrate how, following trauma, gaining control through actions can enable opportunity for growth, albeit that this may co-exist with loss and grief reactions (2004: 24). These instrumental or 'weak' relationships are superficial in the sense that they primarily based upon the outward, apparent features of life. However, I would suggest that this does not render them necessarily false or shallow, in keeping with Simich et al's recognition of the importance to well-being of affirmational support through shared experience (2003). In recognising the centrality of secrecy, or control of information, I would furthermore argue that superficial

relationships may be the only kind that are sensible in response to fluidity, precariousness, and the potential danger that co-nationals may represent by sending information back to one's country of origin.

Both Simich et al, writing about refugee settlement in Canada, and Omeri et al, writing about Afghan refugees in Australia, counterpoise the potential benefits of instrumental social relationships for both practical help and mental wellbeing with the existence of immigration policies that may disempower individuals. Policies that restrict control over settlement by, for example, preventing access to employment or family reunion diminish possibilities for action and control. In the UK, if family members arrive at different times there is no guarantee they will be housed together, or near each other—this can only happen if relatives are able to support new arrivals. Williams' research among refugees in the UK notes how an inability to keep family members together becomes a source of shame and disempowerment for those who cannot support relatives, finding they are housed far away as a result of 'no choice' dispersal housing²⁰ (Williams, 2006: 878).

This ethnographic research among refugees in Leeds abounded with examples of the overwhelming disempowerment created by inflexible asylum policies. The difficulties facing refugees in Britain as a result of such policies have become well-documented by a copious literature (for example, Joly, 1996, Bloch, 1999c, Schuster and Solomos, 1999, Bloch, 2000, Stanley, 2001, Sales, 2002, Carter and El Hassan, 2003, Robinson et al., 2003, Craig et al., 2005, Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Harris, 2005, Malloch and Stanley, 2005). The ground of policy reviews has been amply covered. Instead, I aim to explore structural influences from both the sending and receiving states on the conduct of social relationships among refugees. Although often separated in the literature, local and transnational relationships are interwoven in the every-day lives of refugees such that UK policies and conditions in a person's country of origin both shape a person's social world (cf Al-Ali et al., 2001).

²⁰ During fieldwork I was told by housing workers and other practitioners that close family members can request to be dispersed to the same place, but I only met a few people who knew about or were offered this opportunity. Some knew from friends or family to request dispersal to a certain place, but were told the offer of accommodation was on a 'no-choice' basis. Even following a positive decision, the capacity for refugees to control their own settlement has been severely hampered by the introduction in the 2004 Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act of the 'local attachment' rule that refugees are only eligible for social housing in the local authority where they were supported by NASS as an asylum seeker.

5.3 Contingent relationships

Thomas was a teacher and an active member of his country's opposition party. Exile meant he escaped the trouble these roles caused him on certain levels, but he later learnt directly of the impact of activities and association in the UK on both his security and that of family members. Thomas had continued and even expanded his political engagement since arriving in the UK. He was absolutely delighted to be living in a country that allowed him to pursue his political interests with freedom. When he attended an anti-deportation protest in London his photograph was unknowingly taken by a journalist and published in an African newspaper. Shortly afterwards, his wife and children in Zimbabwe received threats and intimidation, owing accusations that Thomas was opposed to the state by living in exile and by being politically engaged, proven by the newspaper article. They had to leave their family home to live with Thomas's parents in another city.

Prior to this event Thomas had quite a high profile in activism in Leeds both concerning politics at home, and in raising awareness about refugee and asylum seeker issues in the UK. He had been in a local newspaper to highlight the destitution of refused asylum seekers and was a central figure in a community organization. Owing to the negative ramifications for his wife, worsening stories of persecution in his home country, and because of what he saw as dangerous and depressing fragmentation within the political party he supported, his interest in maintaining political activities waned considerably. His case was fully refused, and the constant menace of removal began to have a profound effect on his social life as he toned down activities and almost went underground. He became anxious that to continue to be politically active jeopardized the safety of his wife and children and would add to the torture and beatings he expected were he to be removed. By disengaging from the community organization he also lost contact with people who had been friends and drinking partners in Leeds. Formerly someone who was seen as a community leader, he became an elusive, depressive figure. His social life was therefore contingent not just upon the reasons he first came to the UK, but also ongoing threat of persecution, both for him and his family.

Decisions about who to associate with and the quality and nature of relationships with those in the UK and those left behind are overshadowed and shaped by conditions surrounding insecurity (Al-Ali et al., 2001: 588). People's assessment of their security in terms of who to share information with and when is shaped by news from family and friends or media sources in their country of origin. Some people may have little continual

contact with trusted friends and relatives in their country of origin, in which case hearsay from people in the UK, and past experiences that precipitated flight play an important role in gauging risk. In the case examined earlier, Christna appeared to be basing many of her decisions on events that happened before she left Cameroon, and did not have ongoing contact to inform her decisions. However, among those in my research, it was more normally the case that some sort of contact was maintained. It is therefore not straightforward to characterize transnational, family relationships among refugees as necessarily strong and emotionally supportive in contrast to newly formed weak ties in the UK, as Williams does (2006). Some refugees have experienced multiple losses, or do not have ongoing contact with trusted family or associates in their country of origin, while, over time, relationships formed from 'weak' ties in the UK can become multiplex. Such a transition may be marked by the use of kin terms to refer to relationships with certain peers (cf Baumann, 1995) enriched through unfolding layers of shared experience, exchange and mutual support. The conduct of social relationships is contingent upon events not only in the past, but continuing in the present and anticipated in the future. In this sense, the level of transnational engagement and connection to unfolding events in country of origin can be a critical mediating factor both in shaping the continuation of relationships with those left behind, and determining newly formed relationships in the UK.

5.4 A community of secrecy?

Some people like Thomas had experiences while in the UK that had direct impacts on their social relationships, or on the safety of friends or family. Extreme caution over who one shares information with, and when, is entirely understandable in the context of risks presented by conditions connected to the reasons that caused the initial forced migration. However, the refugee experience is likely to produce layer upon layer of mistrust (Hynes, 2003) that could extend into a boundless social universe (Marx, 1990). It is therefore not surprising that other people, such as Christna, who appeared to have no contact at all with family or friends either in her country of origin, or in the UK who could be connected to the social world she left, still maintained a protective veil of secrecy about her past life. Her perception of the risk of sharing information appeared to be based on her past experiences prior to coming to the UK, yet continued to affect her social life. Indeed, after her claim was fully refused and her support removed, she remained in the UK, despite having to live supported by friends with no right to work, rather than return.

The relationship between trust and the control, or sharing, of information is likely to be important yet it is difficult to generalise across those in my research or to characterize them succinctly. Without pathologizing the 'refugee condition', Hynes has explored the multi-layered mistrust refugee-related experiences are likely to create (Hynes, 2003). Negative experiences of authority and bureaucracy in countries of origin are coupled with numerous interviews in the asylum and resettlement process, which may lead to a particular discomfort and lack of trust in figures and mechanisms of officialdom (Hynes, 2003, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). This mistrust is likely to extend to refugees wanting to garner support as community leaders, especially where individuals may have had past experiences of being betrayed by figures of status (Gold, 1992). More generally, the likelihood that refugees will lose confidence in social systems and authority is widely noted (Gold, 1992, Allen and Turton, 1996, Hynes, 2003, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). The imperative to save lives may undermine the viability of saving a 'way of life', the consequent social upheaval leading to a loss of confidence in formally taken-for-granted norms and moral codes (Allen and Turton, 1996).

Both past experiences and the precariousness associated with seeking asylum in the UK are likely to bring about a lack of ontological security. Giddens describes ontological security as 'the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action' (Giddens, 1990: 92). There are thus important connections between ontological security and trust, as a sense of the reliability of persons and things is also central to the notion of trust (Giddens, 1990). A link between changes in social and material environments of action and a breakdown in trust is noted in empirical studies about refugees, though the idea of ontological crisis is not always directly referred to. It is not the chief purpose of this chapter to investigate the relationship between trust and secrecy, important though it is. Nevertheless, it can be noted that because there are levels of secrecy, and because relationships are contingent upon unfolding events, trust and secrecy cannot necessarily be neatly opposed. Nor should it be assumed that new relationships formed in the UK, despite being 'weak ties' are more or less trusting. Indeed, the anonymity of fresh identities and interaction with people not sharing common backgrounds can foster trust and openness.

Secrecy is not, therefore, equivalent to mistrust; there are shades of both that may exist within one relationship, and which change over time in relation to events. Furthermore, while mistrust is an important consideration that can impact (and hamper) research and the

work of refugee-supporting agencies (Hynes, 2003, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003), the secrecy employed strategically by refugees in response to mistrust of others can be seen as a tool enabling social relationships in the context of precariousness. The negotiation of both new and existing social relationships involves constantly making judgements about who to reveal what information to when.

News travels through people engaged in social relationships, so it stands to reason that some form of social network must exist within and across the UK and the country of origin for the control of information to be a concern. This can be thought of as an indication of a form of community, inasmuch that an individual must feel a connection to a (fluidly) bounded group of people sufficient to desire controlling what information they have access to about him/her. Variations in connections result in levels of secrecy that vary across relationships and time, a point I will now turn to.

5.4.1 Levels of secrecy: sharing on a need to know basis

Hamid, editor of an Iranian magazine in Yorkshire, was convinced that he had spoken to the Iranian secret service since starting his newsletter: 'people phone me up and ask questions. I'm sure they know about the newsletter. They ask me where I live, what I'm doing.' Hamid said he was known as a journalist to the Iranian government, and demonstrated a courageous, brazen attitude to exposure. However, he was clear that many Iranian people want to escape from the reality of politics in Iran, especially given a new, more restrictive regime—'people don't like politics, they don't want to know about politics'. There could be various reasons for this, but Hamid felt that the main one was that reading about politics and problems might remind them of past events they don't want to think about. Hamid suggested that forgetting also meant people do not like being identified as Iranian. He had seen people in the supermarket he believes are Iranian:

I say hello in Farsi, but they say in English 'no, I'm Spanish', or 'I'm Italian' or something—when I know for sure they are Iranian! They don't want people to think they're refugees, they're scared of the secret service here.

One of the complaints people often made was that one could never quite be sure whether to trust friends and associates. The potential of migration to a new place to allow the creation of new identities may equally be a threat. Zimbabweans in Leeds also told me that government supporters masquerading as asylum seekers had infiltrated UK networks to

inform on those politically active in the UK. It is impossible to know with any certainty the extent of any such activity, but the suggestion alone spreads fear that promotes mistrust.

At times during fieldwork the dominance of secrecy among refugees seemed total owing to the type of generalized insecurity and fear brought about by reported secret service activity, among other suspicions. Secrecy was noticeable in terms of conducting research—to ask a question was rarely welcome (cf Agar, 1996: 96). Rules and categorizations about topics considered safe or dangerous, acceptable or taboo were changeable, individual, and subject to context. I learnt to be highly sensitive to mood and tone in group situations, swiftly changing the course of conversation when new people came or left according to a usually unspoken sense of propriety, an intuition of trust or suspicion, a feeling of privacy or exposure. These sensitivities sometimes formed a conversation topic in themselves, especially for RCOs and voluntary organizations struggling to provide services for people who may mistrust others and not pass on information needed to assist.

However, there are times and places when information is shared. Christna telephoned me one day complaining that she hadn't seen me for a few days, asking whether I might go to see her. She said she had some papers she didn't understand. When I arrived she presented me with a thick pile of antenatal registration forms—this is how I found out she was pregnant. As indicated in the opening passage, Christna remained reticent almost all of the time, but then shared with me intimate details of her asylum claim and life that illuminated intimations I had previously gained. Such moments of openness were usually ostensibly linked to instrumental acts, suggested by the possibility that emphasizing isolation could have been a way for Christna to exercise some control over her interactions with me and others. The likelihood that information is primarily shared on a 'need to know' basis—that is, when there is some use in doing so—seemed likely in many interactions I had with all people in my research.

In formal settings, presenting the right knowledge in the best way can be crucial to gaining access to rights, services, and ultimately, refugee status through conforming to Home Office expectations of narration of experiences. Despite the atmosphere of fear and threat, the asylum process requires open and honest information sharing with the Home Office. The Home Office expects an applicant to clearly state in detail their reasons for seeking asylum at the first interview and it is common for new evidence presented at later appeal stages to be discounted as fabricated to falsely bolster a weak claim. Hence, successful

negotiation of the asylum process requires the applicant to be strategic about when and with whom to share information.

Indeed, the need for evidence in asylum claims can itself influence social networks, especially transnational ones, by generating or renewing links. Najma had been in the final year of a law degree and a political activist before leaving her country. After receiving an initial refusal of asylum, she appealed and was advised by her solicitor to gain what evidence she could of her political activities. Through her political links and cross-national family she brought to the appeal court room photographs of herself in demonstrations, proof of her visits to political prisoners and even a sound recording of herself being interviewed on BBC World Service in the midst of a protest in 1999. Her barrister commented that he had never before seen such a barrage of strong evidence in an asylum claim. Even the Home Office presenting officer wanted to give up half-way through the hearing when the sound recording from the BBC was played. Procuring this evidence after arrival in the UK took considerable work in maintaining a network of associates, friends and family, in her country of origin, and across various countries. Najma managed to rekindle contact with a journalist she met in 1999 who provided some crucial evidence, and her strong links with home enabled the smuggling of a letter from a known political prisoner in support of her claims to political activism. Thus immediately Najma was encouraged to foster certain relationships of strategic importance by the need for evidence.

In addition to the requirements of the asylum application process, the need for security can encourage open sharing of information with friends or family at moment of crises. Thomas was fully refused following appeals. At some time later he was rather randomly detained while the Home Office made attempts to arrange travel documents to enable his forced removal. From detention, Thomas engaged in open communication with his wife given the threatening circumstances of possible impending return. Anticipating disappearance, beatings or worse on return he wanted her to alert human rights groups attempting to monitor the treatment of returnees. Secrecy is not total, therefore, but a protective response to a lack of security and precarious social relationships. The newness of social relationships between those recently arrived means that individuals can protect what others know about them, or even develop strategically employed new identities (cf Malkki, 1995a). Information of all types about individuals is therefore a tool of control. Because sharing information often seemed to be for a specific purpose, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about control of information rather than secrecy. Or, to acknowledge secrecy as a tool strategically employed in relation to whether it is useful to share information, and in

response to events; that is, there are levels of secrecy. The levels of secrecy maintained with me and others varied between individuals, and in relation to events and needs.

In the first part of this chapter it was suggested that social relations among refugees are likely to be based on instrumental purpose because of the needs of settlement, while the strategic control of information resulting from contingency on events past, present and future is a vital tool in maintaining social life. Now I will turn to look at how immigration and social status, and the presence of a wider population of people from the same country or region can impact social life of refugees.

5.5 Immigration status and social position affect social life

The insecurity of marginal immigration status and the perpetual threat of return are features that have an overriding influence on the lives of those seeking asylum. The tension and precariousness of awaiting a decision dominates daily life. The resultant limbo creates a situation which is something of a social dilemma. On the one hand, with no permission to work, there is little to do except find people to pass time with. On the other hand, insecurity impedes the establishment of meaningful social relationships. Each day brings the possibility that a letter may arrive from the Home Office which, whether a positive or negative decision, would mean loss of accommodation. The limbo can last months or years, and the Home Office gives no indication of how long the wait will be. Those awaiting their asylum decision often commented to me that there is little point in getting to know people or places beyond the basic requirements of getting through daily life—you never know when you or they might leave, or move house.

It is the intention of government policy to make settlement in the UK difficult for people awaiting an outcome on their claim for asylum (see, for example, the delineation drawn in the integration policy, 'Integration Matters' (Home Office, 2005c)), (Sales, 2002). Restricted rights mean asylum seekers cannot work legally, and are eligible only for computer and English courses, so have limited access to education and training opportunities. This context made it difficult for people to plan into the future or feel confident that friendships would last. Immigration status affects all aspects of settlement (Bloch, 1999; Bloch, 2002). The projects of pursuing the right to remain in the UK and adjusting to a new country take precedence, and this often means that other types of life project go on hold. This research involved people at different stages of migration and of the asylum process, and holding

different social positions. Priorities for those still awaiting determination of their asylum case are different to those who have received a decision.

Sanai from Eritrea had the fastest resolution of an asylum case of anyone I met during my research—two months from the day of arrival. She had fled at short notice at night, leaving her two sons with her parents. On receiving a positive decision she immediately began to arrange family reunion to bring her two sons to the UK. The process can take a long time. For Sanai it took around 18 months, even having borrowed money for the airfares from her deceased husband's friend in the United States of America, rather than waiting for a Red Cross or International Organization of Migration-funded flight. Najma, who also received a positive decision, began looking for work to save the money to visit a third country to where her father and brother could also travel safely for a holiday reunion. If the outcome of an asylum case is positive and refugee status is granted, this brings social and civil rights and a level of security that may allow priorities to shift. Other limited forms of leave to remain (exceptional leave to remain, humanitarian protection, discretionary leave) do not allow family reunion²¹ and thus purposely restrict the extent to which people can become settled.

The willingness of people to maintain relationships with those in their country of origin, or to strike up new social relations with those they meet in the UK is dependent upon a multitude of factors. These factors may be characterized as falling into three categories—those relating to seeking asylum, those relevant to migration more broadly, and those that pertain to characteristics of an individual's social status, personality and 'culture'. Each of these categories of factors may be more or less influential across time, between individuals, and in relation to different relationships a person holds; also, the factors may overlap. Given that the focus of this research was on the impact of asylum and immigration policies on daily lives, this chapter focuses on the first of the three categories: those relating to seeking asylum. However, because the three types of factors overlap they cannot always be neatly teased apart. Factors relating to seeking asylum surround the causes of forced migration or continued exile, and UK immigration and asylum policies and processes—including the legal asylum process and dispersal. Migration factors are those not necessarily specific to the asylum seeking group, for example, length of time in the UK, remittances, responsibilities to those left behind, and adaptive capacity. Factors relating to social status,

²¹ Those with ELR, DL, or HP can apply after living in the UK for four years. Very occasionally this may be granted if there are compelling compassionate reasons, and if they can support their family without recourse to public funds (Home Office, 2006b).

personality or 'culture' are broad, and may include, for example, whether someone is single or a parent, shy or outgoing, familiar or unfamiliar with sharing social spaces with people of different gender or age.

Following the incidents mentioned earlier, Thomas, who left his wife and children behind on coming to the UK, felt compelled to find undocumented employment to try to raise funds for them to travel to the UK, after living for a year supported by friends following the refusal of his asylum claim. He said: 'My life is ruined. I can't go back. I'll be imprisoned or killed. I can't stay here—I'm nothing. I have to work.' As discussed in the previous chapter in relation to housing, those refused asylum are reliant upon others for support with basic needs once their NASS support is removed. Lack of choice, inherent to living under the asylum system, is worsened considerably in this context, putting 'weak ties' under strain. For someone like Thomas, grappling with living without legal status and his commitment to earning money for his wife and children, social life and any hopes and aspirations become secondary to basic survival and avoidance of authorities. Or rather, all social relations maintained are likely to be fundamental to basic survival. Family commitments thereby shape social life, as does their lack for those with fewer commitments. Many of the larger scale social events and parties discussed in chapter seven were gendered spaces, predominantly attended by single men, or men whose families were outside the UK, offering them an opportunity for socializing less open to women.

Both for those awaiting a decision and those who have received an outcome, social status influences social relationships. For example, a young single male with aspirations to work, send home money, and arrange a marriage will have different priorities to a widowed single mother. Social status affects the role and importance of both local and transnational relationships. Gonguita, a young Angolan single mother, tried to join her friend Vivi in Leeds but was instead dispersed to live in Hull. On visits to see her friends in Leeds she struck up a relationship with an Angolan man who had refugee status and was a single father. When her NASS support was suspended because she was reported as missing from her property in Hull, she had little choice but to stay with her boyfriend, without whom she would have had no means to support her three-year old daughter. For Sanai, who had left her children in Eritrea following her husband's recent death, contact with them was critically important both to her wellbeing and to assure her children that she was still alive. An understanding social life in the UK for someone like Sanai, therefore, must incorporate an awareness of how transnational links are balanced in daily life.

5.5.1 Balancing local and transnational relationships

Najma had been a student and political activist in her country of origin. Her daily life in the UK was punctuated by engagement with unfolding political events at home, interaction in family business, and advice from her brother—through the mediums of telephone, email, instant messaging and webcam. During her first months in the UK Najma regularly held meetings with her sister and other family members through instant messaging and over webcam introduced them to some of her new friends. Several months after Najma arrived in the UK she had a call from her mother to say that one of her younger brothers had left home in Africa to make a dangerous sea crossing to escape. For a couple of days Najma severed contact with the outside world and spent two days at home crying, waiting anxiously for news from home that her brother was safe. As she said at the time, she couldn't continue her life until she knew he had arrived safely. She was in regular contact with her closest brother who was her guide and confidante—until he was imprisoned because of his political activities, another event that had a devastating effect on Najma's daily life in the UK. Several times she received calls out of the blue from distant relatives or acquaintances that made it to the UK and called her for support and assistance. In these ways new relationships made in the UK intermingled with and competed for Najma's social time and attention paid to established family and friend relationships. Deep relationships formed prior to her arrival in the UK did not cease or stagnate, but continued and developed in new, altered ways.

Whether contact with others is considered safe and desirable or not, the practicalities of communication affect if, and how often, contact is possible. Technology plays a significant role in the practical possibilities of communication. As we saw earlier, Christna, for example, found contact difficult as her children and sister had no access to a telephone. For some an appointment would have to be made to ensure relatives were available at a neighbourhood phone, while others had relatives with mobile phones and email who could be contacted at almost any time. Alan, a Kurdish musician, had a cousin in Leeds who courted one of her cousins in Kurdistan over email, who then proposed to her over webcam. She later severed the relationship when his traditional views on her role as a wife became clear, much in conflict with her expectations of university education and a career. The influence of transnational relationships maintained with existing family and friends in other countries must be weighed against attention to new, local relationships. Both are altered by constantly transforming perceptions of 'here' and 'there'.

The forced nature of refugee migration often does not allow for the preparation other migrants might make before moving. Conditions of rapid change or multiple losses are likely to make contact with those left behind more difficult for refugees than is the case in more stable migration circumstances. Nevertheless, experiences and ongoing events in the UK and the countries where family and friends are situated continue to influence relationships over time: a refugee's life does not stop abruptly at the border (Malkki, 1995b). Rather than emphasizing rupture and dislocation, or assuming that those uprooted suffer the loss of all contact to the lifeworlds they fled, transnational approaches enable an analytical linkage between displacement and emplacement (Malkki, 1995b: 515). The term 'transnational' refers to the continuation of social relations following migration, between country of origin, settlement country, and other countries to which people have migrated. Transnationalism has been defined variously as 'economic, political and social relations creat(ing) social fields that cross international boundaries', or 'a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement, and/or a (re)construction of place of locality (Basch et al. and Vertovec in Al-Ali et al., 2001).

The refugee experience has frequently been analysed in a sedentarist analytical scheme, which paints the asylum country as 'strange' and the homeland or country of origin as not only normal, but the ideal habitat for any person (Malkki, 1995bL 509). An assumption of rupture and dislocation means refugees have received less attention in studies of transnationalism, although the term has been widely applied to migrant groups. The idea of transnational communities challenges the notion of community bounded by locality and (single) place. Discussions on transnationalism are closely linked to postcoloniality, hybridity, creolization and diaspora—which do not assume the 'purity or naturalness, wholeness or wholsomeness of origins, identities, communities, cultural traditions, or nationalities, but instead regard both emplacement and displacement as ever-unfinished projects' (Malkki, 1995b: 516). However, it is important to acknowledge the role of both the sending and receiving states as shaping transnational practices (cf Al-Ali et al., 2001). People seeking asylum could be seen to be at the sharp end of this influential role of the state given the invasive nature of asylum policy in the daily lives of those seeking asylum in the UK and the ongoing threat of persecution, often by state actors, which encourages protracted exile.

While the quality, nature and depth of relationships held with people in these different physical locations differ between individuals (cf Al-Ali, 2002), the daily lives of all refugees are punctuated by local and transnational events. Transnational activities are undertaken

not just between source and receiving country, but also globally as dispersed diaspora link across national boundaries. Transnational contacts were evident among Kurdish people in this research, especially in the organization of large parties bringing musicians from other European countries. Griffiths similarly notes that politicized Kurdish associations have regular contact with politically affiliated Kurdish organizations across Europe, not just with people and political parties in Kurdistan (2000).

However, the rush to recognise transnational communities risks glossing over differences between people and context (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Al-Ali et al suggest that variables of gender, age, class, education, place of origin, and political affiliation dictate those who are more or less likely to be involved in transnational activities (2001: 594). I would additionally suggest that access to communication technology and contingency on unfolding events play a role, as highlighted in the ethnographic cases in this chapter. In their comparison of Eritrean and Bosnian diaspora, Al-Ali et al note a striking contrast between the two groups' transnational activities and transnational capabilities. While the Eritrean state has been very successful in mobilising its migrant population, in making regular financial contributions, and uniting Eritreans around a sense of pride of winning an independent homeland, the Bosnian state is relatively weak and its people divided along ethnic and class lines. Al-Ali et al. suggest that, rather than providing examples of 'transnational communities', the Eritrean and Bosnian cases are incipient or emerging transnationalisms. As they suggest, varying levels of engagement with transnationalism mean it is probably better conceptualized as a process than as a 'state of being' (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Furthermore, transnational approaches may overemphasize the continuity of social and cultural ties to the homeland, risking the potential of justifying and rationalizing refugee returns (Andrew Dawson, pers. comm.).

5.5.2 Size of population, chain migration and links to country of origin

Deka, from Somalia, came to Leeds in the summer of 2002 after receiving a positive decision. On claiming asylum she was dispersed to Glasgow with her two baby boys where she spent six months. Someone told her that there is more work available in Leeds so she resolved to move away from Glasgow on getting refugee status. She was also attracted by the proximity to Sheffield (a nearby city in South Yorkshire) where she had heard that there were whole streets of Somalis living together in one place. When I first met Deka in the summer of 2002 she found this idea very attractive. With two small children and a bad knee that inhibited her movement she found bringing up her two boys a struggle, and felt highly

isolated and lonely. She found it an ordeal with limited mobility and a double pram to go out and about to meet people. Like other mothers involved in my research, sharing childcare was a primary instrumental driver for social relationships. Dekka wanted to live near other Somali mothers to share food, share the tasks of cooking and childcare, to socialize easily and get support and company to stave off loneliness and isolation.

Soon after arriving in Leeds she went to buy some halal²² meat and saw a Somali woman in the street. They smiled at each other and started chatting. The following day a small group of Somali women came to visit her in her emergency accommodation hostel. These women went on to found the Leeds Somali Women's Group. Dekka was initially involved, but became disaffected by infighting in the group. When I first met her, Dekka was an isolated Somali woman seeking co-nationals, hopefully additional childcare support, and people to talk to about parenting. A year and a half later her desire to meet new Somali people faltered:

Now there are more and more Somalis in Leeds all the time. Not just the ones who come here with NASS, but once one person is settled here they might advise their friends to come and join them. I go into town and see new Somali faces all the time. This way there are more Somalis day by day.

When I first came to Leeds from Scotland, there were not so many people and we were like this, [clasps her hands together, interlocking the fingers]. Now there are more people, and now everyone is talking about tribes. I never ask anyone what tribe they are any more. It is not important here. The tribes are the reason for all the problems at home, and we shouldn't bring it here with us. Even now, I have a friend of 12 or 13 years who lives in America. We talk on the phone. Even now I do not know what tribe she is and she doesn't now what tribe I am.

At first in Leeds, I wouldn't tell people my tribe. When people ask me, I would just say 'it doesn't matter what tribe'. But people keep asking, and in the end I told someone, and then some people who were my friends aren't any more, just because of the tribe. This is the problem for all the arguments with the Somalis.

²² Meat from animals killed according to Muslim law.

I am educated; I know we should leave this behind. People say 'that person is from that tribe who killed my father', then they don't want to know that person, or they talk about wanting to kill them, or make problems for them. But Allah says that if two people are fighting, and one kills the other, they will both go to hell because they both had the intention of killing the other. So we don't have to kill the person who has killed that man, because he will go to hell anyway when he dies.

Deka was of the view that maintaining secrecy over tribal affiliation has the potential for being a panacea of conflict among Somalis in the UK and in Somalia and Somaliland. When she broke this secrecy herself it had an immediate effect as she lost some friends. She later spoke of the heart-break, frustration and disappointment of hearing about the onset of violence as a result of blood feuds among Somalis in Leeds, which she sees as a direct result of the burgeoning population. With the increase in numbers of Somalis coming from a similar area—Deka believes that initially people were mostly from Mogadishu like her and her friends, until other areas became represented by the newer incomers—comes an increase in the networks of 'knowledge', gossip and information exchange about gripes, feuds and causes for revenge.

The geographic proximity of national, regional or ethnic populations within the context of dispersal was therefore as much a cause for division and conflict as it was an opportunity for Deka to find her much sought-after parenting and childcare support. Building friendships and social networks to combat isolation and develop forms of practical assistance can be positive, but can equally carry penalties of being risky and dangerous. This point is also noted by Williams, who contrasts one man in her research who found relationships with compatriots an advantage with that of another for whom compatriots were potentially dangerous who was fearful of information about his whereabouts filtering back to his home country. As she notes, ethnic group can represent danger as well as opportunity. (Williams, 2006: 872).

News travels through people engaged in social relationships, so concerns about control of information are connected to the form of social network existing within and across the UK and the country of origin. The extent to which a person is engaged in social relationships in the UK with people who may, even distantly, be connected to their former social world in their country of origin is likely, therefore, to affect the conduct and depth of social relationships. At least three of the people most involved in my research claimed to have never met anyone in the UK they knew, or who were connected to people they knew

before arrival in the UK. Others, meanwhile, lived among established friends and relatives, such as Zimbabweans, Kurds, and Somalis, for whom a sudden migration over a short time between 2000-2003 enabled some limited chances for chain migration.

The potential for support for new arrivals from a pre-existing migrant community is a matter of interest in literature on settlement and integration. Refugees are often differentiated from other types of migrant on the basis of a lack of chain migration or support or contacts in the country of settlement (Joly, 1996, Bloch, 1999a, Brettell, 2000). Joly, for example, found notable differences between Vietnamese in France, where there was a settled community, and Britain, where this was not the case. Joly suggests that Vietnamese in Britain encountered great difficulties, while those in France claim that they did not encounter too many problems (1996:183). Zetter and Pearl, likewise, suggest that the lack of 'consolidation' in Kurdish and Iraqi communities is owing to not having the 'benefits of pre-established networks and ethnic solidarity' (Zetter and Pearl, 1999: 684).

It is often assumed that the existence of earlier migrants will make life easier for new arrivals. This is apparent, for example, in the favouring of 'multicultural' cities in dispersal planning (Bloch, 2002, Robinson et al., 2003). However, while existing networks may support some new refugees, existing migrant populations do not automatically lead to a supportive structure for newer refugees to slip into. This may be for reasons including class and generational differences, as well as the danger posed by compatriots as suggested above. This was also found by Griffiths in his study of Somalis in London (2000). Although Somali migration to London can be traced to at least the end of the nineteenth century, there is no evidence of Somali community organization in east London until the late 1970s. Griffiths also notes that despite the existence of several community organizations at the time of a large influx of Somali refugees in the late 1980s and early 1990s, clan-based, generation and class differences between the new refugees and older migrants worked against effective community support. Concurring with Deka's observation in Leeds, Griffiths notes: 'the relation between 'old-timers and newcomers', far from easing the process of settlement may in some cases have exacerbated the factionalism brought from the home context' (2000: 296). In contrast, though not entirely without trouble and conflict, Griffiths suggests that the formation of Kurdish community associations was facilitated by a pre-existing ethnic economy and community (2000). In this respect, Griffiths and Wahlbeck also suggest that fragmentation and divisions can be a strength in facilitating the formation of associations (Wahlbeck, 1998, Griffiths, 2000), a point returned to in the following chapter on refugee community organizations.

5.6 Conclusions

As the cases of the individuals in this chapter illustrate, connection to others may be actual or imagined. Either way, the most prominent feature of social relationships held by those in my research was secrecy, or rather, the control of information. I have suggested that the forms and levels of secrecy employed by refugees are linked to an individual's reasons for flight and ongoing exile. Some people are more closed than others. This may change over time in relation to strategies of meeting practical needs that are dictated by developments in relationships, political contexts, and immigration status. The question of boundaries, that is, who is significant in calculations of whether to share information, cannot clearly be defined among those involved in my research, yet decisions made can be understood as strategic and contingent.

Social relationships formed in the UK are necessarily superficial, and are primarily instrumental, at least initially. It has only been in the analysis of wide-ranging material across a highly diverse group of individuals who commonly share their experience of seeking asylum in the UK that a common feature of instrumental, superficial relationships became apparent to me. The primary need to settle, understand, and go about daily life encourages pragmatic relationships—networks of weak ties. However, focusing on present needs is not only of practical use to daily life and settlement, but also avoids talking about the past, which people may have reason to wish to avoid or conceal. Clearly, analysing social relations among people seeking asylum cannot adequately be addressed without taking account of the influence of both sending and receiving states because local and transnational events and relations are intertwined in everyday life for refugees.

Secrecy is a factor that restricts the creation of new relationships, and which affects the quality and depth of existing and newly formed relationships. This can have a limiting influence on forms of community-like association. However, secrecy also indicates that there are people connected to an individual's social world about whom they care sufficiently to be concerned about what they know. Hence, conversely, secrecy can be seen as a tool enabling social relationships in the contexts of fluidity, precariousness of status and fear.

6 Refugee community organizations: contesting good and bad community

The significance of instrumental relationships in the personal social relations of the recently-arrived refugees in this research is mirrored in attitudes to refugee community organizations (RCOs). RCOs were often judged as more or less a 'community' according to their success at achieving practical goals, perhaps owing to the urgency for refugees of needing to settle and gain enough information to go about daily life. Similarly, day-to-day tensions of balancing social lives 'here' and continuing links with 'there' are repeated in the dual focus of RCOs that address concerns about the UK and about countries of origin.

Although the literature on refugees and asylum seekers is vast, there is relatively little written specifically on community, despite the obvious significance of the concept in relation to integration, settlement and identity. Where the concept of community has been addressed directly, it has primarily been through a focus on refugee community organizations (RCOs) or community associations: the public face or representation of 'community' in countries of settlement. This chapter aims to situate RCOs in a spectrum of community-related imaginings and experiences in the lives of refugees, as well as to consider the impact of community-oriented policy on formal and informal 'community' among refugees in the UK. Informal social relationships overlap and interact with the formal constitution of organizations as RCOs, as illustrated by the case of the emergence of the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds.

6.1 Forming the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds

The chair and members of the committee of the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds (ZRCiL) described their origins as a loose social drinking group that met in a pub in an area of concentrated NASS housing. A number of men who had arrived since 2000, and particularly since the major migration from Zimbabwe from 2002 onwards began to get to know each other as regulars at the pub, where they said it was easy to identify Zimbabweans speaking Shona and talking about 'back home'. It quickly became apparent from the nature of the discussions that they were all supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)—the Zimbabwean opposition party. Their common vision for the improvement of the worsening situation in Zimbabwe through peaceful democratic change provided a motivation to form a Leeds branch of the MDC-UK. This seemed to them a natural progression from the pub chat, and they hoped it would offer an avenue for

making a positive contribution to improving Zimbabwe. A committee formed from the most motivated of those who were part of the drinking group. There were branches in other UK cities already formed; they visited and co-ordinated their work with these branches, in particular the branch in Manchester, some members of which came to meetings at the start to help the Leeds group set up.

However, as Nzou, the founding Chair of the MDC branch, explained, it was not effective for those experiencing many difficulties in the UK to try to solve problems in Zimbabwe:

As we went along we discovered that as well as political issues there were other social issues affecting people here in Leeds, in the UK. So that's why we decided to form the Zimbabwean refugee community. It was going to be difficult to approach organizations and ask for assistance as a political party.

Discussion about forming a social organization went on for a time before the MDC branch members became aware that assistance was available to refugee community organizations (RCOs). When Thomas joined the committee he already knew about Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network and approached Merlo, the community development worker ('Refugee Involvement Worker') for advice. Mid-2003, a year after the formation of the Leeds MDC branch, he arranged a meeting with her and other committee members to request assistance with running their group. Merlo explained that they would need to form as a community organization to assist Zimbabwean refugees in Leeds, in order to be able to access charitable funding not available to political groups.

The Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds (ZRCiL) became constituted as an RCO. In practice, there was little difference between the MDC branch and the RCO in terms of leadership and membership. The joint focus was a source of continual contestation, some people favouring the concentration of resources on UK-based problems, and others insisting on the need to address the considerable difficulties in Zimbabwe. Leaders grappled with the division, going through different stages of conflating and separating the committee, Chair, and meeting times of the two organizations. But ultimately the separation was untenable, demanding too much time commitment, as broadly the same people were interested in both. Thus, the parting of the two entities was largely based on orientation—the RCO being primarily concerned with addressing difficulties faced by Zimbabwean asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, while the MDC branch was intimately engaged in political and social developments in Zimbabwe.

The entanglement of issues related to life in the UK and concerns about the conditions in Zimbabwe was reflected in the topics discussed at the monthly general meetings. Topics included political events and developments in Zimbabwe, the worsening of conditions and anecdotes of hardships experienced by friends and family 'back home' and what members could do to assist. These were intertwined with matters relating to the asylum system in the UK: destitution, detention and the high rate of refusals were perpetual topics. Some topics at the meeting might be considered 'typical' issues for any migrant association, but they were usually heavily shaped by the influence of persecution, or impact of the asylum system. For example, a discussion on what organization or company may assist with sending a body back to Zimbabwe for burial became a debate on the danger this would pose to any relative who came to the airport to receive it, and whether the UK government might provide any safeguard or assurance of protection.

The political experience and knowledge of some of those in the organization was evident in their approach to concerns about the UK asylum system and its effects. Committee members assisted people in visiting their MPs about their asylum claims, became involved in meetings with Leeds MPs about destitution, and organized transport to attend rallies and political protests in the UK. The protests they attended included rallying the Zimbabwean Embassy about conditions in Zimbabwe, as well as supporting wider protests about the UK asylum system, particularly around detention and deportation. However, committee members also stressed to me that for many outside of the organizing group, political engagement was entirely novel. They expressed a view that people's apprehension about 'politics' resulted from naivety and a lack of engagement:

There are people who do not want to be involved in politics at all—because they've never experienced it, and their perception of politics is violent, like it is in Zimbabwe.

The centrality of political concerns to the condition of those seeking asylum was evident to committee members, as one said:

Politics I think affects everyone. The fact that you are here, you ran away from Zimbabwe to come and look for care because something's wrong—that has been caused by the politicians, by politics.

The willingness of the Zimbabwean RCO to be more involved in UK politics than some other RCOs in Leeds was perhaps helped by their fluency in the English language²³ and a greater familiarity with the basics of UK governance, owing to Zimbabwe having been a British colony. Although most of the Zimbabweans I spoke to usually stressed cultural differences with UK society, they were perceived from the outside as having superior knowledge and ease with British systems (by other RCO leaders at the Refugee Forum, for example). This was sometimes openly stated, and implicitly demonstrated as the Zimbabwean representative at the Refugee Forum was often nominated to chair or minute the meeting, or to take on tasks, such as composing letters to MPs and Ministers. It has further been suggested by Bloch that Zimbabweans in the UK are likely to be part of the educated and skilled elite, and so have a greater propensity to be politically active (Bloch, 2005a).

The politicization of the organization meant that some Zimbabweans in Leeds were repelled from participation in the RCO owing to its closeness to the MDC branch. One committee member said he had been told about some people who attended meetings following advice from friends that the organization could help with UK-based problems, but felt duped into engagement with 'politics' if those topics were discussed. In general during fieldwork I encountered a strong feeling (not just among Zimbabweans) that for many a key goal of exile is to distance from 'politics', as discussed in the previous chapter on interpersonal relations. Also, Zimbabweans I knew who had arrived since 2000 appeared to be separated from the small population of Zimbabweans in Leeds who predated the recent migration. For example, the RCO told me they had tried to make links with a charity supporting education in Zimbabwe that has been active in the city for over ten years, but did not get a response. The chair of the RCO, Nzou, put this separation down to disbelief among those who left while Zimbabwe was still a prosperous and stable country of the worsening conditions there, or to a lack of awareness of the severity of the situation that resulted in a lack of sense of common struggle. Equally, those who supported ZRCiL often expressed their delight to be living in a 'free and fair' country allowing safe democratic engagement. This is best summed up by one member, a middle-aged man, who told me with tears in his eyes 'now we have tasted freedom, we cannot go back'. I took this to have a double-meaning—having experienced the democratic freedom longed for, but

²³ Fluency in English made it easier for me to become more involved with the Zimbabwean RCO than was the case for other RCOs in my research. I therefore have richer material from the Zimbabwean RCO, reflected in my choice to use them as an example in this chapter. Furthermore, this highlights the significance of language to inclusion and integration. RCOs without fluency and confidence in English found it more difficult to be involved in meetings, activities and consultations.

denied in Zimbabwe, to return to a life of persecution and tyranny would be politically regressive; as well as meaning literally that he could not 'go back' to Zimbabwe.

The level of organization and amount of activities undertaken by the Zimbabwean RCO in their first year were marked in comparison to other fledgling organizations in Leeds. I would suggest that this is directly related not just to fluency and familiarity, but to the unity of political cause, skilled leadership, and, (notwithstanding persistent divisions between the two main ethnic groups—Ndebele and Shona, and others), a relatively successful Zimbabwean nationalist project. Those choosing 'political' engagement through involvement with the RCO were clearly strongly united by the national cause, and highly motivated towards positive change in Zimbabwe. The protocol of MDC meetings confronts head on, and attempts to overcome, the ethnic division between Ndebele and Shona for the benefit of the nation, for example, in demanding that people be able to express themselves in whatever language they feel most able to communicate in. This was in contrast to stories of arguments, and sometimes even violence at meetings to form the Afghan RCO and one of the Kurdish RCOs in Leeds, for example. It also contrasts with fledgling pan-African and region-based RCOs that struggled to garner support or enthuse commitment and action among members to the level achieved in a short time by the Zimbabwean organization.

The Zimbabwean organization seemed, through MDC connections and an existing women's rights movement in Zimbabwe, to be conversant with gender equality ideology and practice. In comparison, other RCOs in Leeds seemed to be introduced to the notion of women's representation on the management committee by funding stipulations or community development workers in the UK. Efforts to include women in the Zimbabwean RCO appeared genuine, and when the two female committee members had stopped coming leaders wanted to enlist me to investigate their lapsed interest as they thought they would be more likely to be honest with me, a woman, about their reasons for not coming. It seemed to be assumed that there should be a partner women's organization, and when I spoke to some of the wives of the leaders they were enthusiastic, but felt constrained by domestic duties. As the fieldwork period ended the wife of the main leader told me there had been initial meetings to launch a women's section. Furthermore, initially ZCRiL general meetings had been held in the function room of the pub where the originating members drank, but were moved to a church hall. The two main reasons provided were that progressive inebriation made decision-making difficult, and that some

women had actively approached the organization to request a move, as they felt being seen going to a pub might be compromising to their reputation.

The case of the Zimbabwean RCO in Leeds exemplifies a number of points of central significance when considering the question of community in relation to RCOs. These include politicization; tensions between home/here orientation; concerns about representation, particularly of women and the non-politicized; concerns about funding; and the enduring influence of past experiences in a despotic state. These chief matters of concern for the committee of the Zimbabwean RCO mirror those raised in the emerging RCO literature (Rex et al., 1987, Joly, 1996, Wahlbeck, 1998, Griffiths, 2000, Zetter and Pearl, 2000, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). Issues confronting refugee community organizations in the UK bear extensive comparison to the study of migrant and other community organizations and the practice of community development. The situating of work on refugee community organizations in relation to other aspects and examples of community development, though not the focus here, deserves more attention. RCOs fulfil many of the same roles of migrant associations, yet the conditions of asylum sharply mark their work. The formal manifestation of 'community' as organizations is encouraged by the government and, in policy discourse, is considered central to refugee integration in the UK. RCOs therefore constitute the dominant focus of interpretations of community in relation to refugees in literature, policy and practice.

6.2 Refugees and community/ organizations

The RCO is a curiously British phenomenon, the provenance of which lies in the underlying policies and concepts relating to British multiculturalism, race relations and thereby emerging policies on the integration of refugees in particular, and immigrants generally. That is not to say that structures similar to RCOs do not exist elsewhere (see, for example, Rex et al., 1987, Gold, 1992, Joly, 1996). However, in the UK, RCOs form the central mechanism of voluntary sector and governmental approaches to refugee management and integration (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005).

Rex, in a (self-admitted 'functionalist analysis'), suggests that immigrant associations fulfil four main functions (Rex and Josephides, 1987: 19). These are overcoming social isolation, helping individuals in the solution of personal and material problems, combining to defend the group's interests in conflict and bargaining with the wider society, and maintaining and

developing shared patterns of meaning. Zetter and Pearl identify similar roles, elaborating on the role of helping to give collective 'voice' to individuals, suggesting that by networking and collaborating with government agencies and public sector agencies, RCOs play a key reticulating role in linking individuals and families to the access mechanisms and resources of service providers such as housing (2000: 684). Zetter and Pearl note that while, in these respects, RCOs are little different from other immigrant group organizations, there are some important contrasts between the two. These lie in the extent of social exclusion experienced by refugees in the UK, and their more precarious residential status (which, they argue, make it more difficult to create and sustain enduring community-based structures). Zetter and Pearl suggest that these two factors have been dramatically reinforced by successive government policies of control and disempowerment, and rapidly reducing public support, which conspire to undermine options for security and long-term settlement, thereby compounding the sense of social exclusion (Zetter and Pearl, 2000). This precariousness and social exclusion has been enhanced with the policy of dispersal and increasingly restrictive government policies introduced since 2000. While local variables significantly impact the emergence of nascent RCOs in the regions, restructuring, restrictive policies, and marginalisation provide challenges for RCOs in the context of dispersal (Griffiths et al., 2005).

In addition, features of persecution and conflict that precipitate forced migration continue to shape the work of RCOs in the UK (see also Griffiths et al., 2005: 196). The daily interplay of relationships and concerns 'here' and at 'home' outlined among interpersonal relations in the previous chapter is mirrored by the dual focus of RCOs. The tension between orientation to 'host' and 'home' societies in the activities of RCOs was a recurrent theme in discussions with RCOs in Leeds, and at Refugee Forum meetings. In literature and discourse, this is taken up in particular in relation to the role of RCOs in 'integrating into' the 'host' society. Joly, for example, opposes political orientation to the society of origin with integration into the 'host' society (Joly, 1996)—a dichotomy which is perhaps too easily made and simplistic. It is not straightforward to associate cultural reproduction and attention to 'there' with a lack of commitment to 'here'. It is also problematic to fix in time a categorization of commitment in what is an evolving, changing relationship for individuals and organizations (Bloch, 2005b). This point will be elaborated upon in the following two chapters on events and food, that, in keeping with Hage and others, suggest that engaging in homely practices from 'there' also promotes a feeling of being 'here' (Hage, 1997: 108). Besides, 'the idea of a boundary or of traits, with an inside and an outside, a here and a there, seems insufficient' and does not account for the dynamics and nuances of

difference (Steen Preis, 1997: 98). The Zimbabwean RCO, for example, could hardly have been more focused on their political remittances (Bloch, 2005a) to Zimbabwe, but were also politically engaged in the UK, and were balancing those activities with assistance and integration work in Leeds.

The policy discourse on RCOs is generally informed by what Griffiths et al term an 'integrative or dominant functional paradigm', wherein 'RCOs are viewed as essential to the integration of refugees, as a neglected social and material resource and a vital mediating institution between the refugee community and the host society' (Griffiths et al., 2005: 4). The simplistic adoption of community (as represented by RCOs) as an organizing structure for policy and resources risks ignoring important questions. Many of these questions can be grouped around the issue of representation. Can a national (migrant) population be represented by a single organization? Nations are intersected by divisions that may preclude, or limit the involvement of certain groups from an organization standing to represent it (Gold, 1992). These include language, ethnicity, tribe, region, age, class, gender, religion, politics and kinship. Women, young people and the non-politicized may be particularly likely to be excluded from community formations (Wahlbeck, 1998). Can 'politics' be separated from 'community' (Gold, 1992, Kelly, 2003)?

A second group of issues cluster around the interaction between informal social networks and formal manifestations of community. Can the existence of 'community' (among migrant groups) be assumed? Are RCOs relevant to conceptualizations of community for those not directly involved with them? Attached to such questions is a need to explore elements of leadership: how do RCOs form, who forms RCOs, and why? Are leaders elite (and/) or representative of a wider population—(why) does this matter? Each of these points is central to a discussion of community among refugees, and to the role of RCOs in relation to the concept of 'refugee community'.

Analysing the position and role of RCOs themselves is also not the main purpose of this chapter. There is now a fairly well developed literature on RCOs in UK policy, in particular Griffiths et al's extensive study of the impact of dispersal on RCOs, incorporating an analysis of their role in relation to social capital and integration (Griffiths et al., 2005). Nor will there be space to compare at length the rich material from Leeds in relation to all of the concerns raised in the emerging literature on migrant associations and RCOs. Instead, in focusing on interactions of 'formal' and 'informal' community, I will propose that a

moral framework of good and bad community emerges from contestations around resources, politics and status surrounding the formation of RCOs.

There is some consistency between constructions of 'good' and 'bad' community not only among refugees and refugee community organizations, but also the voluntary sector and the government. Community discourse at state, local, RCO and individual levels displays notable similarities in moral values. These constructions of 'good' and 'bad' provide moral frameworks for inclusion and exclusion in formal policy and practice, and within and between informal social networks. At all of these levels issues of representation are prominent in the apparent 'good'/'bad' community typification. The voluntary sector, RCOs and individuals all considered good features to include rootedness in experiences of asylum and exile; breadth of clientele beyond immediate social networks; evidence of diversity among management; 'openness' and 'accessibility' of activities and services, and demonstration of democratic process. 'Bad' characteristics were often targeted at individuals in positions of leadership: secrecy or deception, misappropriation and misuse of funds, seeking personal status and prestige, factionalism and nepotism, laziness and lack of commitment. Before turning to explore some aspects of good and bad community, issues around representation will be considered. Finally, the policy environment that champions refugee community will be incorporated into the notion of a moral framework, linked to the positive, feel-good attributes of the concept of community (Frazer, 1999: 82, Bauman, 2001).

6.3 The question of representation

Leaders of the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds were well aware of, and discussed at length, issues of representation. They knew that the non-politicized were discouraged from involvement in the RCO. They were acutely aware of the absence of women from meetings and the committee and made efforts to encourage their involvement. They were very clear that their purpose was to address the urgent needs of people in the asylum system and so made a pointed decision to include 'refugee' in the name. This implicitly resulted in an organization to serve the recently arrived Zimbabwean population, not necessarily a national migrant 'community' as a whole. Furthermore, the open political identity of the organization would attempt purposefully to repel members of the leading ZANU-PF party, albeit that there were great fears and rumours of the Leeds branch and MDC-UK being infiltrated by their members as news spread that the party in Zimbabwe

was beset with spies. In other words, ZCRiL wore many of their excluding tendencies on their sleeves, were conscious of them, and certainly were unapologetic for their political allegiance in particular. Their concern over excluding women influenced the move away from meeting in the pub (even giving up beer) to remedy this gap. The same could not always be said about other RCOs in Leeds, where voids in representation might be seen as an embarrassment or weakness, leading to a reality-gap between how organizations presented themselves and how they operated, with whom.

Critiques of representation in the literature centre on the relationship between refugee organizations and the people they are assumed to represent, as ‘implicit in the term RCO is the rooting of organizational forms in broader social relationships’ (Griffiths et al., 2005: 11). Often, and consistently with swathes of material on participation and community development generally, the issue of the representativeness of leaders is raised—are they representative of their organization, or of ‘their community’? RCOs mediate access to resources for all refugees (Griffiths et al., 2005) making the question of representation crucial, especially given the enhanced role RCOs are being encouraged to play in service provision (Wahlbeck, 1998, Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Home Office, 2005c). Wahlbeck, in his study of Kurdish organizations in London and Finland, questions the suitability of multicultural and communitarian policies for politically divided refugee communities, and suggests that authorities may impose artificial ethnic boundaries on a complex and diverse social reality (Wahlbeck, 1998). Social complexity, and the non-participation of certain groups, raises the question of whether RCOs are more reflective of UK multicultural policies than ‘real’ refugee community.

6.3.1 Politicization

Deka, a Somali woman in Leeds bemoaned the continuation of tribal feuds in Leeds, as we saw in the previous chapter. She believed that in London every tribal sub-set has its own RCO, meaning people will travel across the capital rather than go to the Somali organization near them. Comparing Leeds to the situation in London, she predicted that the creation of more than one Somali RCO would reproduce factions at a moment when she saw an opportunity to discourage people from (violently) perpetuating differences²⁴. In Leeds, and in cases explored in the literature (Joly, 1996, Wahlbeck, 1998, Griffiths, 2000),

²⁴ It is interesting to note that Griffiths et al found generational differences among Somalis in Liverpool and Manchester in attitudes to clan structure, which had appeal for older generations, but less so for younger people who may identify with pan-Somali ideals (Griffiths, et al., 2005).

the conditions that caused flight continue to shape social organization in the UK, as noted above. Hence, questions about the representativeness of RCOs in Britain are intimately linked with contexts that pre-exist migration to the UK, which are both enduring, and are transformed in a new setting.

As we have seen, political motivation was clearly central in the foundation of the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds as an MDC branch, and continued to be intertwined with the social aims of the RCO. However, the quote above from Nzou conflated the need for a more socially-oriented group and the driver of a funding structure that excludes political groups ('it was going to be difficult to ... ask for assistance as a political party'). Funding for political activities needs to be raised privately, or undertaken without resources. Unity around political purpose conflicts directly with the construction of community organizations as apolitical charitable bodies in the voluntary sector (e.g. BBC, 2002, Oxfam GB, 2006). However, political and social problems and concerns are intimately intertwined in the daily lives of refugees, making their separation difficult to achieve in RCO activities, and certainly creating an unrealistic division between the work of RCOs and the lives of the people they seek to serve.

Wahlbeck similarly notes that the politicization of Kurdish organizations means social groups that are not politically organized, as well as non-political or anti-political individuals easily become marginalized in the Kurdish community (Wahlbeck, 1998). He notes that female informants wanted to emphasize that the Kurdish associations are not doing enough to improve the situation of refugee women. He also quotes one refugee commenting on the politicization of the associations: '...A lot of people avoid the organizations because of this' (Wahlbeck, 1998: 225). Nevertheless, Wahlbeck is also keen to illustrate how political divisions are also a facilitator of community activity and orientation. The same political factions that obstruct real co-operation between Kurdish groups facilitate the operation of separate, politically-oriented community organizations (Wahlbeck, 1998)²⁵.

This tension also emerges in consideration of the relationship of 'real' community to the formal organization, as divisions brought from 'home' threaten the apparent unity of 'community' in the UK. Because of divisions, 'refugee associations are not able to provide

²⁵ Although, when asked, Kurdish representatives would state that Kurdish people share a common political goal, culture and identity, in practice there was little overlap or cooperation between the organizations, which were divided along national and political-party lines (Wahlbeck 1998).

equal services to all persons assumed to belong to the specific ethnic group' (Wahlbeck, 1998: 228). Writing about Kurdish organizations in London in the late 1990s, Wahlbeck warns against handing over the whole responsibility for the resettlement of refugees to the communities themselves. Notwithstanding such critiques, this co-option of RCOs into basic service provision (Dwyer and Brown, 2005) has continued and been developed under the new dispersal system since 2000 (see Home Office, 2005c). Issues similar to those noted by Wahlbeck arose among RCOs in Leeds, reinforcing the need for statutory and NGO provision for those who may not be able or willing to approach RCOs for assistance. Indeed, actively resisting formalization by keeping activities informal may serve to avoid the politicization and factionalism that can result from the naming of an organization (Griffiths et al., 2005: 202).

While politicization among refugees is often treated as a hangover from conflicts left behind, the Zimbabwean case in Leeds also indicates the possibility that in the UK context some people are excluded or deterred by the expressly 'refugee' nature of the organization. On one level, in the Zimbabwean case, including 'refugee' in the organization name simply denotes that people seeking asylum are the most prevalent group in the recent migration since 2000. However, ongoing interaction with people across nationalities, including Zimbabweans, revealed that for some the refugee label is a deterrent from seeking help or associating with others. The politicization of the refugee label in the UK is hard to avoid and permeates daily life for individuals seeking asylum in the UK. One strategy of escape and invisibility (cf Malkki, 1995a) is to distance from refugee activities and services. Malkki has examined the construction of the figure of the 'ideal' refugee as a needy, apolitical and dehistoricized figure in relation to Hutu refugees in Tanzania, and noted the role of humanitarian organizations in perpetuating such constructions (Malkki, 1997b). I frequently encountered examples of people avoiding 'community' activities owing to their distaste at being on the receiving end of charity. By presenting themselves as organizations to serve the needs of excluded and marginalized refugees, RCOs may, ironically, repel the people they hope to serve, while reproducing hegemonic constructions of the 'ideal refugee'. The labelling of services and projects was a notable matter of contention in the voluntary sector. One agency situated in an area of high NASS housing concentration in a formerly ethnically white council estate in Leeds took great care not to label any of their activities as being for refugees, since doing so risked creating tensions about access to resources and threatened their relationship with longer-term residents in the neighbourhood. This even resulted, on one occasion, in them not being able to take up funding from a body that insisted the work they supported was attached to a job title and

project named as designated to refugees. Strategies of identity are thus employed not only by individuals who avoid 'refugee' contexts, but also by voluntary organizations playing off funding streams, negative public opinion and the need to promote their activities.

6.3.2 Leadership and the construction of community

The narrative of the origins of the Zimbabwean RCO as a 'naturally' formed friendship group is reflective of the founding narratives of other RCOs I came to know in Leeds. This has similarly been observed by Werbner about Pakistani community organizations. As she notes, while the basis of organizations in friendship groups can be vital to provide an underlying strength that can help make the organization successful, it also incorporates the formal organization in wider webs of social interaction that include and exclude. Werbner eschews simplistic criticisms that ethnic representatives lack widespread internal legitimation in favour of a more complex dialectic between 'centre' and 'periphery' in ethnic groups (see Werbner, 1991). This relates, in part, to the 'dual orientation' of 'political ethnicity' as fostering particularist cultural symbols, excluding outsiders and defining group boundaries; at the same time as emphasizing universalistic, inclusive symbols shared with the wider society to demand equal rights (Werbner, 1991). Werbner contends that there is a British Pakistani community, while clarifying the divisions and differences that lie within it. As she states: 'whereas most members of the immigrant group may well remain encapsulated and marginal, its entrepreneurs have forged contacts across group boundaries' (Werbner, 1991: 117). While being anglicized, educated and middle-class is generally regarded as a key aspect of the non-representativeness of 'immigrant-brokers', these very characteristics are important in establishing shared values with the wider society. These 'peripheral' individuals act as intermediaries with the 'centre' where particularist features are perpetuated (Werbner, 1991).

In contrast, Kelly has questioned whether there is a community behind the organization to be represented. In her study of the Bosnian resettlement programme in the UK, she suggests that community is a label imposed from the outside, being more reflective of British society and multicultural policy than of 'real or imagined' refugee community (Kelly, 2003). People in Britain fled from Bosnia while the country was in the process of becoming independent, and the ongoing divisions there, Kelly suggests, may render the notion of a Bosnian community impossible. Nevertheless, Bosnian community organizations formed in Britain, though Kelly notes that these organizations may not be lasting as over time people retreat to small kin units of trust and support. She proffers the term 'contingent

community' to explain how it is that community organizations exist, despite the lack of community:

The existence of community associations is, therefore, not a reflection of the needs of a community, but, instead, an artificial construction responding to a social policy based on an assumption that communities exist. (Kelly, 2003: 46)

Kelly's critique is important in the atmosphere of stifling rectitude of community. However, the notion of 'contingent' community risks underplaying the existence and potential benefits of underlying social allegiances. In a comparison of the Leeds Zimbabwean RCO with others in the city the 'success' or 'strength' of national identity seems to play a part in the stability and unity of nationality-based RCOs. It may be the case that the notion of a 'contingent' community is most relevant to groups such as Bosnians, where the national 'imagined community' had not evolved prior to flight (Anderson, 1991 (1983)).

Nevertheless, existing identities and social relationships may be encouraged or hindered in the UK in response to the availability of funding and multicultural, 'community'-favouring policies (Werbner, 1991, Griffiths et al., 2005). The Zimbabwean case shows how personal and private networks are 'officialized', and utilized by different parties, both inside and outside the organization, for their own purposes. Owing to social divisions, informal networks may operate in relative isolation of formal community groups, while the formation of organizations, conversely, often depends on a strong informal social network to become established.

Clearly, contextual conditions in both the country of origin and in the UK are highly significant in shaping the form of RCOs, and who becomes involved in them: some aspects are 'contingent', but this doesn't necessarily preclude some elements of RCOs being rooted in (segmented) social groupings. It cannot be assumed that there is a community behind any one community organization, but critiques of representation should not dismiss, or ignore, the existence of underlying social networks. Indeed, studying internal structures is as important as examining the interface between different groups in the wider context (Werbner, 1991). Given the marginal position of RCOs in the voluntary sector (Griffiths, 2000) they may therefore be characterized as peripheral both to the mainstream 'centre' and to 'the hub of refugee community activity' (Griffiths et al., 2005: 202).

In exploring the interplay between formal community structures and informal networks, it is important to note that individual refugees were just as likely as community development

workers and academics to reject community organizations, or view them as problematic, because of deficiencies in representation. The perceived exclusionary aspects of RCOs frequently focused on gender or ethnicity and shape perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' community.

6.4 Good and bad community

Sanai, from Eritrea, received a positive decision quickly following dispersal to Leeds and decided to move to London. She applied for council housing in a Borough in West London close to an Eritrean Orthodox church and her new friends who she met through a contact she had been given before leaving Africa. There is also a significant Ethiopian population in West London, and the closest provider of English classes was a large Ethiopian organization. Despite the nationality-based name, leaflets and posters advertising the organization promote that 'the object of the charity is to effectively address the needs of refugees and migrants and their families, from anywhere in the world living in the United Kingdom'. Sanai built up a group of friends from attending these classes, all of whom were also Eritrean, Tigringa speakers. They were keen to talk to me about the Ethiopian community organization:

The Ethiopian community are bad, you know. They don't do anything to help people. Especially our people. You know that the man who runs the Ethiopian community has a hotel. He is a rich man. They are getting £150,000 money from government to do things. But they do nothing.

I asked what things they thought they should be doing, and Sanai's friend, Kidane, explained by telling of the experience of trying to get advice:

(Laughing) You know, you go there with problem. First you fill in form. That form is for them to get more money. You have to fill in form and wait. Then you wait, and they don't do anything to help you anyway.

This was followed up by an emotional and angry complaint by Sanai about not getting a bus pass for travel to the English classes. She was particularly displeased that they still hadn't provided one when she sprained her ankle. I had already been told by the Eritrean friend who helped Sanai settle in the UK and who was engaged with the Ethiopian

organization over some years that bus passes are not provided for people living within a mile radius of the centre: Sanai was living in temporary accommodation a couple of streets away. I suggested this could be the reason.

Ha—you think it is that! All the people who work there are Ethiopians. There are no Eritreans who work there. You know, our countries at war, 30 years. They don't like us! That's why they don't help us.

Kidane and their other Eritrean friend who was present received bus passes, but this fact was dismissed by them in favour of painting a picture of long-entrenched persecution of Eritreans being perpetuated in the UK.

This conversation was typical of stories I heard consistently across nationalities, in London and Leeds where control over resources and services by RCOs were interpreted as nepotistic, factional and discriminatory along ethnic divisions from 'home' contexts. It also exemplifies another central concern—suspicion and mistrust towards RCOs because they get funding from the state to provide services (see also Griffiths et al., 2005: 135). The commonest complaint I heard from individual refugees about the organizations that purport to represent and support them was that they are ineffective at responding to their particular need. Such complaints would often be framed by a rejection of the personnel, rather than considered a result, for example, of a lack of capacity on the part of the organization to effectively resolve problems. Despite people's own experiences of the difficulties of resolving problems with NASS, Immigration, and the Home Office, and their understanding of the inflexible, non-negotiable nature of these bureaucracies, blame was never placed on the state. Only those RCO leaders who became experts in problem-solving and gained deeper understanding of state systems began to interpret problems as policy-related rather than personal or ethnically discriminatory.

Notwithstanding the likelihood that most people volunteering their time to help run RCOs (as they invariably do) make every effort to assist the people who come to them for help, an inability to effect direct change was viewed by individuals as a 'bad' community trait. This can be seen as an instrumentalist take on community—community is something that has a use in terms of communal support and problem-solving: if it fails to achieve it is 'not' community. Indeed, in conversations with RCO leaders they tacitly agreed—their impotence in the face of an apparently irrational and callous bureaucracy led to a great sense of disempowerment, compounded by feeling embattled by 'community' members and the

state alike. Often, for those people in my research who had negligible contact with RCOs, a single interaction that had not garnered the response hoped for would discourage them from any further contact. Furthermore, the entire organization would be likely to be denounced as 'useless' and not 'working for the community' in any future discussions.

Through discussion and gossip the contestations surrounding the activities and role of RCOs impact conceptualizations of community for those with peripheral engagement. Likewise, members and leaders of RCOs are themselves part of broader social networks that inform their perceptions and imaginings of 'community' alongside policy-influenced constructions communicated by funding bodies, community development workers and the wider voluntary and statutory sector. It might not, and perhaps could not, be possible for a formal organization to 'represent' or address multifarious, overlapping social relationships and beliefs that may form part of any understanding of community. The extent to which RCOs are peripheral to a wider population of refugees is clearly context-specific, and dependent on leadership, among numerous other factors. Yet, I propose that RCOs are nonetheless relevant to conceptualizations of community for those not directly involved with them. They form a source of contestation over 'community' even (and particularly) for those who choose not to be involved with them. Counter-identification is a decision about engagement as much as participation might signal identification with a group or organization. Decisions to engage with RCOs depend on the position of an individual in relation to the including and excluding characteristics of an organization. These decisions are informed by implicit categorizations of good and bad 'community'. RCOs likewise evaluate each other in terms of what they believe to be appropriate 'community' behaviour and action, as do the community development workers who support them, and, through funding, the state.

6.5 Money as polluting community

Deka, from Somalia, complained to me in the spring of 2004 about a group of men seeking to establish a new Somali RCO in Leeds (which would be the fourth, and newest). They were door-stepping Somalis to ask about their needs and desires of a new organization. She surmised that they had no interest in the answers to their questions, and implied that they merely wanted people to add their name and address to a sheet of paper that would be used to falsely demonstrate wide-spread support in order to apply for funding. That there were already three other Somali organizations in Leeds added to her conviction that these

individuals were status-hungry men wanting to encourage tribal factionalism among Somalis in Leeds by setting up a new RCO. Whether 'genuine' or not, their attempts at democratic representation through this sort of surveying was dismissed by Deka owing to her suspicions that they were motivated by status and profit.

Leaders, too, opposed profit and community in terms of the commitment of members to helping others, and to contributing to 'the community' through involvement in the RCO. As Tau, a ZCRiL committee member described:

Because some people, when they come here, they start working here, and get this kind of good life here. They actually forget about home: 'why think about that, I'm ok here'.

Nzou, the ZCRiL leader, continued:

And I believe that some of them do not even bother supporting families back home. Others say, we should stay working here because at least we are sending money. What are we going to do in Zimbabwe?

They oppose the self-centredness of accumulating wealth with commitment to the 'community' (in the UK) as well as to the nation 'back home'. Worse still, they believe, some individuals are not 'even' supporting family: in other words, providing security to family is seen as good, even if it competes with contributing to 'the community', whereas personal profit is bad. In speaking with the most committed RCO leaders and members in Leeds I found a tangible tension between sympathy and frustration towards 'most' people, who were depicted at just getting on and concentrating on earning money. The reality of poverty was prominent and emotive. All RCOs spoke of the difficulties of arranging meetings when some people worked night-shifts and others during the day. Because of their own personal sacrifices, key members knew that time spent helping to run an RCO was literally at the cost of earnings. Many people work long or double shifts in casual positions, sometimes at very short notice, making the organization of meetings and activities in advance extremely difficult—committed members might miss a shift to attend an important meeting or event. They knew that many people would be wise not to make such a sacrifice, but bemoaned the consequent atomization of lives which counteracted possibilities for shared strength in the face of adversity.

Given that funding is provided for 'the community', anyone believing an organization should be representing them felt they had a right to comment on their use of resources. If the organization did not meet their personal needs and wishes directly, it was deemed not to be meeting the needs of 'the community'. Such frustrations about the appropriateness of RCO activities were exacerbated where people had unsatisfactory interactions, such as the one outlined above in attempting to get advice from the Ethiopian organization, which people felt were motivated by achieving targets to justify the need for more funding. In the conversation about the Ethiopian organization, Sanai and her friends appear to oppose economic and social status to 'community'. The amount of funding received by the Ethiopian organization (£150,000) seemed to these Eritreans to be high. Combined with the fact that the manager was also the owner of a profit-making hotel, and the perceived ineptitude of the organization, implicit in the statement is the suggestion of corruption or embezzlement. Suspicion and mistrust of organizations, and their leaders in particular, was frequently expressed in implicit or explicit accusations in relation to finances. The repetition of factors relating to finances—both funding and personal profit—as depicted in opposition to 'good' community traits leads me to consider the construction of money as polluting community purpose. Profit, and with it personal status and gain, are 'out of place' and endanger the purity of community (Douglas, 2002 (1966)).

The polluting capacity of money is echoed in the voluntary sector and by the state through attitudes to funding. The criteria fledgling organizations must meet to gain funding are strict, owing, I was told by community development workers, to the risks of embezzlement and financial mis-management. Nascent organizations struggle to meet funding criteria to prove reliability to be trusted with handling money; contact with brokers such as community development workers is usually crucial. Stories circulated about how an organization could be tarred by one incidence of embezzlement from which it would be difficult to recover without re-constituting and changing their name. One community development worker in Leeds told me of his annoyance at an application to the Home Office Refugee Community Development Fund being sent back with the accusation that his supporting signature has been forged. He felt this indicated a wider attitude among government, and sometimes large voluntary bodies, of mistrust towards RCOs. The pride and honour of leaders in setting up an organization against difficult odds was damaged by the measures taken by funders to establish their veracity. Systems of operating through impersonal form-filling were often culturally strange and even humiliating: people may be familiar with gaining access to resources and power through prowess in negotiating face-to-face relations, often via social networks and kin. This 'culture-shock' ran through from

people's overall sense from experiences of a 'culture of disbelief' in the asylum system (e.g. Back et al., undated: 102); being guilty until proven innocent. The sense of mistrust towards RCOs from government and funders, leaders felt, was symptomatic of the broader climate of the vilification of 'economic migrants' and the construction of asylum seekers as undeserving 'scroungers' attracted by welfare benefits (Sales, 2002). Money and profit also pollute the purity of asylum and exile, as wealth and business does not conform to the ideal image of the needy, helpless refugee (cf Malkki, 1995a, Malkki, 1997b).

The consequences of the polluting quality of money may exclude certain organizations and individuals from formal interpretations of community, but may not necessarily exclude them from informal structures. Indeed, as the following chapters will address, commodities and profit-making events provide important moments and spaces to build social network and establish shared identity. Alongside non-profit RCO events, private parties and profit-making music events are social gatherings of central importance in the social lives of refugees. Furthermore, economic considerations are central to the understanding of the symbolic importance of food, as explored in the chapter on food, gender and power. Finally, I will turn to the national policy level, which similarly appears to support the notion of a moral framework against which manifestations of 'community' and the way they operate can be judged as 'good'.

6.6 Why is community so good for policy?

At the national policy level, RCOs are strongly supported as 'good' within integration and refugee policies (Home Office, 2005c), which stem from wider approaches to multiculturalism and race relations. This championing manifests itself in support for RCOs through community development, such that there is an intimate relationship between the existence of RCOs and the policies that support their formation. In Britain, the approach to integration has been described as communitarian—dominated by a view that refugees form communities, and through these they will integrate into wider society (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). The unerring support for RCOs by dominant, and dominating state and large voluntary sector bodies may be seen as part of the modern phenomenon of community's 'feel-good factor' (Bauman, 2001). The popularity of community and its apparently universal goodness seems to apply to the favouring of RCOs as the preferred unit of refugee support and integration (or some might say, as a mechanism of control). Arguably, refugee community organizations would not exist, or

would not be a significant presence, were it not that there are funding sources and policies that support and encourage their formation because they are seen as a 'good' and useful structure. The dominant functional paradigm of policy discourse posits RCOs as central to refugee integration by reticulating between refugees and the 'host society' (Zetter and Pearl, 2000, Griffiths et al., 2005: 4). The Home Office, in the new integration strategy, 'Integration Matters', published in 2005, suggest that there are many opportunities to strengthen the participation and involvement of refugees and RCOs in their 'local communities', stating:

RCOs are a crucial resource where they exist, especially in bridging links with the wider public, deriving their strength not only from refugees' strong impulse to self-help, independence, and the desire to make a positive contribution to the society that has provided refuge, but also from the unique resources of their members, such as language skills and understanding of community needs. (Home Office, 2005c: 23)

This quote exemplifies this functional paradigm, emphasizing refugees' skills in terms of useful resources. In the light of a wide, gradual erosion of welfare state provision for asylum seekers and refugees and reliance upon voluntary organizations for basic needs (Bloch and Schuster, 2002, Sales, 2002, Dwyer, 2005, Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Griffiths et al., 2005), it is significant that refugees are characterized as having a 'strong impulse to self-help'.

The management of refugees through 'community' is clearly related to multiculturalism and race relations: policies developed for immigrants have been applied to refugees (Wahlbeck, 1998, Kelly, 2003). Fundamental to this position is a general approach to the incorporation (and control) of migrants through community as a 'privileged marker of difference' (Baumann, 1996), and of designated community organizations as a vehicle for the representation of minority interests (Werbner, 1991, Kelly, 2003, Griffiths et al., 2005). This communitarian model of integration is in contrast, for example, to more individual-oriented models that favour assimilation, such as in France where RCOs are a less prominent feature (Wahlbeck, 1998).

Thus RCOs are considered central to the integration and participation of all refugees in civil society. Despite this prominent role, the centrality of RCOs to integration for individual refugees cannot be assumed as other factors, such as economic participation and

the role of informal networks may be more important. Indeed, RCOs may perpetuate marginality by adapting to statutory authorities and large NGOs while being peripheral to refugee community activity (Griffiths et al., 2005: 202). As mentioned in the introductory chapter on community, it has also been suggested that there is a conceptual linkage between the attribution of community to ethnic groups in contemporary UK multiculturalism and the control of people in a colonial history of 'divide and rule'²⁶ (Baumann, 1996, Alleyne, 2002). This is interesting to note in relation to the promotion of the devolution of power 'to communities' by the Labour government and the co-option of voluntary sector in welfare state provision (Dwyer and Brown, 2005, Griffiths et al., 2005). Although the incorporation of ethnic representatives in civic bodies is not a new phenomenon (see, for example, Werbner, 1991), the notion that the voluntary sector will mediate between state and 'community' has enjoyed particular prominence in recent Labour governments. In 2006, for example, David Miliband (then Minister of Communities and Local Government) called for 'double devolution':

Not just devolution that takes power from central government and gives it to local government, but power that goes from local government down to local people, providing a critical role for individuals and neighbourhoods, often through the voluntary sector...A double devolution of power from Whitehall to the town hall, and from the town hall to citizens and local communities. (Weaver, 2006)

In Leeds, for example, representatives from the Refugee Forum of RCOs were sometimes invited to attend meetings and events in the wider voluntary sector, and those organized by bodies within local and regional government. This would be in addition to conferences and events, usually run by the Refugee Council, targeted at RCO leaders where local, regional and national government representatives would attend to communicate policy and to 'consult'. The Refugee Forum was also in high demand as a source of consultation, with two or three requests per month from service providers in the city wanting to gain 'the view' of the 'refugee community'. The Refugee Forum received frequent visits from the Refugee Council refugee development advisor whose specific remit is to highlight refugee issues in regional bodies. It is a moot point whether such mechanisms improve democratic participation of minority groups, or serve to maintain hegemonic structures by cloaking power. In reviewing approaches to social capital, for example, Griffiths et al flag up a

²⁶ Though, as Werbner suggests in relation to British Pakistanis/ Asians, the argument that ethnic minorities maintain a structural position in British society identical to any colonized group doesn't acknowledge the long-term trend towards integration into broader political and administrative structures (Werbner, 1991)

critique of Putnam's 'linking' social capital—which, along with 'bridging' forms, they attribute to RCOs—as potentially perpetuating forms of tokenism and dependency (Griffiths et al., 2005). Rather than viewing policy as a prescriptive framework, Shore and Wright propose viewing policy processes as a cultural phenomenon providing insights into the operation of hegemonic power that empowers some people and silences others,—a process visible in the inclusion of certain versions of refugee community, while others are excluded and silenced (Shore and Wright, 1997).

There was obvious competition between RCOs in Leeds for favour within the wider voluntary sector, by state or quasi-state bodies. This resulted in the possibility that less 'popular' organizations may mimic the behaviour and style they deem as reaping these 'rewards'. One way such messages are transmitted in Leeds is through the Refugee Forum of RCO representatives. I attended the meetings for one year, almost from the start of the forum. Without wishing to underplay the extent to which RCOs appreciated the support of the community development workers who facilitated the meeting, it was clear that the participation philosophy underlying the existence and management of the forum created tensions. Workers repeatedly encouraged the representatives present to 'take ownership', to feel empowered to set the agenda of the meetings, and the overall direction of the forum. However, any views expressed that didn't conform to British equality philosophy—for example, the questioning of gender equality or hints towards sexual discrimination, were quickly challenged and quelled. To vastly summarise the overall approach, one could say it was 'you should have your forum to express whatever you find most important, as long as you do it in our way'. This approach echoes Kelly's suggestion of contingent community. While the representation of refugees is demanded through the encouragement of RCOs, their public face in mediating with wider UK structures was expected to be reflective of British hegemonic constructions of community.

As mentioned in the opening chapter on community literature, communitarian approaches promote only certain types of community: unsavoury or unpopular communal activities are implicitly excluded. In Leeds, approaches to refugee community development are contested, with some considered better than others. It appears that for RCOs, sensitivities around charitable funding for community organizations may be compounded by the moral overtone that a 'real or proper refugee should not be well-off', as noted by Malkki (1997b: 231). In dominant approaches, money has the potential to be polluting through mismanagement and profiteering, which can lead to exclusion from the networks and relationships potentially available to formal organizations. Conversely, good management

of funds and the organization of successful fundraising, for example, can build a 'stronger' organization that in turn achieves status in the refugee and voluntary sectors. Along with displaying elements of 'good' community, as outlined above, these factors may increase the likelihood of continued funding and lead to greater inclusion in consultative structures. Thus, as an accusation of embezzlement or mistrust from individuals resulting in declining 'community' support can quickly lead to the demise of an organization, meeting the expectations of 'good' community can quickly cumulate. This momentum can mean certain organizations become increasingly favoured, building their legitimacy, and perpetuating hegemonic versions of what a good RCO should be. After all, only trusted organizations get funding for activities that meet the requirements of funding bodies. One day, when trying to help Leeds Iranian Organization with a computer problem I noticed a stack of brand new equipment for martial arts training. They had been successful in a bid for funding for a martial arts class for young people and were compelled to spend the funds on thousands of pounds of equipment; meanwhile they struggled to keep the organization itself running with handed-down office equipment and had a barely-operating computer. Of course, the dictation of voluntary organizations by funding strictures is a universal phenomenon. These strictures directly dictate acceptable 'community' activities to emerging RCOs.

6.7 Conclusions

RCOs are in various ways a source of contestation both for refugees intimately involved with them and for those with little or no engagement. Where people felt that they stood outside or inside perceived boundaries of exclusion, this was often explained in terms of a moral framework. The designation of groups of people, characteristics, and organizations as good or bad enables the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, and legitimates it. This establishes norms of community values that are perpetuated by boundaries and that are epitomized in handbooks and funding requirements for RCOs. The notion of a normative framework has clear resonances with theoretical approaches that recognise how community can operate as an exclusionary or repressive structure for those who do not conform to the norm. This includes the implicit acceptance of only certain versions of community in communitarianism, and consequent exclusion of those viewed as deviant.

As more refugee research is undertaken and published it is increasingly the case that a gap between 'real', informal social groupings and the RCOs that stand to represent such groups

requires attention and investigation. The progression and development of dispersal over the course of this research has brought a notable improved awareness in the Leeds refugee and voluntary sector about the nuances of power and representation within and between RCOs in the city. At government level too, formerly simplistic and naïve approaches to RCOs are gradually being infiltrated with a greater acknowledgement of possible difficulties, of the need for better resourcing, and of inconsistent approaches to consultation (Home Office, 2005c: 24). Given that the government enthusiastically promotes the role of RCOs, policy and social justice-oriented approaches are keen to highlight the difficult circumstances under which these organizations operate and the resulting problems. These include massive reliance on volunteering, and the likelihood of organizations being comparatively ephemeral and weak (Griffiths, 2000, Zetter and Pearl, 2000). Equally others point out such that such features may be welcome signs of responsive, 'grounded' organizations. Nevertheless, the literature and discourse is largely devoid of approaches that take proper account of power dynamics, as also noted by Griffiths et al, who seek to address this deficiency (Griffiths et al., 2005). Not all RCOs are equally placed to represent 'their community' or to engage in consultative frameworks. Differences in their stage of development and desire to engage 'up' will influence the capacity of RCOs to act. These considerations, and analyses of whether consultation is actually effective, must be acknowledged to better understand the role of RCOs in relation to both formal and informal community imaginings.

In keeping with Werbner's conclusions in relation to Pakistani ethnic leadership in the UK, I would concur that exclusive attention to boundaries risk failing to incorporate, and highlight internal structures. Her argument that representation must be seen in terms of 'centre-periphery' relations in favour of a simple querying of internal legitimation is compelling and constructive. However, while much can be gained from well-established perspectives on community formation developed in ethnic and migration literature, there are mitigating circumstances that differentiate the experience of people subject to the asylum system (especially since 1999) from existing ethnic minorities in the UK. Understanding of centre and periphery must be tentative, taking account of the fragmented and precarious nature of refugee social ties in comparison to more-established populations of labour migrants. Clearly much migrant and ethnic literature has overplayed homogeneity and encapsulation of ethnic or migrant 'communities'. Nevertheless, the increased likelihood of chain migration, in particular, the relative stability of immigration status, and comparative choice over living conditions make non-refugee migrant populations more likely to enjoy shared senses of identity and support, or otherwise 'community'. Refugees,

meanwhile, for the most part experience acute social exclusion and precariousness that makes the formation of communal structures and imaginings difficult, even where there is a will, and unlikely where there isn't.

The extent to which RCOs are representative of the people they claim to represent has been a central feature of the emerging literature that critiques their role. RCOs do not stand in isolation from social relationships. They form a topic of discussion among refugees precisely because they are 'meant' to be engaged with 'real' community and form a public face of 'the community'. These factors, and the fact that they receive public funding on these grounds, empower people to feel they have a vested interest in them, even if they distance themselves from involvement in the organization itself. RCOs include some and exclude others with respect to contested boundaries—some of which are likely to be highly contextual to the country, and conflicts of origin; and some of which appear to cross-cut nationalities and ethnicities, such as a tendency towards male leadership (see also Wahlbeck, 1998). In their recent study of the impact of dispersal on RCOs, Griffiths et al conclude that despite the promotion of community organizations as central to integration, informal structures may be more important in the integration process (Griffiths et al., 2005: 5). It is hoped that this chapter, and the thesis as a whole starts to go some way towards developing a greater understanding of such informal structures, and how they relate to formal organizations. Hopefully moving beyond the important observation that formal organizations exclude some, I have attempted to outline how and why inclusion and exclusion operate in terms of a good/ bad moral framework observable across individual, organizational and state spheres.

7 Events and parties: community moments

Parties, music nights and other events provide spaces and times that both build imagined boundaries and create or renew social relationships. Music and dancing have been recognised for building migrants' sense of identity and belonging, particularly for refugees (Baily and Collyer, 2006). Events provide 'community moments' for those within and without to see a physical manifestation of 'community' through food, clothing, music and dancing, albeit brief. The efficiency of ritual and other integrative practices in heightening people's awareness and sensitivity to 'community' is well-recognised in social theory from Durkheim onwards (Cohen, 1985, Frazer, 1999). Building on the exploration of boundary as a moral framework in relation to RCOs, this chapter will firstly take a case of a profit-making and then of a non-profit 'community' event to explore how they include some and deter others. Secondly, the role of advertising in dictating segmented audiences is considered. Thirdly, the significance of clothing, music and dancing as constituting and symbolising elements of community is discussed. I will argue, in keeping with some recent approaches to hybridity and migrant praxis, that the community of events and parties is ambiguous and contested, holding 'fission and fusion' (Werbner, 2005: 5) in tension. Given that there is high diversity in the asylum seeking and refugee population, within a multicultural, 'super-diverse' (Vertovec, 2006) city, it is notable that many of these events were largely mono-ethnic. Further, they were often characterized by being male-dominated, young adult spaces, as was the case at the Kurdish Nowruz party in 2004.

7.1 Nowruz 2004

Nowruz—the key festival of the Kurdish year—was celebrated in 2004 with a major Yorkshire event in the function room of a large hotel in central Bradford throughout the afternoon and evening on a Sunday. It was organized by Kojir, who I knew as a friend of musicians I had initially met in Hull, particularly Alan, a violinist, who moved to Leeds from Hull on gaining a positive decision. When Kojir gained positive status he began setting himself up as a promoter of Kurdish parties, and forming a band of which he was the singer. Because of his music contacts, and those of other musician acquaintances in Leeds and Hull he knows a number of well-known Kurdish artists. He has organized several large parties; this was one of the biggest.

When I arrived a couple of hours after the start time there were around 100 people waiting outside, while the venue was already almost full to its capacity of 700. As a VIP guest

accompanying one of the musicians, Alan, I was ushered past the waiting crowds, a complimentary ticket (price £20) was stuffed into my hand and we were whisked past the Kurdish security guards. Once inside I could make no attempt to look unobtrusive in a large room packed with Kurdish men, many of whom were in 'traditional' dress (*persbmaga*). I was shown how to differentiate between Sorani and Badini/ Kumanji dress. I counted a maximum of twenty females, mostly Kurdish women and some girls, a few apparently 'white British' women (and very clearly the girlfriends of Kurdish men). I was quite obviously the only person in the room who was not either a single Kurdish man or part of a family or couple. My novelty value even prompted requests for photographs, or to be in a video—much like being a tourist in a location unfamiliar to outside visitors.

At any one time there are at least as many people dancing as there are people videoing and taking photographs of each other dancing, and of the performers, as there had been at other Kurdish events I attended. Alan pointed out in annoyance that some of these videos are likely to be sent back to Kurdistan, or to other countries where Kurdish people live to be sold on the black market. He was keen to point out that while the artist fees might appear very high (he didn't disclose exactly how much, but suggested figures to be in the thousands of pounds for top artists, and in the hundreds for lesser artists), they do not gain from record sales, videos and royalties as recognised artists from rich nations do. This is another reason for the popularity of such large parties— it is difficult to get hold of recordings of Kurdish artists— they achieve renown through live performances in Kurdistan (or in 'diaspora' countries), through performances on Kurdish satellite television channels, and from bootleg video and sound recordings. While historically a physically attentive listening public was dependent on and constituted through face-to-face exchanges, new media communication technologies have enlarged the Kurdish listening public and might be said to have created a 'virtual Kurdistan' (Grossman and O'Brien, 2006).

Music and musicians hold a significant position in the imagining of the Kurdish nation in exile (Grossman and O'Brien, 2006). Alan, who plays classical Arabic violin, felt that his music wouldn't be appreciated but had been cajoled into performing as a favour to his friend Kojir (albeit to an upbeat electronic synthesiser backing). His expectation was confirmed as while he played he heard people in the crowd calling for the next singer who would perform popular independence songs. When the crowd became more attentive shortly after the follow-up act began, he said 'you see, now they (sic) listening because of politics'. Complete mayhem ensued when the top-billed famous female singer arrived. She was ushered through the crowd within a chain of beefy Kurdish security guards who

attempted to brush off eager hands, while party-goers tumbled over chairs in the rush to catch a glimpse and get a close up photo or bit of video footage. Kurdish flags, a potent symbol of the independence movement, were everywhere; some more subtle—on lapel pins or as a sash, while others were prominently displayed and enthusiastically waved in the air during political independence songs.

Crucially, large events such as this provide an unrivalled opportunity to reinforce and rebuild social networks in exile, to catch up on news and to share gossip. People came from Yorkshire, as well as Manchester, the North East and the Midlands. Although Alan hadn't wanted to attend, the event proved a welcome opportunity for him to see friends from Hull, and across Europe. Alan was pleased to catch up with the violinist accompanying one of the top acts, a good friend from music college in Iraq, who lives in Sweden with the rest of the band. They had driven from Germany the previous day from another Nowruz party. Other artists had been flown in from Holland, or had come up from London. Many accomplished Kurdish musicians have been resident in Europe in exile from the 1970s onwards (Grossman and O'Brien, 2006). Alan spotted someone he had known while in transit for two months in Turkey en route to the UK who he hadn't seen since. I often heard of people being reunited with friends or relatives as a result of contacts made at big parties. By the same token, fear of being recognised can discourage people from attending larger social events, though information about who attended might be passed on by friends. On several occasions I completed Red Cross Tracing and Message²⁷ requests for people who had been given hope or some vital information about a family member's whereabouts as a result of information exchange at parties. One Angolan man was told by a friend that he had met someone with the same surname at an Angolan Independence day party in Manchester—this gave him the confidence to trace his six brothers who he had assumed were all dead.

7.1.1 Attendance—us and them

Earlier in the day when Alan came by to give me a lift he was with a group of friends who I expected were all coming to the party. However, only Alan was to attend, having agreed to perform. The others said they didn't want to go: 'we've seen those parties—it will be chaos, like all Kurdish parties'. They had enjoyed meeting up with the parade of Kurdish

²⁷ Red Cross works worldwide to restore contact between families following conflict or disaster by exchanging messages and searching for relatives. I acted as a volunteer for the Tracing and Message Service, assisting people to complete forms that are sent to Red Cross representatives in the appropriate country when normal means of communication have broken down.

musicians arriving at a friend's house from Europe and London the previous night, providing a chance to catch up without needing to endure the 'chaos' of the party. Alan, his associates and family were always keen to differentiate themselves from the general crowd who attend such events, usually with sharp class-based overtones. As Kojir said:

It's not their fault—those people, they come from the villages, not the city. They are uneducated. You know, they don't speak English; some can't even read or write. They are a long way from home, and are very lonely—they miss their country. They just want to party and dance. Like everywhere, they want their own photo with the singer. So it can just get crazy when they all push each other to get in front to get a photo. They behave badly because there are no women. It is always bad to have lots of men together. It's not natural. Many of them have left wives and families behind. They can't bring them here, not like in Sweden and Denmark. There they have parties every week, and they are nice, calm parties because families are going. It's not like here where it is just lots of young men. I mean, there are some Kurdish women here, but not many. And when the parties are like that, they don't want to go.

This passage indicates the salience of class and gender in discussions of big parties. The distinction from the 'crowd' was also made in relation to people's reasons for being in the UK, and their reasons for attending such a party. Alan, for example, considers himself to have really experienced problems from Saddam Hussein (former president of Iraq), whereas in his opinion 'most' Kurdish people in the UK are 'just country people' who took advantage of the regime to leave Kurdistan motivated by economic reasons. At one time Kurdish people enjoyed a relatively high rate of success in asylum applications²⁸—Alan associated the opportunism of claiming asylum at a time of high acceptance rates (and the consequent insinuation that their claims to persecution are fabricated) with an opportunistic attitude to life in the UK. This perpetuates state and media constructions of deserving and undeserving (Sales, 2002), attributing negative economic characteristics to those deemed not 'proper' refugees (Malkki, 1997b). If the main 'type' of people attending such events represents a form of Kurdish community in the UK, Alan and his friends consider this a 'bad' community. Overall, Alan (and his friends) characterize the 'mass' of

²⁸ Between 2000 and 2003 the Home Office received 32,740 applications for asylum from Iraqi nationals. Over the same period, 2460 were granted refugee status and 14,690 were granted another form of leave (Exceptional Leave to Remain, Discretionary Leave, Humanitarian Protection)—about 52% in total. This compares to about 32% of total applicants receiving some form of leave to remain over the same period (Home Office, 2004), (Home Office, 2005a).

Kurdish people as here to (just) make money, insular, more likely to be involved in illegal activities (from driving without tax or insurance to drug-running and rape), uneducated (and therefore unable/ unwilling to learn English), coming from rural areas (having more conservative/ traditional social views), and having a lack of respect for women, Britain, British society and culture, and generally of anyone not Kurdish (or even not of their Kurdish ethnic sub-group).

The lure of seeing friends who live in other European countries, and the possibility of finding missing friends or relatives whose safety is unknown is sufficient to encourage some people to put up with unsavoury behaviour, while others are discouraged by disruption and violence. Both men and women complained to me that the high dominance of men also put them off, as indicated in the above quote from Kojir. Unrest and 'bad behaviour' seen at such parties was seen as a symptom of the lack of women in the UK Kurdish population resulting from separation from wives and family structure. The increasingly restrictive immigration regime has made family reunion more difficult²⁹, which in any case is not allowed for people with Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR). Many people were granted ELR, Kurdish applicants and support workers told me, because the government contended that international intervention in Iraq would imminently remove causes of persecution.

7.1.2 Women and violence at parties

The male-dominated nature of such large Kurdish parties was constructed as 'dangerous' and inappropriate for women by people of both sexes. Following this Nowruz party I spoke to Alan's four female cousins (aged 10 to 19) about their thoughts on why there were so few women at such events. The eldest of the four sisters, Sarah, said about women not going to parties:

It's not an Islamic thing. Kurdish people—we're not Islamic, anyway! This is why we don't go to these parties: they are not like parties in Kurdistan. If I go to a party like that, all the men are just staring at you. You walk past, and they're just staring at you. Like that. It's not nice. I don't like those men like that.

²⁹ People with full Refugee Status may apply for family reunion visas for close relatives to enter the UK. Home Office asylum statistics do not include family reunion, and though 'Control of Immigration' statistics include some data on family formation and reunions, this does not differentiate by immigration status.

The sisters said that if women went to the party and danced or looked in a certain way ‘they might say bad things about that girl’. They agreed that men could sometimes behave similarly in Kurdistan, but were particularly irritated by the contrast with what they had come to see as normal behaviour for British women. Although they said Kurdish men see women in the UK wearing short skirts, driving, having boyfriends, they still would talk and say bad things about a Kurdish women for much less. Furthermore, they identified the sort of men who behave like this as those who try to take advantage of more liberal attitudes to sexual relationships in the UK by going to nightclubs where they try to chat up British women. They too associated this behaviour with rural, working class men who they considered were excessively traditional and opposed to integration into British society. Large social events provide an episode—a moment—of community manifestation which through participation, aversion and debate becomes a domain of negotiating Kurdish-British cultural tensions.

Violent episodes and unrest at these large parties were remembered and discussed long after the event. While women wouldn’t want to risk shame by being seen dancing at such events, Alan, his family and friends, all perceived such parties as bringing shame to the Kurdish population in the UK at large, and thereby the Kurdish nation. One of Kojir’s friends who arrived in the UK a fluent English-speaking doctor took numerous photos of the damage done at a summer party later in the year, saying he wanted to record the stupidity of his compatriots to send to his nephews in Kurdistan to teach them of the futility of violence and unrest. That such disruption occurred in a peaceful country where Kurds had come to escape violence they considered a particular folly. Hence, events provide sites of contestation over ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ perceptions of Kurdish identity in the context of exile. Through new media technologies, events and parties are shared with those in Kurdistan and other diaspora countries, creating transnational possibilities for negotiating ‘community’. The production and circulation of videos is an increasingly important diasporic practice, and may in part reflect increasingly restrictive immigration and visa policies that prevent people from joining relatives in the European territory (Steen Preis, 1997: 87).

This conversation took place when the girls’ mother, Zahra, had invited me for a Nowruz dinner with them. She cooked dolma (stuffed vine leaves) as a special dish, and they talked about how they would have eaten it celebrating Nowruz in Kurdistan with the whole family in the park. The participation of the whole family was reiterated several times, with the implication that male presence, and social interaction as a family member, made this type of

socializing 'safe' and enjoyable for women and girls. Kurdish men in the UK, however, were constructed as having unruly and dangerous sexuality. Immigration restrictions and impeded chain migration among refugees results in a marked lack of family in comparison to other migrant groups. The charts below show asylum applications for the UK from Iraq in 2003 and 2004 (the statistics do not differentiate between Kurds and Arabs).

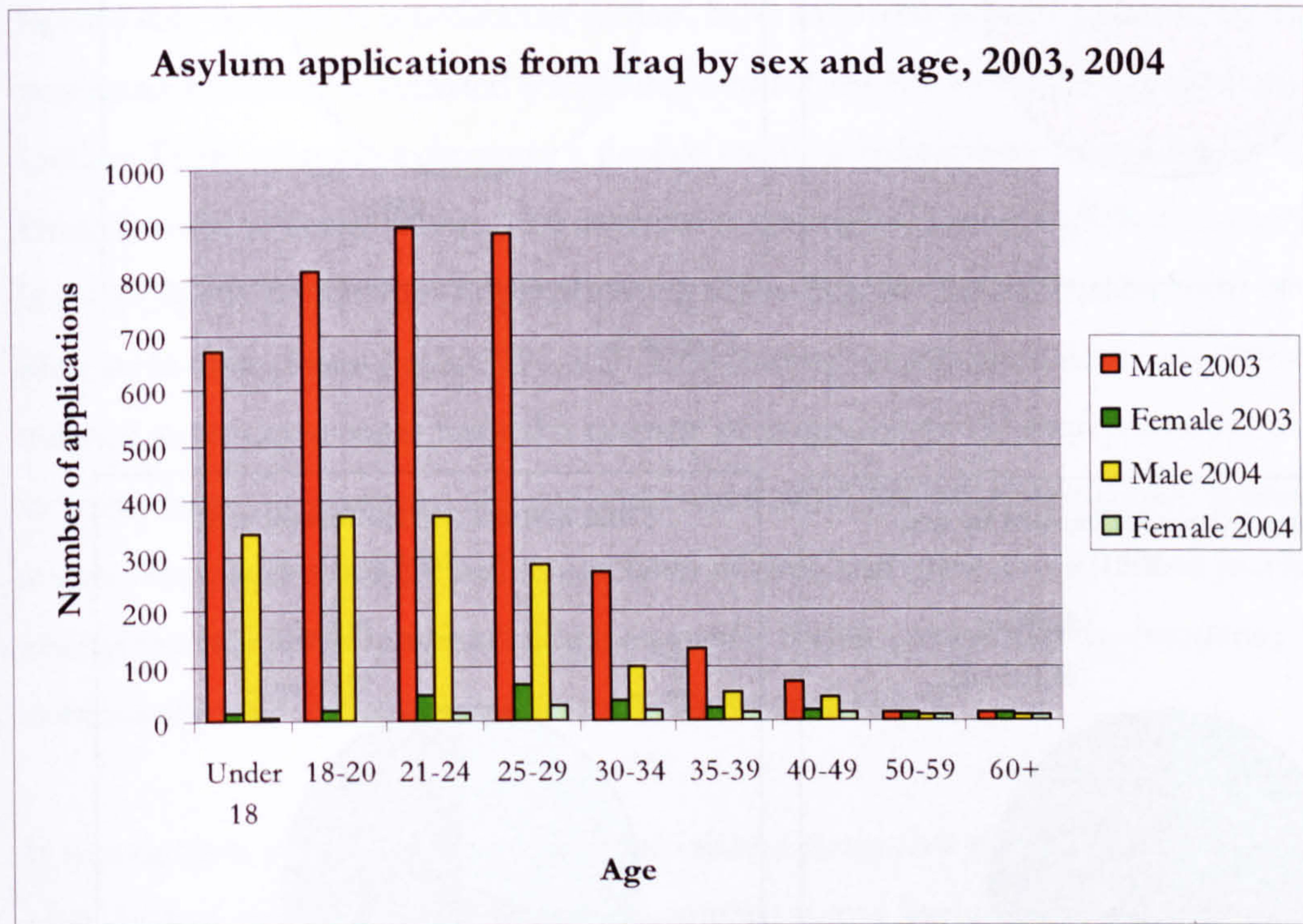


Figure 4

The bar chart (figure 4) clearly shows that the population is dominated by young men, primarily 18-29 years old. It also demonstrates the negligible older population: 60 applicants over the age of 50 in 2003, dropping to a total of 40 applicants over 50 years old in 2004. The pie charts (figures 5, 6, 7 and 8) compare the proportion of male to female applicants from Iraq, and the total asylum seeking population. In 2003, 6% of applicants from Iraq were female compared with 26% of total applicants. In 2004 7% of female applicants from Iraq compares with 30% of total applicants. In Leeds, at the end of July 2005, of the asylum population supported in NASS accommodation 69% were single. The remaining 31% were in some kind of family group (including couples, couples with children, extended family, siblings, and single parent families) (Leeds Refugee and Asylum Service, 24 August 2005).

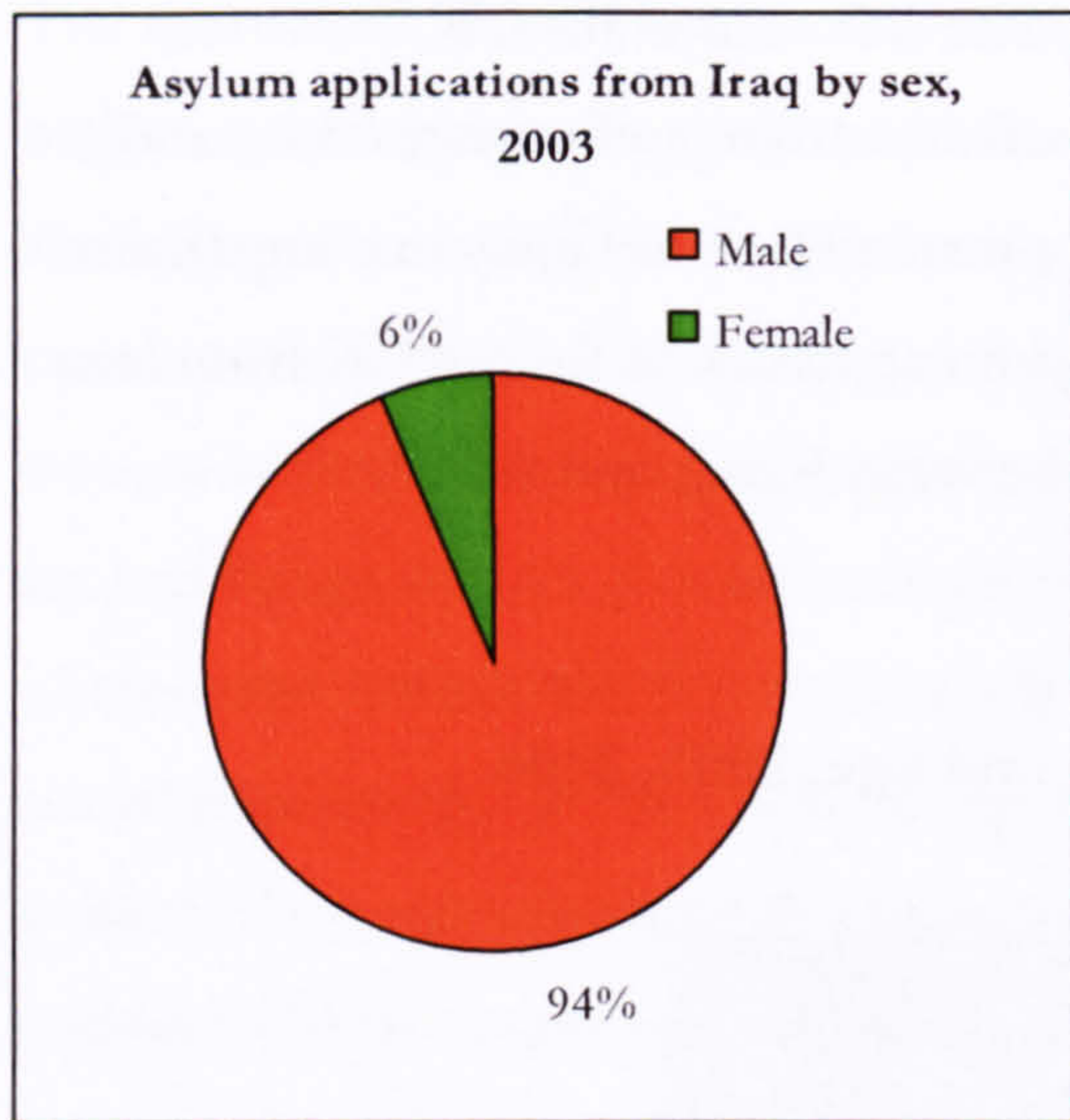


Figure 5

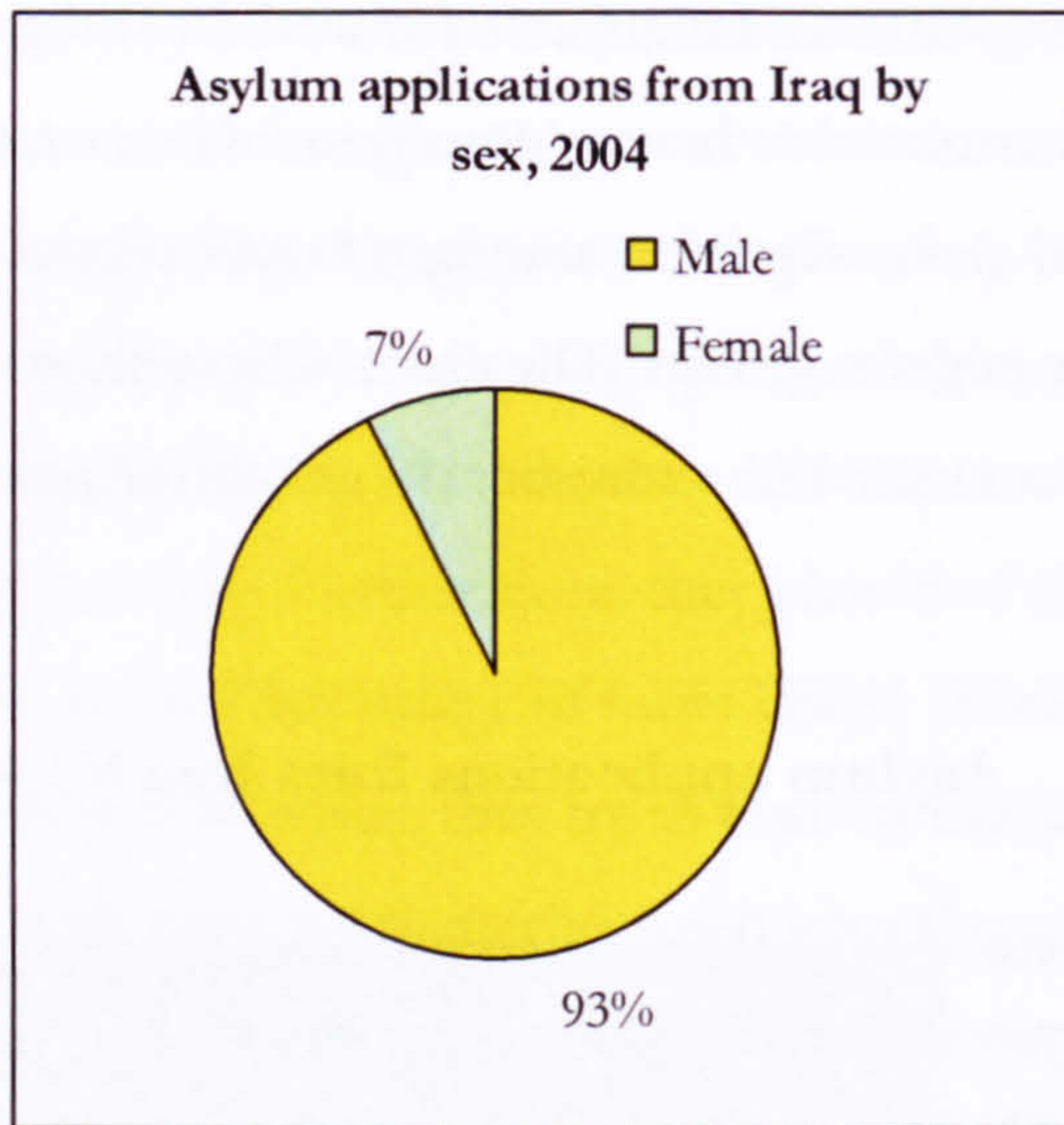


Figure 6

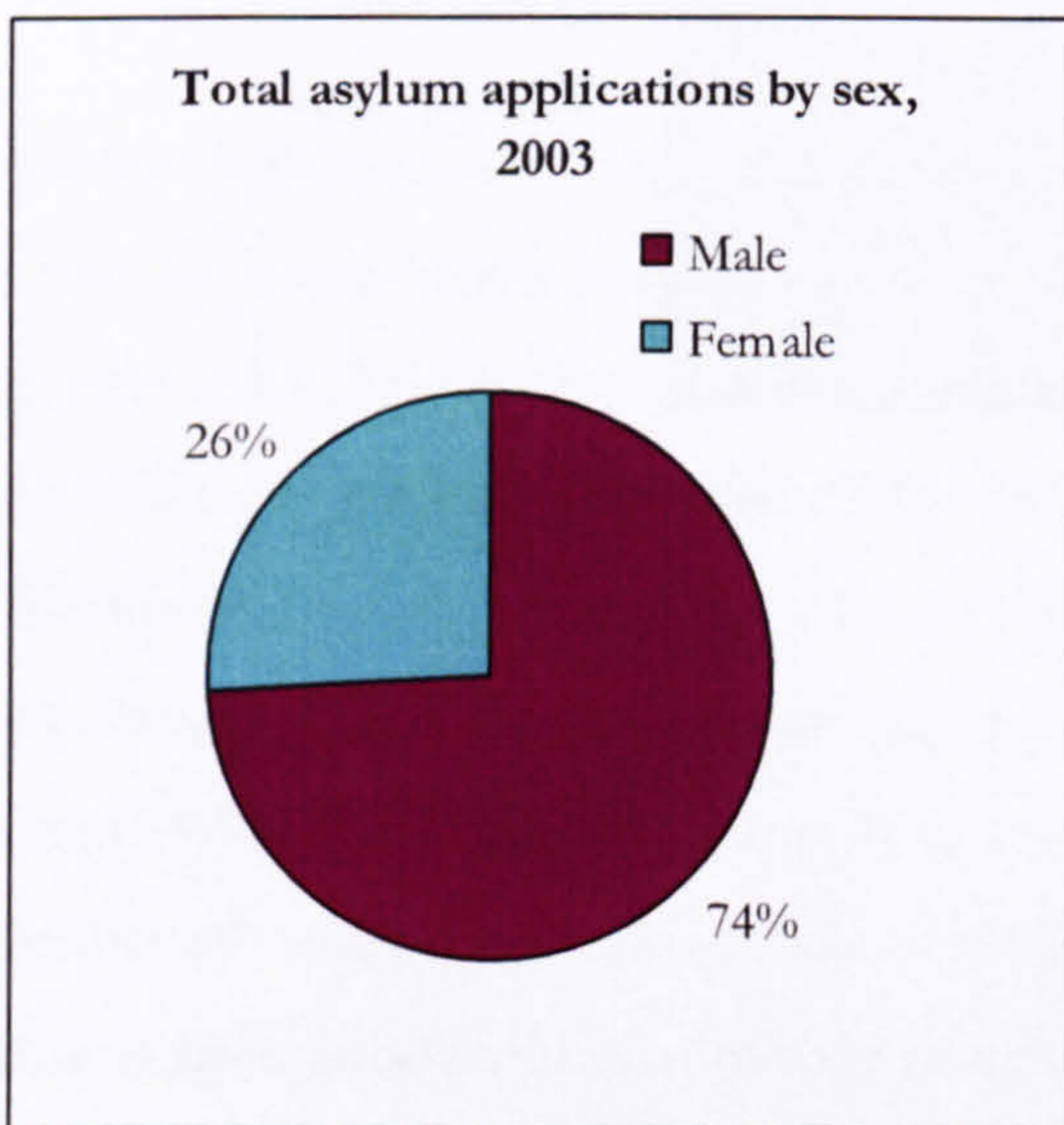


Figure 7

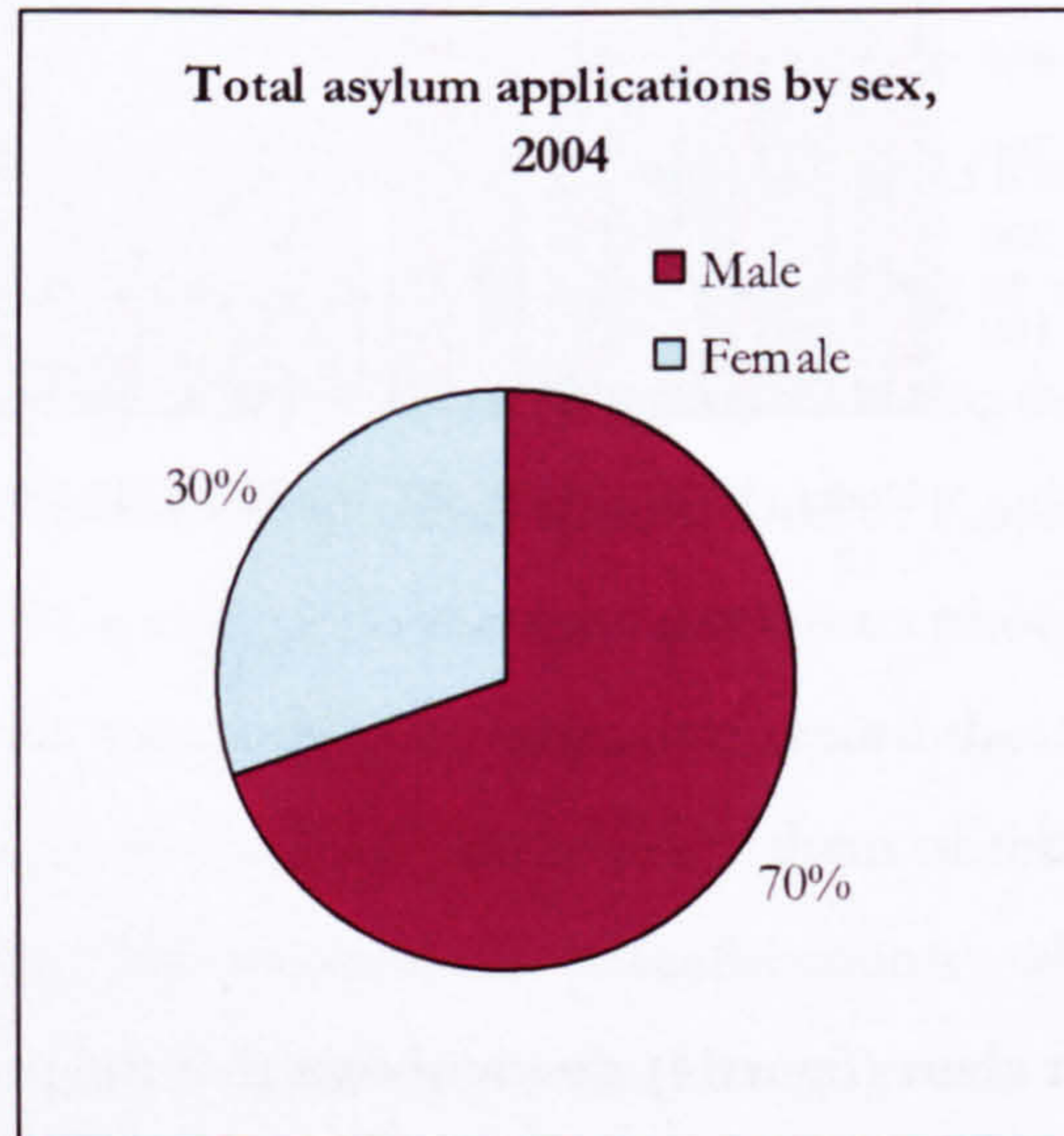


Figure 8

[Data for figures 1,2, 3, 4 and 5 are from Tables 5.1 and 5.2, Applications for asylum in the UK, excluding dependents, by nationality, age and sex, 2003 and 2004 (Home Office, 2004, Home Office, 2005a)]

Large Iranian parties were similarly known for their tendency for violence. Siroos of the Leeds Iranian Organization told me how their 'longest night of the year/ Christmas' party had been highly successful with over 500 people coming from across Yorkshire and even further afield. However, he said: 'there was a lot of drinking and fighting. I had to break it up and take people outside. There was too much fighting and I didn't get home until six in the morning'. The editor of the Yorkshire-based 'Salam Iran' newsletter, Hamid, ran a story on violence at Iranian parties, which in conversation with me he put down to women:

There is always a lot of fighting at Iranian parties. It's because of looking at girls. I think it is the same here? Fighting over girls, or fighting over looking at someone's sister, girlfriend, like that. There are some women and girls at the parties, but many men wouldn't allow their wives or daughters to go because of this fighting.

So, while many of the elements of a party (such as music and clothing discussed further below) may be seen as reproducing 'home', both men and women complained of the strangeness of male-dominated socializing. Steen Preis has noted how bachelor male Sri Lankan Tamil refugees experience a double mode of refugeeism—lack of family results in limited world of social action. This disturbs social reproduction 'and, hence, community' but also opens possibilities of participating differently in cultural construction of Tamil identity in exile (Steen Preis, 1997: 93). 'Community' events are neither a transposition of cultural practices brought from the country of origin, nor does transformation sever a link to past, distant or imagined identity and community. The 'diasporic public sphere' provides a space for confrontations and interactions of here and there, tradition and modernity, change and stasis that emphasize heterogeneity within groups and the 'tendency of community towards fission and fusion' (Werbner, 2005: 5).

It was not just at events for people from Islamic states that women were less likely to be seen. In fact, the similarity of gender discourses across 'asylum' countries was striking. All those I spoke to, without exception, constructed public social events and activities as predominantly men's space. This included women, even if their reasons departed from those given by men. When I asked about the (relative) absence of women from Zimbabwean events I had attended Nzou, the RCO leader, told me that it is not culturally normal for women to go out, that they would get bored sitting in the pub, and that they would rather stay at home with the kids and visit each other in their houses. At a meal organized jointly by the Zimbabwean RCO and LASSN I had a chance to ask some of the wives of the men centrally involved in running the organization what they thought. I found that they were slightly annoyed that while their husbands had been spending a great deal of time texting and phoning a lot of people to encourage them to come to the event, they had only been asked at the last minute. They took this to be a sign that their husbands had assumed that they wouldn't want to go. Nzou's wife said: 'It's not true that we don't want to go out. It is easier for them if we stay at home and do nothing. That is the way they like it. They like us to stay quiet.' This demonstrates that men and women may have different interpretations of the exclusion of women from non-domestic socializing. Also, it is vital to reiterate that women did chose to socialize, just perhaps differently in other spaces.

The greater potential for women to be isolated both from interaction with British structures, and from existing refugee formations was recognised by a group of women who decided to set up a dedicated women's RCO. Their launch will now be examined as an example of a more formal community event.

7.2 An RCO event: Central African Women's Education and Health

The launch of Central African Women's Education and Health (CAWEH) in January 2004 was held at HQs, a pub with a large, cheap-to-hire function room located in Chapeltown, an area with a high concentration of NASS housing and with one of the highest minority ethnic populations in Leeds (Unsworth and Stilwell, 2004). The evening's entertainment included a performance from a Leeds-based West African drumming group (white British people), a women's singing trio (Leeds-born Caribbean-origin black women from Chapeltown), two Ghanaian musicians, and some DJing and live synthesiser music from a young man from Cameroon. The night really got going with the finale—an older Congolese man, clearly well-known to the crowd, in a white suit singing popular tunes to crackling backing tapes. Despite the concerted efforts of the previous performers to encourage people to dance, it was only when the popular Congolese songs came on that people really got moving—reflecting the dominant nationality and musical tastes of those attending. Many people got up to pay their respects to the singer, or chanteur, by shaking him by the hand or patting him on the arm (in the typical Congolese way, as I was told).

Mid-way through the evening there was a break for food. The food was prepared by women from the organization and included some 'typical' dishes from Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo—fried dough balls, yucca, fish stew, a spinach and (dried) fish mixture, rice, hot home-made chilli sauce, and a variety of chicken dishes. As people ate, the organizers took to the stage—all wearing dresses in varying African styles in impressive bright pink batik material, and a couple of men in hand-made shirts in the same matching material. The material had been bought by someone's friend in Belgium from a Cameroonian trader, and the outfits uniquely designed and hand crafted in Leeds by one of the organizers. Statements about the formation and purpose of the organization were read in French and English, and dealt primarily with issues of isolation and lack of information among people from Central African countries owing to language barriers and a poor level of knowledge of available opportunities. They spoke about wishing to provide a bridge

between existing support services and French-speaking African women, and about the need for an organization run for women, by women in order for them to be able to talk about health, and to be able to deal with issues around cultural translation and understanding British structures of particular importance to women (for example, to do with childbirth, childcare and schooling). Various topics were addressed, all of which emphasized the isolation of Central African women from each other and from interaction with UK people, structures and systems.

While each event is unique, there are some identifiably 'typical' elements of RCO-organized community parties. They are usually held in a community centre, religious building or cheap venue, preferably in an area with a high concentration of refugees and asylum seekers. The evening includes live music performances, DJs playing music usually from the locality being represented, sometimes dedicated children's activities, free food available, and some talks from a compère and others about the purpose of the event and about the organizing RCO(s). These talks invariably refer to the desire of organizers to combat isolation in the population, to create a sense of strength in sharing adversity, to criticise or respond to government policies on issues such as destitution, to promote the existence and activities of the RCO in supporting people, to profile 'cultural' manifestations such as dancing, music, and food, and to thank funding bodies.

The CAWEH launch followed this 'standard' and was attended by around 100 people. Most were African men though the expressly gendered event did achieve a significantly greater balance of women and children than is usual at such events. Over half of those attending were people I recognised as performers and their friends or associates, community development and support service figures, or leaders of other African RCOs, such as Leeds Ethiopian Community, Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds, Leeds Great Lakes Community, and Yorkshire African Refugee Community Organization. The latter two are organizations that represent French-speaking countries, and their leaders, along with those of the other RCOs present, regularly attended community meetings and events. Many of the women present were already involved in the CAWEH organization, or the wives of other RCO leaders. Poor weather with heavy rain conspired against stronger attendance, especially from women who might be considered more isolated, who could also be intimidated by the prospect of travel to an unknown place in the dark on public transport to an event of unknown quantities. As the idea of a community organization may be unusual, this, and the fact the organization was very new generates suspicion and doubt about its worth and power. Furthermore, such 'formal' RCO events would be promoted

within the voluntary refugee sector, but may not be advertised more widely with flyers and text advertising, such modes of promotion thus helping to dictate the audience. The type of people attending the event, therefore, themselves served to strongly reinforce the stated purpose of the organization and the reason for the event—high levels of isolation. Despite attempts (including my own) to invite more ‘isolated’ women from central African countries, those attending were mostly gatekeepers, ‘pioneers’, or ‘ethnic brokers’—people on the periphery (Werbner, 1991). Hence, the speeches fell on the ears of those much less isolated than the women the organization had been set up to assist.

There was much cross-attendance at RCO events by other leaders. Leaders always promoted their events at the Refugee Forum of RCO representatives, and those who most frequently attended the Forum could also be seen reliably supporting such events. It was seen as diplomatic and part of a reciprocal relationship to invite other leaders and people from refugee supporting agencies. At the Central African Womens’ event, for example, it was appropriate and diplomatic to invite the other organizations representing Central African and French-speaking refugees. During my research there was a ‘hardcore’ of about twenty or thirty such people intimately involved in either running or supporting RCOs (as well as myself who was studying them) who would invariably attend such events. These individuals were likely to refer people to an organization, building word-of-mouth networking. This ‘hard core’ had a key role in helping to launch and thereby legitimate new organizations. Their attendance also displayed a sense of solidarity among RCO leaders in the city, especially across African groups. So while organizers may envisage the role of such events as being part of helping to break down isolation and improve social contact in the population they see as their clients, such events are likely to be more important as a means of profiling the organization and networking between (rather than within) RCOs.

7.2.1 Class, poverty and inclusion in ‘community’ events

The invitation encouraged people to ‘come and share and learn about Central African culture’. From the outset, therefore, the event expressly promoted a desire to communicate ‘out’ about ‘Central African culture’ as well as providing an opportunity for sharing ‘within’. This advertising ‘out’, and relative diversity of nationalities, men, women and children attending the CAWEH launch thus contrast markedly with the nature of the Kurdish Nawroz party, dominated by young Kurdish men and advertised through Kurdish-language flyers. Just as Alan and his friends were keen to emphasize their differentiation from the working class crowd, RCO ‘community’ events may be more likely to be attended by

people linked to support services who could be viewed as an emerging refugee middle class (Gold, 1992).

Events with famous live artists were usually huge—attracting audiences of hundreds to over a thousand people. Ticket prices were high, often between £30 to £50. Similarly to the purchasing of high-priced familiar food products explored in the following chapter, paying such high prices for a night's entertainment appears to be irrational. Certainly, the most destitute must be completely excluded. However, it is reasonable to assume that the core audience are surviving on very low incomes, whether NASS payments, illegal labour wages (people spoke of £2-£4 an hour rates), or for those with status, either benefits or (low) wages. Coupled with the usually high rate of remittances sent home, paying for a ticket must take some budgeting preparation and is weighed against commitments to relatives and simple survival. The fact that such large numbers of people are prepared to pay high ticket prices demonstrates the central importance of these events to the people who attend. Conversely, those who are unsure whether they really want to go are easily put off by high ticket prices.

On a day-to-day basis, association for those in this research was mostly with small numbers of people in the domestic realm, at college, to play sport such as football, in cafes or at church or mosque. Social events provided rare moments of interaction with large groups of compatriots and fellow-refugees. In fact, those most closely involved in my research rarely took part in any kind of larger-scale socializing activity because of feeling depressed and unable to leave the house or interact with unknown others. In addition, such self-exclusion was sometimes for reasons of class, gender, and poverty, as indicated by the exclusionary boundary implicit at events such as the Nowruz party and CAWEH launch. Given the high diversity in the asylum-seeking and existing Leeds populations, and the often high level of secrecy among compatriots for reasons of controlling information, it is notable that large parties tend to attract audiences clearly segmented along national, ethnic, regional or linguistic lines. Conversely, given that many events were segmented in this way, it is interesting to note that events organized by several RCOs or by refugee agencies tended to be more mixed. This differentiation led me to consider how advertising and promotion foster contrasting, segmented social spaces.

7.3 Events as ‘community’? Advertising dictates the audience

Posters and flyers for upcoming events were always on display in the Kurdish cafes, restaurants, and hairdressers, Iranian restaurants, and a couple of Zimbabwean shops concentrated in the Harehills and Chapeltown areas (see photo below, plate 1). Flyers were also circulated through social networks, businesses and community organizations, extending circulation to ‘ethnic’ businesses across Yorkshire. However, as refugees are dispersed across the city, and as new refugee enterprises are limited to certain places and nationalities, this method has only limited potential for promoting to people living where there are no obvious locations to advertise. Hence, so-called ‘viral marketing’ via text was a significant and popular advertising method. A promoter builds up a list of mobile phone numbers through social contacts whom they text about upcoming events. These texts are then passed on to friends, and so on. This means messages can be rapidly and widely distributed through a relatively cheap advertising mechanism to get the message out quickly to large numbers of people³⁰. The distribution of flyers and the use of text marketing highlights the newness of large refugee populations in Leeds, and the transient and fragmented nature of social networks.



Plate 1 Posters for an Iranian night displayed next to CDs, Super Shandez Persian store.

Text advertising elucidates certain features of refugee lifestyles. Promoter’s contacts are built up through personal contact, and the further dissemination of texts also relies on friendships, emphasizing the significance of trust and social networks. The personal link to the organizer creates a sense of legitimacy for their event, even if that link is several times removed. Texting demonstrates the primary importance of the mobile phone in the

³⁰ Texting was also used by the politicized Zimbabwean RCO to advertise political protests and encourage responses to anti-immigration newspaper and internet polls. Zimbabweans also told me how they received weekly exchange rates from black market money changers who facilitated sending financial remittances to Zimbabwe. The role of the mobile phone is prominent and significant in facilitating the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, as Glazebrook found among Afghans in Melbourne, Australia establishing lives following release from detention (Glazebrook, 2004).

maintenance of social relationships in a highly transient population (Glazebrook, 2004); gathering postal addresses is largely pointless when people move frequently. Portable mobile phone adverts overcome the lack of established 'community' spaces as a place of information exchange (and this lack precipitates the need for a social event). Whether or not an individual was willing or able to attend an event, they would forward the text to friends. In this way, the exchange of information through texting helps to build real social ties, reinforcing emergent social networks even in the absence of attending an event. Information texting is a relatively novel marketing phenomenon in the UK: it may be that the immediate take up of the newest 'underground' marketing ideas by promoters reflects their advanced entrepreneurial and adaptative skills.

Text marketing through fragmented but loosely linked series of social chains as the preferred advertising method also highlights the newness of both the social events and the audience members to the UK. Promoters may be operating in complete ignorance of, or parallel to, existing Leeds night entertainment advertising networks. Existing advertising techniques would be unlikely to reach the intended audience as they too are perhaps too new to the locality to know about local mechanisms of advertising music events and club nights (for example, listings in events magazines, newspapers, 'youth' magazines, on the internet, on official poster sites and through conventional city centre flyer locations). The mainstream night scene in Leeds operates mostly in ignorance of the largely hidden 'refugee' night scene, as similarly noted in Dublin by Brady and Put (Brady and Put, 2006). Events were always busy or even highly over-subscribed—the obvious success of text-chain marketing demonstrates the primacy of nationally and ethnically discrete social groups, and the cultural specificity of music genres. The people in my research interacted almost entirely with same-language co-nationals: the advertising of events through social networks helps to create segmented audiences. In addition, printed flyers contain symbolic identity markers to market to specific national and ethnic groups, thus disclosing symbolic inclusion.

7.3.1 Symbolic identity markers in flyers

Flyers³¹ for social events and activities contain details of symbolic importance which serve as a source of identification for those able to understand their significance, and which simultaneously create a boundary beyond which stand people for whom these symbols are incomprehensible or irrelevant. Flyers are more than just an advertisement for an event.

³¹ An advertisement printed on a page or in a leaflet for wide distribution.

Their colours, text and style betray national or ethnic affiliations and cultural meanings. These meanings may only be understandable to those sharing a certain regional or cultural background, for example the use of idiomatic terms such as 'Zim beers, Zim DJs' clearly denotes a Zimbabwean event to those familiar with the term, but means little to others. Also, where symbols are understood and recognisable (for example, a national flag) those 'outside' may render them irrelevant if they do not identify with them. An Angolan might recognise a Zimbabwean flag on a flyer and thereby decide the event is not meant for them. In addition, Zimbabwean music events are often printed in yellow, green, red and black (see plate 2). Using flags and printing flyers in national colours communicate the identification of an event with a national group, indicating the likely key audience, main language groups, musical styles, and types of food.

A second primary tool of differentiation is language or script. A brief glance at a flyer for an Iranian event instantly identifies it as such through the use of Farsi script (plate 4) and ensures that Iranians can understand the information. Farsi is recognisable (and occasionally understandable) to Arabic speakers, while being entirely incomprehensible to those unable to read Arabic script. To those who speak and read Arabic, and to those from the Middle East, the use of Farsi script and language demonstrates that the event is marketed to Iranians. To those who do not speak or read either Arabic or Farsi this use of script denotes a broader symbolic boundary—perhaps Middle East, Arabic, or maybe just 'different', 'exotic', or 'foreign'. Hence, in keeping with Cohen's observation, boundaries perceived by some are imperceptible to others (Cohen, 1985).

Thirdly, the type of musicians playing, the genre of music, and the names of the musicians, DJs and organizers also carry meanings that differentiate along national, regional, linguistic, ethnic and tribal lines. For African events, music genre terms relate to geographic areas: Kwaito is South African, Kizomba is Angolan, Soukouss is Congolese (plate 3). The names of musicians might belie a further finessing of identification below the broad brush of region or nationality provided through national flags, script, idioms and music genre. Zimbabweans can differentiate Shona or Ndebele names, while those from Arab countries can separate Kurdish and Arabic, and Kurds can sometimes separate different Kurdish ethnic groups.

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 Z.C.L. Promotions Presents The
CROWNING OF
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 at LEEDS WEST INDIAN CENTRE, CHAPELTOWN
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CANDY (RIDDIM KING)
 VS
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 VS
EPHRAIM DREAD
 (Manchester's most wanted)
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LADY DJ MASTOE

Master of Ceremony **DJ Smoove**

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 Adm: £5 b4 11pm
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Come and Vote for your 2003 DJ of the Year

Plate 2 Flyer for Zimbabwean event

AFRICAN SUMMER PARTY
 EVERY SUNDAY
 AT THE FFORDE GREEN
 FROM 25TH JULY 2004

GRAND OPENING :
 WITH DJ MATHURIN SELECTING ALL THE LATEST & HOTTEST AFRICAN MUSIC:

★ LA DANCE DU MOMENT
 COUPE DECALE PRUDENCIA
 - ZOUK - RUMBA - SALSA - SAMBA

MAKOSSA - BIKUTSI
 - ASSIKO
 SOUKOUSS AND THE
 HOT NDOMBOLO
 RnB- HIP POP- RAGGA-
 HIP SHAKEN SOCCA

KUDURO- SABAR- GHANA RYTHM
 NEVERTHELESS THE CONGO VIBRATION

BBQ AFRICAN STYLE MIX SOYA TILL 8.00PM

DOOR ARE OPEN FROM
 14:00PM TILL 11:00PM
 £3.00 before 8PM
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AFRICAN MUSIC PROMOTION
 ERNEST MIX
 GOOD TIME GUARANTEED

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FIRST TO ARRIVE
 SEXY FIVE LADIES BOTTLES OF CHAMPAGNE
 TEN HOT GUY BOTTLES OF COURVOISIER
 DON'T MISS IT FOR ANY REASON

Plate 3 Flyer for African Summer Party

22ND MARCH 2004
 UK LEEDS, GRANARY WHARFE, LEEDS
 behind Leeds Train Station

BERKE ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

گروه هنری برکه با افتخار تقدیم میکند
 کنسرت نوروزی
 بهترین
 باشکوه
 برای اولین بار
 صمد به کنسرت می رود

شهره با ایوم جدید و ارکستر اختصاصی

SHOHREH
 ANDY
 SAMAD
 SHANI
 OMID

معروفترین و محبوبترین خوانندگان ایران
 همراه با برنامه مشترک اندی و کورس پس از 13 سال
 با ایوم جدید PLATINUM
 امید با ایوم جدید و ارکستر اختصاصی

جهت سفارش مستقیم و رزرو بلیط از طریق برنامه
 گذاران با تلفنهای اطلاعات تماس حاصل فرمائید

محل برنامه
 M62 from Manchester
 M1 from Sheffield
 Junction Leeds City
 Centre
 follow signs for
 Granary Wharfe
 after Hilton Hotel,
 turn left
 behind Leeds train station
 LEEDS GRANARY WHARFE
 WITH OVER 500 FREE CAR
 PARKING SPACES

شروع 19.00
 پیش شروع ملی ایران همراه با برنامه مخصوص
 DJ HUMAN
 شینی
 صمد به کنسرت می رود
 کورس
 اندی
 شهره
 امید پا یان 2.00

بهای بلیط
 تا 20 فوریه 2004 £32 /
 از 20 فوریه تا شب برنامه £42
 شب برنامه 50 پوند (در صورت موجود بودن بلیط)
 کودکان زیر 6 سال میهمان گروه هنری برکه می باشند
 کودکان از 6 سال تا 12 سال 15 پوند همراه با ارائه کارت شناسایی

+44 (0) 7708163255
 +44 (0) 7818810512
 +44 (113) 3930451
 +44 (113) 2251510
 email: Berke20002000@yahoo.co.uk

Plate 4 Flyer for Iranian event

When the South African Kwaito star, M'Du played in Bradford in 2004 Nzou had wanted to go, but didn't as none of his friends would join him—they didn't want to go to see a Zulu act they would not understand (Nzou speaks Ndebele which is mutually comprehensible with Zulu). Interestingly, as an RCO leader Nzou had taken on a nickname which he felt bridged Shona and Ndebele, as his real name was 'too Ndebele'. He did this as he was concerned that some Shona people could mistrust him, and didn't want people to pre-judge him on the basis of his name. This exemplifies both the mistrust towards RCO leaders mentioned in the last chapter, and the potency of names as ethnic signifiers. This pragmatic approach to identity shifted with audiences—outside Zimbabwean circles he was known by his real name (cf Malkki, 1995a). The potency of names reminds us in particular of the pernicious divisions that can continue to shape social interaction among refugees in the UK.

Lastly, the overall design and layout of a flyer are similarly idiosyncratic. The flyers shown demonstrate the key differences between Middle Eastern and African events. Arabic, Iranian and Kurdish events usually had formal posed photographs of the musicians (e.g. plate 4 and 5); African flyers often had photos of unidentified black ladies dancing, or, in the case of concerts, high quality photos of the performers. The quality of flyers reflects the production costs and promotion budget and thereby the status of the event, party organizers, promoters, and musicians. 'Community' (RCO/ voluntary sector) events were often produced at minimum cost using word processing software, while night club and concert flyers were in full gloss colour. Some events target wider regional geographic populations, aiming for unity and mass appeal. This is particularly evident with African events that bring together symbols of a variety of nations. The 'African Summer Party' and 'Valentine Day Special' flyers (plates 3 and 6), for example, name musical genres from a number of parts of Africa, display multiple flags and combine French and English text thereby invoking a pan-African identity. These various symbolic identity markers are utilized to market events which, in addition to the distribution of flyers through certain shops and the use of viral text marketing through social networks, encourage geographically and ethnically segmented audiences. This signalling of a space for people who identify with certain core symbols announces the creation of a moment when people who consider themselves within the boundary can indulge as 'insiders', away from a world they generally experience as outsiders. This brings us to further explore how clothing, music and dancing delineate and constitute 'community' spaces.

7.4 Clothing, music and dancing

7.4.1 Parties—a safe space for ‘different’ clothing?

At the Nowruz party I asked whether it would be normal to wear the traditional *pershmaga* (that many men wore at the Bradford event) as a standard form of dress in Kurdistan, or only at parties. One of Alan’s friends told me that *pershmaga* is worn in rural Kurdistan, but said it was not be normal to wear it out and about in the UK. He recounted incredulously that in Hull he had once seen two Kurdish men walking into town in traditional clothes, ‘I was really surprised! I mean, the Pakistani people, they wear their own clothes, but they have really been here a long time.’ He felt that it was ‘ok’ for Pakistani people to wear ‘their clothes’ because they are a long-established migrant minority in the UK, but that this practice would be considered odd for Kurdish people, partly because of their newness. This can otherwise be interpreted as a feeling of not (yet) having legitimacy as a cultural entity and recognised minority population in ‘multicultural’ Britain to ‘be’ Kurdish. Presumably the consequent projection is that as the Kurdish population become more established through time and ‘participation’ in UK society people may feel more able to be visibly different. Hence, ‘community’ events provided an opportunity for people to wear special, ‘traditional’ or culturally specific clothes.

Many Kurdish people took long overland routes to the UK making carrying things from ‘home’ very difficult. I was therefore surprised at the number of people I had seen at Kurdish parties wearing such traditional dress—not all of these people could have brought them, or had them sent by family still in Kurdish areas. One of my friends agreed that there must be someone making them in Yorkshire, indicating the importance of clothing as cultural reproduction. Kojir said people wanted to wear what they considered their best or special clothes to go a party, yet *pershmaga* clearly signify more than a smart clothing option. The military renown of the Kurdish army and their nationalist struggle has made military attire quite fashionable, while incorporating a political statement of (para-) national unity. As noted by Huisman, dress is part of the cultural politics by which nations are actively produced (2005: 46). At the CAWEH launch many of the Central African people attending came in special outfits, particularly brightly coloured suits or patterned suits fashionable among fans of Congolese singers. Probably the most famous is Papa Wemba, whose fans are renowned for their mimicry of his flamboyant and colourful suits. Hence this particular style advertises not just one’s cultural origin but also musical taste. In the case of Somali or Iranian women, the types of material used for scarves and the style of wrapping visibly

demonstrate both cultural origin and Islamic faith. Hence clothing can be multi-vocal (Appadurai, 1986), with multiple symbolic significances—a nonverbal language (Huisman, 2005)—and is not simply an announcement of national or regional origin.

Because of the nature of flight and for some, long periods of travel and transit, most people who come through the asylum route arrive with nothing or very little. The extent to which refugees have time to prepare differs according to circumstance (Jansen, 2004, Huisman, 2005). Apart from a copy of the Bible or Qur'an, often the only thing people carried would be their best shirt, or a piece of jewellery, or other type of accessory almost as a type of talisman. Clothes and other accessories carried in flight hold sentimental value 'which both inscribe and are inscribed by ... memories of self and personhood' (Parkin, 1999: 303). Hence, in addition to their capacity as cultural, political and religious markers, the journey taken by clothes may hold a particularly heightened symbolic value for refugees. Christna, from Cameroon, brought some items of Catholic ritual significance, but also her cult 'gown' or dress. She slept in this dress, and claimed in her asylum appeal that she did this because she slept better when wearing it. In fact, the dress took on a particular importance as a central feature of her asylum case, as she sought to prove her membership of the cult, which was the foundation of her case. As evidence such items may thereby become especially potent, symbolising past experiences and embodying legitimacy. It is pertinent to briefly note that access to asylum statements and appeal documents were protected and venerated. While I never requested it, three women showed me their SEFs (Statement of Evidence Form) during the research, presented with a sense of ritual importance. These documents were 'affectively loaded' (Navaro-Yashin, 2007) owing to the sensitivity of legitimacy in asylum claims and the highly personal nature of the information contained within them. Christna kept hers in a brown envelope zipped into one of the sofa cushions, Sanai bought a shiny plastic folder to store asylum papers which was stashed under blankets in the bottom of her wardrobe.

Clothes procured after arrival may symbolically denote connections with family, movement between diasporic spaces through exchange, and ties to people who have enabled their procurement. I once met an Ethiopian man I knew on the bus from Sheffield on a Sunday, wearing an ornately embroidered white shirt. I commented on it, and he said his friend gave it to him on arrival in London, for him to have something Ethiopian, and to have something nice to wear if he wanted to go to church. Zahra and her four daughters had come through family reunion, meaning they had plenty of time to plan their journey, and gave careful thought to the things they brought, which included two quality women's

'traditional' Kurdish dresses. Zahra wore her dress to her daughter, Sarah's wedding. Some time later when Kojir had an engagement party all of the sisters came in traditional Kurdish dress as the eldest sister had been on holiday to visit relatives in Syria, returning with (little else other than) dresses for her sisters. The CAWEH management committee procured cloth from a Cameroonian trader in Belgium for their special launch event outfits. This was presumably cheaper than having it sent from Cameroon, or perhaps more importantly, was a result of a social relationship a friend of theirs had with someone in Belgium. Clothing is both a cultural language or text (Geertz, 1993 (1973)), and representative of experiences and social networks past and present (Huisman, 2005), embodying overlapping identities.

With the exception of African women attending church on Sunday (itself a type of special event) it was very unusual to see people dressing in 'traditional' clothes outside parties and social events. People usually rationalized this because they saw such types of dress as 'special', a type of 'party dress'. Community events and parties provide an opportunity to visibly and proudly announce one's cultural origins through clothing. I would ask people why they didn't wear their 'special' clothes I saw them wearing at events or inside their house more regularly. Usually they would say something like 'it's nice to wear inside', or 'it's nice to wear for a party'. Yet, given that most people live in constant fear of racist abuse or attack, and generally feel exposed enough through obvious lacks of competency in English language, cultural etiquette, and because of skin colour, it is possible to invert the statement 'it's nice to wear inside' as meaning 'it's not nice to wear outside'. A further facet of the multi-vocal capacity of clothing is that while dressing well may mark inclusion and security of belonging in culturally-specific migrant spaces, on the 'outside', in mainstream Britain special or traditional clothes announce difference.

I sometimes saw some African women I knew at a salsa club known for its international clientele, and the quality of dancing. British salsa aficionados danced alongside Latin-American and African fans of salsa music and dance. The club was small and dark, and dancing partnerships were quickly formed, and rapidly interchanged through the night. Like Kurdish men going out to nightclubs hoping to meet English girls, the freedom of anonymous, open dance-floors and generic 'night club' clothing allowed women and men to gain individuality by being invisible, eschewing nationality and 'refugee' labels. I was once snubbed by a woman I knew fairly well as a good friend of a key participant— in the day time our conversations often revolved around 'refugee' matters, but perhaps in the club she didn't want to risk me identifying with her on those grounds. Clothing in the club was intentionally non-ethnically specific, following fashionable styles among British young

people. More broadly, when I saw refugees socializing away from designated 'refugee' events they would wear nondescript clothing bought in the UK. Similarly, in her study of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal women, Young notes how they chose to wear football strips and sports clothing when visiting the city of Adelaide (2006). While the bright stripes and colours of football shirts conformed with Pitjantjatjara perceptions of desirable clothing, in the city they also communicate social belonging with mainstream Australia, suggesting that to evade cultural rooting, to be cosmopolitan, is to be invisible through clothing (Young, 2006).

Malkki's notion of strategies of invisibility (Malkki, 1995a) is instructive. She found among Hutu refugees in Tanzania that those in living in the town changed their names and circumvented identification with the refugee label. Her informants portrayed the local, well-established population as resenting refugees because of the stigma of poverty, and associated the label 'refugee' with the curtailment of liberty and freedom. This contrasted with refugees in the Mishamo camp where security was derived from being a member of the 'Hutu refugees' collectivity, resulting in the heroization of this joint identity. She suggests that for those in the town, security and freedom derived from being 'socially unmarked' (Malkki, 1995a: 164). In comparison to city centre night clubs, refugee 'community' events can be compared to the open 'refugee' identification of the refugee camp in Malkki's study. To attend a 'refugee community' event is to be identifiably part of the refugee population (cf Zetter, 1991). One can legitimately communicate a specific cultural origin in dress and dance styles in a secure, knowingly 'refugee' environment. In clubs, security comes from lack of cultural specificity: enjoying and dancing to international, generic musical forms. People go there to be just another clubber, to be single, young and sexual, distancing from the overt 'refugee' identity of mono-ethnic music nights and 'community' (voluntary sector) events. Secrecy may again be key, providing a motivation for people to avoid socializing with large groups of co-nationals. Clothing is central to communicating belonging in contrasting contexts of communality. At events and music nights I was visibly an outsider, indicating the success of these events at constructing a moment of maximal knowledge and belonging for new migrants within the UK. This was demonstrated not just by my dress, but also by my patently inferior dancing capabilities.

7.4.2 The value of dancing and music

I was struck by the contrast between party night-life and day-to-day monotony when I went out with the group of Angolan women I knew well. As a group of single mothers they

would leave all the children at one of their houses for babysitting, taking it in turns according to who felt like, or could afford to go out. I went with them to an Angolan club night held upstairs on a Thursday night in a place known for Latin music. This is a club that I have frequented since it opened in 2000, so it came as some surprise to find myself there at a night attended almost solely by Angolans. In advance, and during the night itself, my friends attempted with some hilarity to teach me how to dance in the appropriate style for 'Kizomba' music. This is a type of popular dance music specific to Angola, being broadly similar to some types of Kwaito in South Africa. The female dance involves a (painfully) slow hip gyration and controlled hand movement as if to draw attention to the 'heat' of the finely-tuned pelvic patterns. My friends were clearly revelling in demonstrating their high prowess in this difficult dance form by seeing how hard it was for me to imitate. The night allowed these young Angolan single mothers a space to be young, sexual and attractive. They could relax and enjoy life away from the responsibility of child care and the angst of waiting for an asylum decision. It was a chance in their lives, dominated by experiences of the unfamiliar, to be proficient and superior. It was also a chance in their relationships with me to exchange some specialized cultural knowledge, while conversations in their homes were often dominated by them asking me about the asylum system and British society.

It was noticeable at community events incorporating a number of nationalities, such as the CAWEH launch, that people would only dance to the music they knew best. As the nationality of the music changed, so would the constitution of the dance floor. Different moments of events might be made Kurdish with line dancing, or made Congolese with soukous music and dancing. Other research has found that defending boundaries of identity through music and dance may become even more important in the country of asylum owing to exile and nostalgia for past lives (Kaiser, 2006, Van Aken, 2006). Nzou, the leader of the Zimbabwean RCO told me how he had never listened to Zimbabwean music in Zimbabwe: 'it's only here when I never hear it that I've started listening to it', he said. In December 2003 he was able to visit Zimbabwe (having entered Britain as a spouse on his wife's work permit). While there, his friends expressed surprise that he spent his time in England listening to Zimbabwean music rather than being up-to-date with the latest American and UK hits, as they had expected. Music events organized by private promoters attract large numbers: dispersal has created significant audiences for musicians from key refugee nations across the UK. Events that never previously existed in Leeds and Yorkshire now happen with frequency, most notably Persian (Iranian), Kurdish and Zimbabwean. Musicians who previously may have only played in London now make

regular visits to the UK to tour venues in various cities³². Concentrated refugee populations are indicated by tour locations and ticket outlets: Manchester, Birmingham, Luton or Milton Keynes, and Bradford.

In keeping with the noted propensity for children and young people to adopt new cultural forms more quickly than their parents (Dawson, 2001, Stanley, 2001), a desire to reproduce 'past' cultural forms through music and dancing may vary across generations. At a night organized by Zimbabweans a mixture of African and US/UK hip-hop, RnB and African electronic dance music dominated. Later in the evening the DJ put on a couple of older, more 'traditional' Zimbabwean songs which cleared the dancefloor, apart from an enthusiastic middle-aged man in a brightly-patterned 'African' shirt. The on-looking younger, American-label-clad generation strongly and openly conveyed their sense of cultural cringe and astonishment at his lack of 'cool'. The dance floor provides a space to negotiate 'local'-global interfaces, where US and UK music genres and dancing styles are appropriated rather than imitated, as Van Aken has observed in her study of the re-invention of dance among Palestinians in the Jordan Valley (2006). It is notable that most of the African nights advertised 'RnB and hip hop' alongside African genres (see flyers shown earlier) when the Leeds night scene (and indeed, global music industry) is already dominated by this music (cf Gilroy, 2002 (1987)). This shows how events do not simply reproduce 'traditional' or global/ UK forms, but incorporate both, replicating neither. As Van Aken states of Palestinian dabkeh dance events: 'the imitation of Western dance is not a mere execution of exogenous cultural models and steps [it is an] effective appropriation and reinterpretation' (Van Aken, 2006: 219). Transnational interchanges are complex and 'flexible' and not just a cultural case of 'win or lose' (Ong, 1999).

Dancing may provide a way of embodying home, and of gaining freedom. To dance is to demonstrate practices requiring high competence in artistic and physical movement. Hage, quoting Bourdieu, sees home as a place of 'maximal bodily knowledge' where one has a 'well-fitted habitus' (Hage, 1997). He states: 'this sense of familiar knowledge implies spatial and practical control which in turn creates a sense of security' (1997: 103). Meanwhile Miller, in his study of women's 'wining' (carnival dancing) in Trinidad suggests it may be seen as 'absolute freedom' (Miller, 1991). For the women in his study, wining may provide

³² 'World music' events should be differentiated from those of new migrants, although, as Brady and Put found in Dublin, at times there are intersections when musicians draw both constituencies to the same event (Brady and Put, 2006). As they noted, musicians may mediate such a differentiation, for example by switching language to address different parts of the audience

a release from general pressures, for example, unemployment or female oppression in Trinidadian society (Miller, 1994). Linking this with clothing, he further notes that the costumes worn by women during carnival provide a 'sea of identical designer costume where the individual draws on the anonymity of the crowd' (Miller, 1991: 335). He describes wining as an expression of free sexuality 'which has no object but itself, and most especially it is a sexuality not dependent upon men' (Miller, 1991: 333). The importance of spontaneity in wining is central, he suggests, meaning that 'freedom here is, almost by definition, *a moment*, that is an event, not an enduring state' (Miller, 1991: 334 emphasis added). Miller's observations, I suggest, may be usefully applied to the role of music and dancing in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. Discussions with individuals and party organizers emphasized that social events were paramount as an escape from the drudgery of daily boredom, the high stress caused by the asylum system and every-day experiences of social exclusion.

Music is also enjoyed away from the diasporic public sphere: music recordings on tapes and CDs constitute important items of exchange among friends. A market for music is indicated by the increasing availability of music from nations represented among dispersed refugees in Leeds. The photo below shows the wall behind the counter at 'Super Shandez' Persian food store filled with CDs, DVDs and cassettes (fig. 7). 'Ragini music' opened in Harehills near to the large Grand Mosque in Harehills, a specialized Afghan music shop also stocking Iranian CDs and DVDs (see photo fig. 6). In Leeds city centre a percussion shop with the largest stock of African music CDs outside of London formerly marketed to the British 'world' music scene, but has seen heightened demand since the start of dispersal. Following requests, the shop began stocking cassette tapes again, having previously stopped, and became an outlet for promoters selling tickets for performances of big African names. The largest part of the stock is devoted to Congolese and Zimbabwean/ South African music.



Plate 7 Ragini Afghan/ Persian music store Plate 8 Music at Super Shandez

The distinction of identities through music and dancing is one of the clearest modes of cultural differentiation. While dancing and music are known for their importance for migrant cultural reproduction, and hold a dominant role in 'celebratory' approaches to multiculturalism (alongside food (Hage, 1997)) dancing may have a particular importance for asylum seekers and refugees as a form of 'homely' practice. Dancing, and gaining access to opportunities to dance by getting the right music and attending music events became a salient theme in the research. As a researcher I was gauged on my dedication to cultural understanding and sharing in learning new dances; my 'incompetent participation' recorded in fieldnotes only later triggering an awareness of the power and value of dancing (Okely, 1992: 16-17). Though people migrating through the asylum route may have little opportunity to bring material goods, all come with their bodies and the competencies of bodily praxis. Dancing may be an especially important way for people to establish some freedom and individuality in the context of lives that are marked by powerlessness and subsumption under 'refugee' and ethnic groupings.

The suggestion that continuity and cultural reproduction provides some security and shared sense of belonging—a moment of community—need not be dependent upon a notion of the 'home' country as the ideal habitat for refugees. Literature in refugee studies often hangs on to simplistic binaries that paint the country of exile as strange (Malkki, 1995b, Malkki, 1997a), yet transnational interactions are dynamic and flexible, eschewing the opposition of integration and encapsulation frequently attributed to migrants (Steen Preis, 1997, Ong, 1999, Werbner, 2005).

7.5 Events as integration, as home-building in the UK

Central to Cohen's symbolic approach to community is the question of dealing with dissent within communities, which he overcomes by suggesting that while people may form communities around central symbols, these are variously interpreted. Cohen acknowledges the significance of rituals and events for strengthening the perception of boundaries for insiders and outsiders. He also notes that excessive attention by sociologists and anthropologists on function and form of community organization may have led to unjustified assumptions about the meanings of these forms for members (Cohen, 1985: 70). It was suggested earlier that the study of socializing in the lives of refugees should be contextualized within daily lives often characterized by social isolation and boredom. Such

a distinction may also be made in analysing the performance of cultural knowledge in the diasporic public sphere and quotidian common-sense aspects of practical knowledge (Werbner, 2005). In comparison to the more mundane confrontations of 'own' and 'other' culture that migrants face daily when going to the shops, getting on a bus, or deciding what to eat, for example, dance, music and clothes, along with food, are matters of cultural reproduction that attract considerable popular and academic debate. These visible, public boundary-markers are central symbols in the contestation between 'national community' and minority rights and practices in multicultural Britain.

Recently in the UK, the fear of a multicultural society highly fractured along lines of 'othered' differences perpetuated by encapsulated, unified migrant populations has been given momentum by certain key figures. Trevor Phillips, the Chief Executive of the Commission for Racial Equality, gave a speech which became highly publicized in which he warned of 'sliding into US-style segregation' (e.g. Woods and Leppard, 2005), and when David Blunkett was Home Secretary he stated in the wake of the Bradford and Burnley 'riots' that all immigrants should speak English in the home (Werbner, 2005). The idea of 'exclusive' social practices opposing integration is also apparent in some migration literature. Abner Cohen, for example, suggests in relation to the West Indian Notting Hill Carnival in London 'if these immigrants were integrated economically and socially within British society, they would not need such an exclusive gathering' (Cohen, 1991: 186). While he seeks to demonstrate how unhelpful and uncooperative attitudes towards the organization of the carnival have cemented West Indians' general sense of social exclusion in British society, his opposition of an 'exclusive gathering' to integration is clear.

The reproduction of cultural practices or embracing of new influences from the country of exile is also a matter of considerable contestation within refugee groups; attention to each may change over time and differ according to individual taste, generational difference or gender (cf Huisman, 2005). Some refugees constructed excessive attachment to 'traditional' practices as regressive and culturally isolationist. On commenting on the wearing of special or traditional clothes at Kurdish parties, Kojir noted disparate views among Kurdish people he knows. He wanted to distance from those who think it is bad to learn English or change your ways owing to a perception of losing or polluting Kurdishness. Conversely, he felt those concerned about tradition would look down on people considered to be getting on with their lives in the UK, learning English and becoming adapted to UK life: 'like, if they see you eating a sandwich', he explained. This was perpetuated elsewhere, as I sometimes felt that association with me or other UK citizens was considered something of an

'integration trophy' for some refugees, while conversations sometimes conveyed a sense of cringe or snobbery towards those 'clinging' to 'traditional' spaces such as parties and cafes. Among both refugees and British people, demotic discourses often perpetuate the construction of 'ethnic' cultural practices as a sign of the supposed lack of commitment of ethnic minorities to their 'host' nation, and of the pristine cultural preservation of practices from other places.

The ambiguous role of music as evoking both 'tradition' and 'innovation' is recognised by Baily and Collyer in their review of studies about the role of music for migrants (Baily and Collyer, 2006). Ritualized repetition of music may be seen as leading to cultural stagnation, capturing the moment people left (Baily and Collyer, 2006: 174). For forced migrants in particular, the diasporic space of exile groups may provide the closest approximation of the culture left behind, as 'often the displacement is not only spatial, but temporal' if the culture or the place with which the migrant is familiar has moved on or no longer exists (Baily and Collyer, 2006: 170). RCOs, and the places they occupy provide sites for the expression and reinforcement of cultural symbols (Rex and Josephides, 1987, Wahlbeck, 1998). Most Leeds RCOs do not yet have established office space, so events may be especially important for forming a presence and staking claims to cultural and social unity. For people otherwise largely isolated to socializing in the domestic sphere, large parties and events provide a 'safe' space for cultural expression. However, shared symbols do not denote consensus—they are malleable (Cohen, 1985). The celebration of unity and organization among some ethnic communities may overlook diversity and conflict within migrant populations (Gold, 1992). In respect to clothing, for some dressing well may be a strategy to challenge marginalization in wider society (Huisman, 2005). Others seek strength through strategies of invisibility through assimilation with mainstream dress, dancing and musical tastes. Some people move between these strategies in different social contexts.

Any discussion of the social events and activities of asylum seekers and refugees must be framed by an overwhelming sense of exploration and newness—people do not feel they know or understand their own lives. There are no established social practices to study. The sense of holding an unfamiliar social status in a new and strange country, and the confusions these lead to, cannot be overemphasized. My asking about the reasons and purpose of events, and significances of their features would be met with confusion, sometimes dejection and mixed emotions. Indeed, as people realized I attended many community events, my questions to them would often be turned back on myself, seeking

explanation. Although refugees often considered social events in the UK as novel, this is notwithstanding elements of continuity and familiarity—indeed, as the events described indicate, a combination of certain elements in the same space and time strive for reconstructions of ‘home’. While social events (for some) may be one of the key examples of people coming together beyond small, fragmented social networks, the lack of family structure and established relationships, among other things, make strange the experience of togetherness for refugees.

Simplistic constructions of bipolar opposition in the idea of being caught ‘between two cultures’ are reliant on conceptualizations of sovereign nation-states, assuming ‘the purity or naturalness, wholeness or wholesomeness of origins, identities, communities, cultural traditions, or nationalities’ (Malkki, 1995b: 516). As Vertovec notes ‘many policy-makers and members of the public assume a zero-sum game: that is, it is presumed that the “more transnational” migrants are, the “less integrated” they must be’ (Vertovec, 2006: 27).

Simplistic approaches to winning or losing ‘own’ or ‘other’ culture have given way to more complex notions of hybridity (Werbner, 1997, Ong, 1999), seemingly ignored in discussions that stress continuities with ‘home’. Functional-structural approaches in studies of transnationalism and globalization encourage descriptions of how relationships across two or more states are interlinked and interdependent, sometimes to the neglect of local conditions (Appadurai, 1993, Ong, 1999). Focussing exclusively on transnational interconnections risks artificially emphasizing similarities of lives lived across nations, while glossing over significant transformations in how people’s lives are lived out locally (Werbner, 2005). More dynamic notions of hybridity and cosmopolitanism have emerged from a move towards a focus on social process in migration (Brettell, 2000, Vertovec, 2006). Commenting on British Pakistani ‘community’ practices, Werbner suggests that the notion of ‘reproduction’ is not a static concept implying simple continuity of culture or class between South Asia and Britain: ‘It has to be grasped as a local class, gendered and intergenerational power struggle, in Britain, waged through symbolic objects, and responsive to British class and life-style choices’ (Werbner, 2005: 10). However, concepts of fluidity and hybridity have often not been sufficiently applied in the study of refugees (Malkki, 1995b).

Against the tendency to view reproduction of ‘cultural’ practices as countering integration, and promoting ethnic encapsulation, it may be argued that ‘homely’ features of social events promote integration, rather than counter it. Indeed, refugees mostly viewed events as important to their integration, in terms of integration being seen as a two-way process:

the idea that agency is needed by both 'host' and 'migrant' in adapting to one another's ways of being. Hage, writing about the role of ethnic food suggests that by cooking and eating familiar foods rather than looking back, as is frequently implied in migration and 'nostalgia' literature, Lebanese Australians in Sydney are in fact making a home in the present:

'Positively experienced nostalgia does not necessarily involve a desire to 'go back'; most often than not, the 'pull us out of here and deliver us from the tortured life of exile' is a desire to promote the feeling of being there *here*' (Hage, 1997: 108, emphasis in original).

His observations regarding food will be taken up again in the following chapter, but to extend these to refugee parties and music events in Leeds, I suggest that events are both an opportunity to indulge in familiar practices and, in the strangeness of the context, a staking of being here.

Asylum seekers and refugees spend much of their time trying to become proficient in the language and culture of the 'host' society—events provide spaces where people can relax from this constant engagement with the unfamiliar and proudly engage in 'their' culture. Events were depicted by organizers and attendees as helping to communicate out to the wider society, to stake a presence, and legitimate their presence in the UK. They thus hold a dual role in representing 'community' identity and reproducing a sense of home for those who attend, and in communicating a statement of 'community' and culture out to the dominant society (Mankekar, 2005, Kaiser, 2006), and, through video and photos, to family and friends at 'home'. In creating a part of home as elsewhere here, events demonstrate adaptation to being in Britain, and provide a moment of location as a population in UK society. Despite their homeliness, refugee community events are not faithful replications of practices and contexts left behind: events merge the familiar and the strange, continuity and discontinuity.

7.6 Conclusion

In a British context, migrant parties with people in similar dress, listening to music from 'home' and speaking the same language can create an apparent sense of unity—of 'community'. While I contend that music, dancing and clothing are central to forming

spaces of belonging and familiarity at refugee community events, the importance of cultural continuity for emergent refugee social groupings must be treated with caution. The possibility of differential experiences of a central symbol is enabling in theorizing the heterogeneity within groups that may nevertheless commonly identify with aspects of musical events and parties as insiders. The fluidity and dynamism inherent to cultural reproduction further demands that the central symbols around which social events may be constructed are not categorized tightly into affiliations to 'there' or 'here'. These categorizations are matters of personal dilemma and wider social contestation among refugees, whose perceptions are likely to change at different stages of settlement, according to social networks, and in distinct 'community' spaces. Security may be found for some individuals at certain times in culturally distinctive migrant community moments, while flexible approaches to identity also enable blending in with pockets of UK culture.

The extent to which it is ever possible to talk generally about the cultural and social practices of any population is itself questionable, yet the newness of scenarios for recently arrived asylum seekers and refugees in the UK means people are often unsure of the reasons or significances of any given social event or activity. While social phenomena everywhere undergo transformation over time, the context in which socializing takes place is new for those recently arrived. The proposition of a spatial and temporal community moment at social events suggested here needs to be considered as tentative, built on fragmented and precarious social networks. Containing both elements of homely familiarity and strange novelty, the ambiguous nature of events creates a contested domain of new community formations.

8 Food, power and gender

Like the flyers for parties and events discussed in chapter seven, shop frontage may provide hints about cultural origin understandable only to those who recognise them. This chapter explores the significance of authentic home foods and other goods in the daily lives of new arrivals. Food was an identity marker at community events, and in shops and cafes which are sites of commensality and of shared symbolic forms. I contend that food holds a particular importance for refugees and asylum seekers as a locus of lived and imagined community. There are three central aspects to considering food as community: firstly, food as a marker of difference and identity; secondly food-related experiences as constitutive of social ties; and thirdly, food as a form of power. Though this chapter is broadly structured to take these three concerns in turn, difference, commensality and power are interwoven across the material presented. I seek to move beyond a sole focus on 'home' foods as central to migrant cultural continuity to incorporate an understanding of both culinary attempts at homely reconstruction, and adoption of new foods as mediating adaptation. I finally wish to highlight the particular adaptative capacities of women, often associated in the migrant context with tradition and cultural continuity.

8.1 New 'refugee' shops and businesses in Leeds

To anyone walking around Harehills in Leeds in spring 2004, the arrival of significant numbers of refugees from certain countries is evident in the emergence of new shops and cafes. Roundhay Road, the main thoroughfare, boasts a Persian restaurant, a Persian tea room, a Persian general store, the Kurdish 'Mediterranean' restaurant, 'Sumer' and a café called 'Afro-Latino' run by an Angolan couple (plate 9, 10, 11, 15, 16). Up Harehills Road, Temby's Mini-Market display their Zimbabwean flag in the window. Inside, the small shop is stacked high with 'Twiza' maize, Zimbabwean beer, and staples such as rice, baby food and breakfast cereals produced by large multinational companies, but sourced from Southern Africa. Stuck on the door is a piece of paper with the Zimbabwean dollar to pound exchange rate, scribbled in pen to keep up with rapid inflation in Zimbabwe. On nearby Harehills Lane competing Kurdish hairdressers, 'Kurdistan' and 'Nawroz' have set up opposite each other (plate 12 and 13) just along from the Kurdish Diyko Cafeteria (plate 14). In other parts of Leeds too, new businesses opened, including more Persian restaurants, and an Ethiopian shop in a small market inside the city centre Merrion shopping centre. I was told four or five Kurdish hairdressers opened in Leeds in 2003 and 2004.

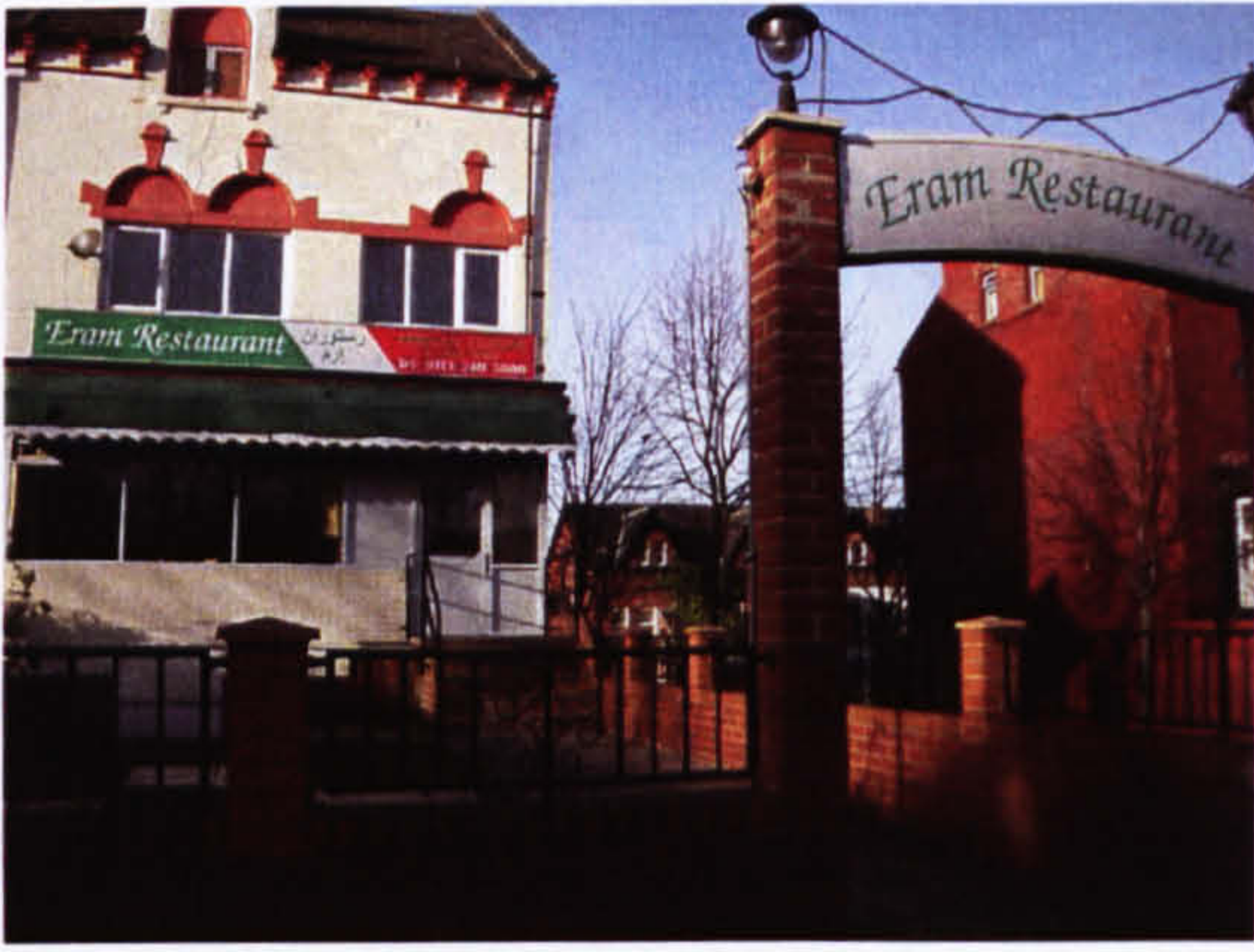


Plate 9 Eram Persian Restaurant



Plate 10 Darvish Persian Traditional Tea House



Plate 11 Super Shandez Persian Store

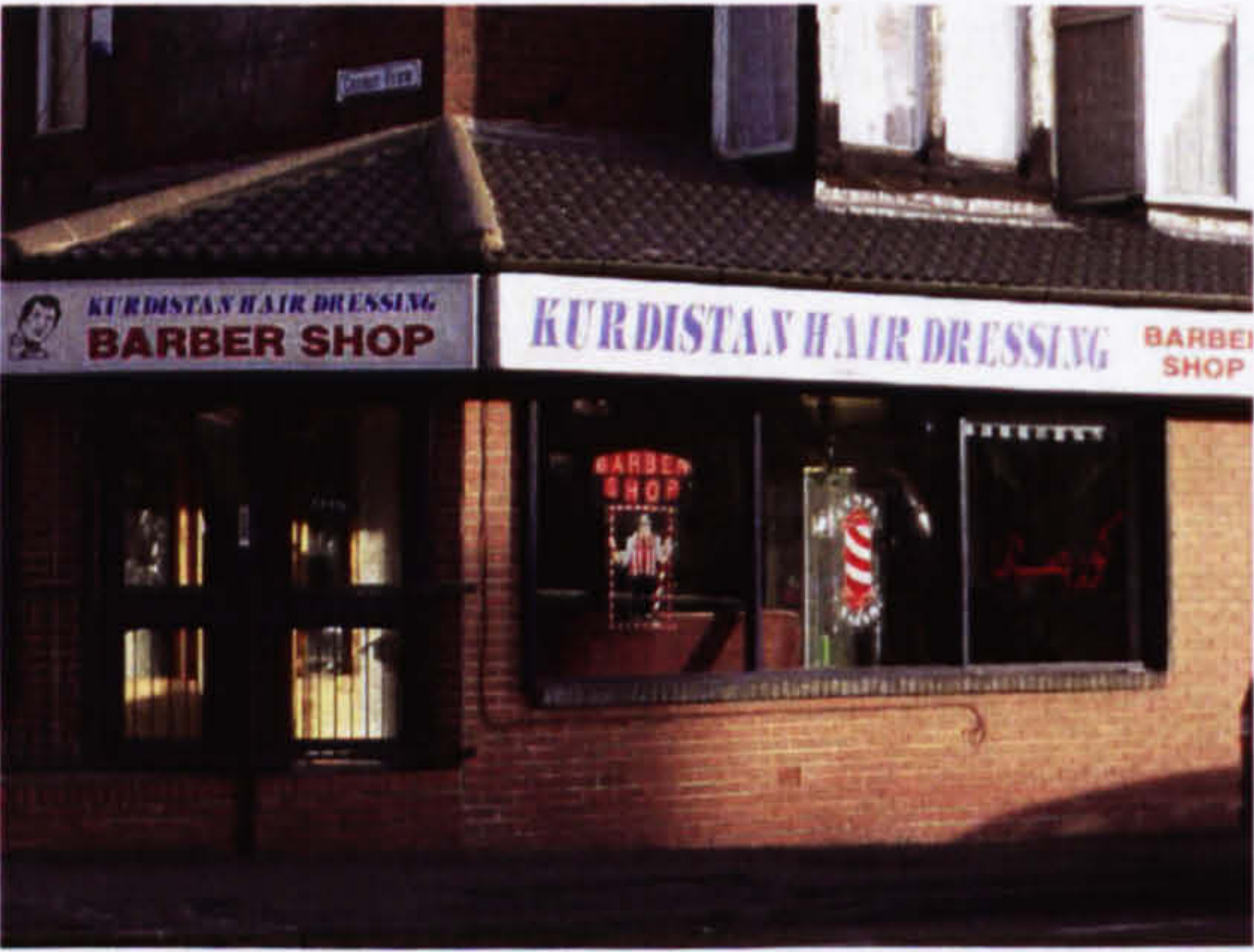


Plate 12 Kurdistan Hairdressing



Plate 13 Nawroz Hairdressers



Plate 14 Diyko Cafeteria



Plate 15 Sumer Restaurant

In addition to new enterprises, some existing businesses have adapted to serve the demand of a new customer base. The Costcutter supermarket in Lincoln Green (the area of highest density NASS housing in Leeds) went from marketing to what could be characterized as 'bargain British' food to including yams, chillies and mangoes in its fruit and vegetable section and stocking manioc flour, large bags of rice and maize meal (plate 20). The availability of African and Middle Eastern vegetables and products steadily increased at Leeds City Markets, both at existing stalls, and with a new African/ Caribbean stand; once a week there was a stall selling African cloth in the outside market.

Like flyers for music events, these shops, businesses, cafes and restaurants employ varying levels of identity markers that display their national, cultural or ethnic affiliations. Some are direct and obvious, such as Kurdistan hairdressers. The Iranian places on Roundhay Road use green and red national colours in their frontage, state that they are 'Persian' and combine English with Farsi script in their signs. The Kurdish restaurant a few doors away, however, calls itself 'Mediterranean', with an additional banner in English and Arabic declaring the cuisine to be Mesopotamian. One would have to know (or guess) it is Kurdish, or to recognise the name 'Sumer' as Kurdish, to differentiate it from the growing number of 'Mediterranean' and Middle Eastern cafes in Leeds. Of the two adjacent phone card shops on Harehills Lane, one was preferred by the Ethiopian man I knew living nearby because the owner was Somali—though you wouldn't be able to tell this from the outside (plate 18 and 19). The Kurdish grocery store on Harehills Lane called 'Gihan' (Sorani for 'world') had lettering in Kurdish national colours—but unless these markers are known by a person passing they would be unlikely to 'see' it as Kurdish (plate 21).

The rapid emergence of shops, cafes and restaurants representing major refugee populations demonstrates the centrality of food to migrant praxis. Food outlets have a dual role of representing community boundaries both to those within and those without. National symbols homogenise divisions and diversity within states, reflecting hegemonic national culture, as noted by Mankekar in her study of Indian grocery stores in the US San Francisco Bay Area. She notes how the collection and display of products from different parts of India are 'lumped together', and that the notion of 'Indian food' collapses 'the immense diversity of the culinary traditions of the subcontinent' (Mankekar, 2005: 204). Nevertheless, Mankekar considers Indian grocery stores to be crucial nodes in the transnational circulation of texts, images, and commodities between India and the diaspora, enabling variable constructions of homeland, identity and community.



Plate 16 Afro Latino Restaurant and club



Plate 17 Inside Temby's minimarket



Plate 18 Somali phone shop

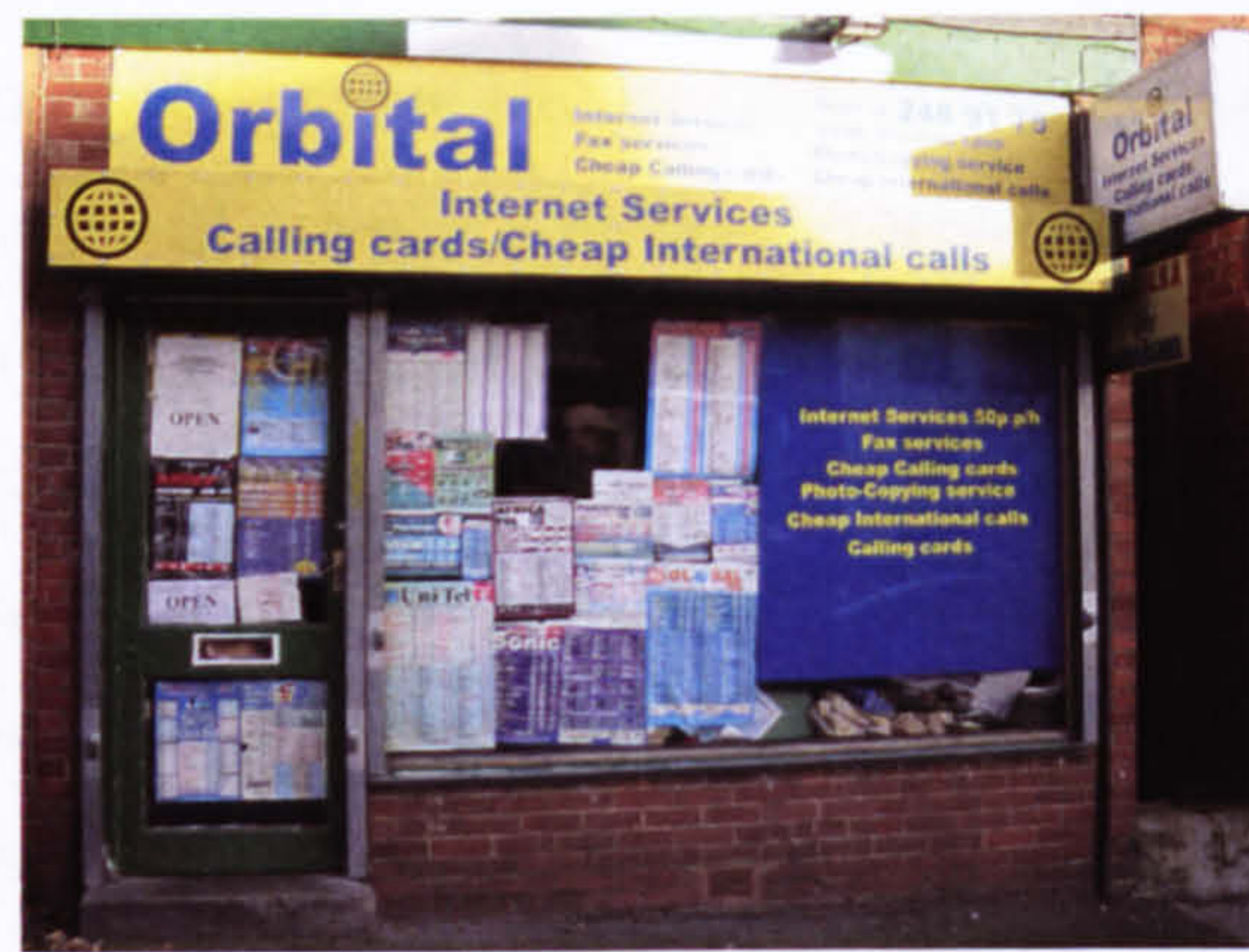


Plate 19 Another phone shop next door

[The sign for the Somali shop, Phone Plus Public Call Office/ Internet Cafe, advertises its products and services: 'Fax send & receive, Photocopy, Printing, *Travel Agents, DVD & CDs, Mobile Phones & Accessories*' (my emphasis)].



Plate 20 Maize for sale at Costcutter



Plate 21 Gihan Kurdish supermarket

The polyvocal capacity of commodities evoke a range of responses for the men and women who patronize them (Mankekar, 2005: 202). The Indian grocery stores 'mark the urban landscape with specific signifiers of ethnicity and 'Indian' culture and, hence, enable Indian communities to represent themselves both to themselves, and to the dominant

community' (Mankekar, 2005: 203). Likewise, Tremayne notes how ethnic divisions between Malays and Chinese are 'crystallized in the city streets' of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia through food consumed in public food stalls (Tremayne, 1993). The particular role of shops and restaurants became evident to me not in Leeds, but in London when I made regular visits during fieldwork to see Ana and Damian from Colombia (who moved there from Hull), and Sanai, from Eritrea (who moved there after quickly gaining a positive decision while in Leeds).

8.1.1 Shops and cafes as a statement and legitimation of 'community'

Every visit I made to London to see Ana and Sanai would incorporate a trip to either a Colombian café or an Eritrean restaurant, at their behest. I sometimes wondered whether they wanted to promote to me the 'community' benefits of living in London in comparison to the multiculturally bereft Hull, in Ana's case, or the Eritrean-lacking Leeds, in Sanai's case. Both of them moved to London to be with, or find 'community' (as nationality/culture, and through known friends), but they and I both knew that it had also been a risky, difficult move that often hadn't brought the benefits they imagined. Perhaps they wanted to try and prove to me (and themselves) that there were great benefits to London life, despite the pitfalls. However, I doubt they would be as strategic as that. I felt they wanted to educate me in 'their' culture and cuisine, to 'give' me a bit of their culture, to create a cultural exchange. I consider it equally likely that they simply felt more comfortable in these places because of a sense of familiarity. These cafes and restaurants formed a type of sanctuary of safety through familiarity, security through competency, and relaxation through the enjoyment of home food and drinks; they were places of maximal communicative power (Hage, 1997).

This relaxation was in marked contrast to their discomfort at spending time where they were staying, which in both cases were bereft of homely feeling. At that time, Sanai was living in a room in a run-down hotel—temporary housing while waiting on the housing list. Ana moved frequently being effectively homeless, sleeping on sofas with her infant son, and in one case on a single bed in the kitchen of a two-room damp basement bedsit, also home to mice and rats. Visiting cafes and restaurants either with co-nationals or people from other countries (such as me) perhaps legitimates them and their presence in London, and therefore in the UK. Restaurants and 'ethnic' businesses are like pillars of migrant success—territories that prove the existence of a wider population, whether or not one sees them eating or drinking there.

The cafes and restaurants in London, like those in Leeds, would usually have flyers for music events, leaflets for community organizations, and adverts targeted at the national population catered for by the establishment. These serve to demonstrate that there is a sufficient number of people to create a market not just for culturally-specific eating places, but services, concerts, musical events, parties and private enterprises. These flyers and leaflets could, therefore, be compared to Anderson's assertion of the centrality of what he terms print capitalism in the creation of the imagined community of nationalism (Anderson, 1991 (1983)). Cafes and restaurants openly flaunting their cultural and national affiliation are, perhaps, a bastion of the wider national/ regional/ migrant population ('community') which is otherwise invisible beyond the reaches of one's limited and fragmented social networks. They provide a place to feel safe in a foreign country, experiences of which were otherwise marked by the sense of hostility and racism towards asylum seekers and refugees. Their physical existence, whether one can afford to eat and socialize there or not, is a positive proof of a wider group, a legitimation for being in the UK.

Through the places and experiences in which it is bought and shared, food becomes embedded in social interaction. Mankekar describes how stores also provide spaces for people to gather and exchange important information 'about community events, and where many new arrivals learn about neighbourhoods, schools, and employment opportunities' (Mankekar, 2005: 203). Again, Tremayne notes the same in the Kuala Lumpur food stands, describing them as a form of 'community centre': a place to meet friends, make business contacts, an introduction to city life for rural newcomers, and locations for exchange of news (crucial to people in the informal economy who do not trust official news) (1993). Of the women I knew well in Leeds, I noticed how regular trips to Leeds City Markets became a central organizing feature of their lives. Leeds City Markets became about the only place where I would bump into people I knew from my research, otherwise only seeing people in the context of arranged visits in houses. I also noted that the people in my research would often talk of seeing people there, suggesting that shopping at the market has become habitual practice for many people who have come to Leeds as asylum seekers. Most people said they shop there because it is cheaper than local stores and supermarkets—which is indeed true. Yet, despite the major differences between Leeds market and the markets people were familiar with at home, the basic concept of a market appeared to be an understandable, and thus comfortable form of shopping. Shops and cafes and the practice of spending time at them appeared to be an especially important site of the daily confluence of developing social ties and engaging in imagined, shared values.

The high numbers of people from certain nationalities have clearly been influential in creating a market for new 'ethnic' businesses. Yet, creation of a market through bulk in numbers is not the only factor in the development of 'ethnic' businesses. Refugees' past trades and experience of business in their country of origin, their links in the UK, and the valuing of business and enterprise among compatriots and family also play a part. Alan, a Kurdish friend, told me how hairdressing is a popular trade for men in Kurdistan, hence the creation of five niche hairdressers. As the refugee population is characterized by large proportions of people (several hundred to a thousand or more) from a few 'top asylum' countries (including Iraq, Iran, and Zimbabwe) and smaller (tens to hundreds) populations of people from a great number of other countries, it should be remembered that there are a great number of people from countries with small numbers in the city and with no bespoke services. There is not necessarily a simple equation between number of refugees in Leeds and the appearance of 'ethnic' businesses, as the impact of relatively large numbers of Afghan, Eritrean, Polish³³, Chinese and Congolese refugees has not been so clearly marked with bespoke services and shops (albeit that these markets may have been met by alterations within existing businesses, such as the changes to a Costcutter in Lincoln Green). The relatively rapid appearance of shops representing nations of asylum seekers dispersed to Leeds also indicates the possible influence of the increased speed of trade and transportation in the contemporary era in comparison to periods of former migrations.

8.2 Food, community and difference

Food has long been a subject of sociological and anthropological interest, where it has often been dealt with as an indicator of household structure, and of class differentiation (Douglas, 2002 (1966)). Food is not only a source of nutrition, but is invested with rich symbolic meaning. In exchange and consumption, food products are commodities of economic and social value, along with other items of material culture. Food, particularly among hunter-gatherer societies, links people to land, and in conditions of scarcity or poverty may become a source of conflict (for example, Hetzel and Frith, 1978, Turnbull, 1994 (1972)). Food has also been considered for its symbolic role: the association of meat with masculinity and power (Fiddes, 1993); as mediating perceptions of the body and health (Beardsworth et al., 1997); and in understanding socially constructed aversions and

³³ Since the fieldwork period ended, the impact of new Polish migrants following EU accession is visible with the emergence of jars of Polish pickles and signs in shop windows stating 'Polsky Produkty'.

ideas of disgust across cultures through notions of pollution and taboo (Douglas, 2002 (1966)). These approaches have tended to consider the role of food in relation to social institutions in a single dominant cultural context: the assumption of a situated culture being implicit in such explorations of internally shared meaning systems. Latterly, food has been recognised in ethnic and migration studies for its particular role in constructions of identity, belonging and home in conditions of diversity, movement, and globalization (Gardner, 1993, Tremayne, 1993, Hage, 1997, Mankekar, 2005). It is in keeping with these latter approaches, which highlight food as central to migrant praxis, that I consider the role of food for community among refugees in the diverse context of Leeds, in 'multicultural' Britain.

Taking food as a lens demonstrates the confrontation of community with nation, culture, and social structures. The emotional valence of food highlights the tensions of adaptation and questions of identity. The concept of community shares with nation and culture a tendency for reification, and likewise, a highly contested nature. Cuisine is a tangible symbol of national identity, but any such notion is simultaneously challenged by regional diversity within borders (Mintz, 1996, Mankekar, 2005). The relationship of community to culture, and community to nation, carries confusion and conflation, as identified in the opening chapter on the concept of community. In discussing the role of food, it is pertinent to note the common lexical slippage between community in terms of nation and culture (denoting a large and primarily 'imagined' number of people), and community as a small-scale social structure and analytic tool. Invocations of community slide imperceptibly between large and small scale social groups, and between beliefs, emotions and social relationships. This fluidity is as prevalent in everyday usage as it is in the literature. Moments of commensality not only constitute face-to-face relations but also signify connection to an imagined community: the type of food shared and manner of eating denotes and carries value for unseen others. Following Amit, I concur that a fruitful direction in studies concerning community is in understanding how and where delimited social spheres and community as imagined interact (Amit, 2002). By looking at the different aspects of the role of food in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, my aim here is to explore a domain of 'dynamic interaction' of community as a concept and as actual social relations.

How might food be related to community? While objects (including food and other commodities) neither create nor are simplistically reflective of culture, they are embedded in social life, and through their use and consumption people create meaning (Miller, 1998,

Mankekar, 2005). In both formal and informal settings, the sharing of food was frequently referred to as an, or even the indicator of community. This was often in reference to those considered to be in need—single fathers, for example, receiving the support of single or married women cooking for their children (and them). Both refugees and those who support them refer to the sharing of food and shelter with those who are destitute (with no means of statutory support) as a community activity. This type of support is of great interest to service providers because in planning responses they need to gauge extent to which people will be supported privately ‘in their communities’, working in interaction with such patterns and networks (Lewis, 2007). It was common for RCOs and refugees to say—‘we do this because that is what we do. We share because of our culture’ (or religion), often counterpoising (negatively) with UK ‘culture’. By funding ‘community’ events, refugee agencies expressed an element of meeting an humanitarian aim by providing free food to people on low incomes or those destitute. Food thus becomes a symbol of communal sharing and moral superiority, and invokes a ‘global community’ of humanity.

Sharing food was an area where community was constructed as practice—actualized in social relations rather than imagined. In comparison to the contested domain of RCO discourse, eating together was a practice where communality precluded contestation, adopting the ‘feel-good’ factor of community (Bauman, 2001). The ideological power of food is evident in its prominence in public policy and debate. Council representatives told me that city-level dispersal planning in Leeds considered the distance of housing from purveyors of halal³⁴ meat and mosques, in addition to the purely pragmatic Home Office requirement of not being more than two miles from a main Post Office branch where asylum seekers collect their support. Sensitivity to considering requirements of halal and kosher food boundaries in the provision of lunches at meetings and events is widely considered as a basic pre-requisite of any public service body or voluntary sector organization in a multicultural society. The rogue ham sandwich has a bad reputation of mythical proportions, meeting scornful grumblings at any buffet table.

Food became a prominent campaigning tool against the much maligned asylum seeker voucher system introduced in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. In the first two years of dispersal, support was provided with vouchers that could only be redeemed in certain

³⁴ What is halal was a point of much contestation and perennial debate among all Muslims in my research. For many people coming from Muslim states, being in the UK was the first time they have had to fully consider the idea of halal boundaries in food; non-halal foods were simply not available in their country of origin.

designated shops. Vouchers impeded the chances of asylum seekers buying enough food, as these shops were not the cheapest, and were not permitted to give any change. Further, as noted by Refugee Council commenting on the re-introduction of vouchers for those on Section 4³⁵ support, they ‘prevent people accessing foods appropriate to their culture and religious beliefs’ (Refugee Council, 2006). This was a specific concern in Leeds when dispersal began in 2000, as initially vouchers could only be redeemed at the city centre Morrison’s supermarket which did not stock halal meat.



Plate 22 Asylum Seekers Eat Our Donkeys, Daily Star, 21 August 2003

The construction of asylum seekers as abhorrent, out-of-place folk devils (Cohen, 2003 (1972)) was cemented in the two infamously low points of a tirade of negative media portrayals in 2003, also concerning food. Following up from the Sun’s ‘Swan Bake’ front page which accused destitute asylum seekers of stealing the ‘Queen’s’ swans from Hyde Park for a barbeque, the Daily Star ran a story headlined ‘Asylum Seekers Eat our Donkeys’ (see plate 22) (Medic, 2003, Nicks, 2003). The story continued inside the Daily Star (under

³⁵ Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, also known as ‘hard case’ support, which allows the Secretary of State to provide, or arrange for the provision of facilities for the accommodation of a person and his/ her dependents under certain criteria if their claim has been refused. Of five criteria, the principal one is a requirement to sign up for voluntary return. Others include there being no safe route for return, or a physical impediment to travel for a medical reason.

the headline 'Hands Off Our Asses') alleging the theft of some donkeys that gave rides at Greenwich Royal Park by asylum seekers. The spurious link was outlined as follows: 'donkey meat is a speciality in some East African countries, including Somalia. And two areas near Greenwich–Woolwich and Thamesmead–have large numbers of Somalian (sic) asylum seekers' (Nicks, 2003). These articles are examples of combining constructions of both food and people as out-of-place and so polluting (Malkki, 1995a, Douglas, 2002 (1966)). Needless to say neither story had any foundation, but they nevertheless became perpetuated as urban myths.

What unites the tabloid headlines, culturally sensitive public and voluntary bodies and the idea of 'appropriate' food in the voucher campaign is the prominence of food as a marker of difference in multiculturalism (Hage, 1997). Because of the capacity of food to represent cultures, and therefore, difference, it is also fundamental to constructions of home and belonging for migrants. In his analysis of the importance of food in home-building for Lebanese migrants in Australia, Hage suggests that:

The feeling of community is also crucial for feeling at home. Above all, it involves living in a space where one recognises people as 'one's own' and where one feels recognised by them as such. It is crucially a feeling of shared symbolic forms, shared morality, shared values and most importantly perhaps, shared language. A home is imagined as a space where one possesses maximal communicative power in Bourdieu's sense—that is, the capacity to speak appropriately in a variety of recognisable specific situations. It is a space where one knows that at least some people can be morally relied on for help (family or friends). (Hage, 1997: 103).

Food, as Hage suggests, can have a critical importance in constructions of home and community, bearing relevance to each of the elements he identifies above: recognising a space as 'one's own'; as a shared symbol; as a shared language; as a form of communicative power, and as a form of help. Boundaries of home and community are maintained through food—sharing the food itself, and special foods as shared symbols.

8.2.1 Women's cuisine as identity and culture at 'community' events

Shortly after arriving at any 'community' event I would be collared and led to the food table where someone, usually a woman, would describe the dishes and implore me to try

them. While this was no doubt largely motivated by simple hospitality, and the pragmatic need to describe unfamiliar dishes to the uninitiated, it was always done with great flair and pride. The cuisine on offer directly represented the countries of the people involved in helping to organize the event. In the case of single-nationality-based RCO events this may be a few similar dishes, while events organized by refugee agencies or by multiple RCOs may provide food that was wide-ranging in form and in geographic origin. Women who had cooked would usually tell me about how long they had spent preparing large catering volume dishes. They would sometimes advertise any 'special' ingredients boastfully, emphasizing their authenticity. For example, Marzieh, one of the leaders of the Leeds Iranian Organization would often cook rice—not just for Iranian events—her strong links with the small voluntary sector meant she was often asked to help cater for other parties and community events. I went to one 'refugee' (and thus multicultural) community event where Marzieh took it upon herself to explain to me the available food to the best of her knowledge (there were dishes from many countries). She ended with the rice, pointing out that although I was sure to recognise it as rice, it was *Iranian* rice, owing to the dried redcurrants served with it—'typically Iranian'.

The pride with which food would be presented to me, and the insistence of people that I should eat their food came with an implicit, and occasionally explicit message that by eating 'their' food I was learning about, taking part in, enjoying, and thereby valuing 'their' culture. Of course, my vegetarianism created great despondency about my capacity to fully appreciate and engage in the culinary glory brought to Leeds by refugee populations. Yet the association of food with pride was evident, as was the centrality of food to conceptualizations of cross-cultural learning and interaction. Cuisine can be an 'easy and rewarding' bridge across ethnicities and cultures, albeit a partial and attenuated one (Parker, 2000). Presenting, sharing and enjoying food provided both men and women within 'a community' with an opportunity for individual, group, and cultural pride, and provided a (positive) chance for inter-cultural learning and appreciation.

While the preparation of food was usually done by women, it was men who usually present the public face of refugee community organizations in public meetings and events.

Community events not only provided an opportunity for members and wider circles to get together, but also provided an opportunity for the wives of the leaders, and for other female RCO members to be actively involved in RCO activities through preparing food. Notwithstanding the occasional active woman among RCO committee members, the public face of RCOs was generally male. This was sometimes not for want of trying to

engage women more centrally in formal management. Leeds Iranian Organization stood apart among RCOs in Leeds by having a woman centrally involved in setting up an organization alongside men—but she said they struggled to get a second woman onto the committee that they required to meet the equality stipulations of funding bodies. Marzieh was an Iranian woman who had been here over a decade from an earlier wave of migration—she speaks fluent English and was dedicated to bringing together older and newer Iranian migrants. However, she also said that many of the Iranians who have been here longer mistrust and possibly even dislike the newer arrivals who have come through the asylum system. Meanwhile, she said, those women who have come more recently may be less familiar with the notion of women being publicly involved in leadership or management because of their experiences in a restrictive Islamic state. Like other RCOs, Leeds Iranian Organization hoped that as new arrivals adjusted to UK culture and value systems it would become easier to involve women.

RCOs representing people from African countries spoke of the ‘African culture’ of the sexual division of labour—women doing domestic work in private, men taking public roles in the labour force and ‘community’—as preventing the involvement of women. Perhaps partly because I am a woman researcher, such comments made to me would usually be rapidly followed up with a suggestion by a male leader that they would like to have women in the RCO, but these cultural backgrounds mean women are less likely to want to take part, or to know what to do. Meanwhile, women who were involved in RCOs either directly or as wives of leaders (and indeed some men) would recognise other ways that mean women may have less chance of taking on leadership roles. These included the likelihood of women being involved in childcare and domestic duties, sometimes in addition to having a paid job, and the possibility of women being more socially isolated or not speaking English adequately. Consequently, the power to ‘speak for’ and represent a certain ‘refugee community’, national/regional culture, or other social group the RCO stand for usually lay with men.

Cooking, in contrast, provides a community role where women’s expertise dominates. Overwhelmingly, RCO leadership was seen as a man’s role, while cooking was expected of women, (though it must not be assumed it is always women who cook—food for an Iranian meal organized by LASSN was cooked by a man). Offering typical cultural dishes was an almost essential prerequisite of any community event. Advertising the provision of food was a promotional technique, but the significance of food at events reached beyond this basic function. The preparation of food incorporated and empowered women to represent

‘community’, and to do so proudly and visibly, whether or not those who prepared the food attended the event. This (limited) power of women as providers of food, or, more precisely, cuisine, was replicated in the private domain; this will be discussed below. Before that, I will look at how exchanging food and other products constituted and augmented social ties.

8.3 The overlaying of informal networks of exchange and support

Vivi, a woman from Angola who lived seven years in London before being dispersed, regularly visited friends there. Her friends in Leeds were also linked into social networks formed in London, or that had been created through their friendship with Vivi and trips to London. During college and school holidays it was common for their children—all of similar pre-school or primary school age—to spend time together in the care of one or more adults in either of the cities. Vivi or one of her friends might travel to London on a bus with three or four children from different parents to leave them there for several days. In return, Vivi and her friends would occasionally receive children from London who would stay for a few days before one of the parents would come to pick them up. Although these trips were primarily motivated by spending time with friends, and giving some childcare relief, they also provided an opportunity to stock up on familiar foods not available in Leeds. Vivi was particularly keen on ‘Chouriço de vaca’—tinned beef sausages available in the Portuguese delicatessens in Brixton. At first she would bring, or ask people to bring farofa—a type of coarse toasted manioc flour used as a topping for almost anything. One day I went to see Vivi and she announced with a sense of great victory that she had found somewhere to buy farofa in Leeds following a tip-off from an Angolan woman. However, not everyone lives close to the shops that might sell such things, and especially with children to care for it is not easy to travel across Leeds on public transport for a special product. This means that if someone went to buy a special food they knew others would want they would often buy several and hand them out to their friends.

In this case, the possibility of shopping for familiar or favoured goods probably wouldn’t have warranted a trip to London in itself. But the childcare and friendship network created the chance to benefit from the wider availability of international food in London, and the comfort of shopping in London’s strongly black and visibly African boroughs. In Werbner’s study of Pakistanis in Manchester she also notes that one network often leads to, or implies others, as ‘exchanges initiated on the shop floor extend into domestic and inter-

domestic domains' (1995: 233). Without the detailed social network analysis such as that done by Werbner, I am limited in my capacity to elaborate on the overlaying of networks. However, I often encountered examples of people using trips to London and other cities to visit friends to take advantage of shopping opportunities, and also of procuring items through friends visiting them in Leeds.

While day-to-day shopping formed a fundamental social activity, informal exchanges of foods and commodities were embedded in other activities and networks. Social networks enable the procurement and exchange of goods and food, while, conversely, the exchange of goods, especially gifts may constitute and shape social networks (Werbner, 1995). For example, acquaintances can become friends by providing information to new arrivals, informing them of where to go to get appropriate food and items, such as halal meat. Knowledge about a new shop offering longed-after goods or an existing shop beginning to stock new items of significance would spread rapidly around social circles. Perhaps the most significant source of procuring specialized goods in terms of community and social networks were the informal processes of exchange and gifting that operate between friends and associates.

Despite the growth of trades and businesses to meet the tastes and desires of new arrivals in Leeds most people in my research relied on getting special products from other cities—either themselves, or through friends or acquaintances. Sometimes people made special trips just to buy goods—the Zimbabwean RCO committee arranged a car to go to Manchester to collect Zimbabwean beer and other items for a community event they had been asked to cater for. However, most day-to-day procurement and exchange of food and goods seemed to overlay other forms of social networks and social reasons for travel.

In addition to the prominent new businesses in Leeds, there was a less visible growth in private business. I once heard that an Ethiopian woman was running a private restaurant making home-cooked food welcomed by single men from her kitchen somewhere in Chapeltown. Several sources reported that the Leeds Somalia Community, who had a property in Harehills Lane, ran a roaring trade in chaat—a type of plant with amphetamine properties used widely in Eastern Africa (see Harris, 2004, Patel and Murray, 2005). An Ethiopian man who went there for coffee told me it is normal to see a group of men waiting for the shop to open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays when deliveries arrived from either Yemeni contacts in Sheffield, or Somalis in Sheffield or London. (Incidentally, this place later changed their name to 'East African Community', presumably

in response to their wider clientele from other Horn of Africa countries). These types of exchanges are likely to be central to building social networks for some individuals, but their illicit nature makes them harder to uncover. A more established topic of migrant studies are forms of transnational exchange of goods and food, considered briefly next.

8.3.1 Transnational networks of exchange

In migrant literature, the exchange of foods and commodities between people in different nations is frequently considered an important feature of transnational social fields. The impact of migrants on the families, places and 'communities' they leave behind is receiving growing interest in migrant and development literature. Gardner's ethnography of Talukpur, a village in Bangladesh, highlights particular position of food (alongside other commodities) in constructions of home and homeland revealing the impact migration has for both those who migrate and those left behind. Most households in the village are involved in migration, so the movement of food, people and goods comes to symbolise the power of both 'home' and 'foreign countries', or 'Desh-Bidesh'. Gardner makes particular mention of the importance of food:

The bags of migrants returning to Britain are often filled with chutney, pickled mangoes and dried fish. Once in Britain these are distributed to the kin of village neighbours living nearby. Likewise, Bangladeshi food is readily available in many British cities. In London, Sylheti fish is flown in daily. In season jackfruit (selling for twenty or thirty pounds each) can be bought in Brick Lane and Spitalfields market. Most families consume rice from Bangladesh or India, along with betel nut, spices and a wide variety of Bengali vegetables. (Gardner, 1993: 11)

The consumption of rice grown on one's own land, and fish caught in the river in Talukpur is thought to be particularly nourishing because of its capacity to link to the desh—homeland—considered sacred, and the social group which inhabits it (Gardner, 1993). Food, then, creates a direct link to homeland for those in the UK, gaining its power through an essential link to a place of shared Sylheti origins. Her study is important given that the impact of migration on the lives of those in the developing world has received so little attention (Watkins, 1997). However, it is pertinent to note the differences between studies of labour migrants, such as Gardner's and Mankekar's, and people who enter the UK through the asylum system. The types of return, repeat, or yo-yo migration enjoyed by the South Asian migrants in their studies enable the easier exchange of goods in both

directions—from 'home' to the UK and from the UK 'home'. The increasingly restrictive features of asylum migration limit exchanges of food and other commodities and so they are more likely to be an important feature of constructions of home and belonging among other types of migrants.

Most importantly, Geneva Convention Refugee Status is given with the proviso that people cannot return to the country from which they have claimed asylum. To do so gives states the right to withdraw this status. This is not to say that return or repeat migration, or visits, do not take place. I often heard of people who had gained refugee status arranging to meet family in a third country as soon as they could organize travel documents. For example, Najma managed to meet her father and two brothers in a third country after getting her status. Zimbabweans spoke of people meeting up with family in South Africa or Zambia. One Kurdish man I know even made two clandestine border crossings between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan to visit family, find a fiancé, who he then married on the second visit, before returning to the UK to work and raise the funds to bring her to join him. This does not mean it is easy to transport foods, clothing or goods in such visits. Even meeting in a third country can pose significant risk, requiring cautious border crossings. It is not the kind of activity that makes easy the exchange of suitcases filled goods like the chutney, pickle, and sari-filled bags Gardner describes being brought back by Sylheti migrants. In the case of the Kurdish man, he told me that he crossed at night on donkey in either direction, making it impossible for him to carry the items his friends and family plied him with before departure. In fact, in recompense, he brought me a small vase from Iran as a 'second-best', quasi-authentic homely product. Sometime after the fieldwork period had ended I visited Sanai in London after she had been successfully reunited with her children through family reunion. Her children had left everything they owned—all their possessions and clothes—for her sister's family and friends, and arrived at Heathrow in the clothes they were standing up in and only one piece of luggage—an elaborate Eritrean coffee making set (plate 23). Sanai was at pains to treat me to a 'real' Eritrean coffee during my brief visit—by then in her own flat, with the facilities to create her own homeliness without needing to visit an Eritrean restaurant. The set included a mini electric stove and a decorated box that stored a clay coffee pot, a jar of fresh coffee beans, place mats, an incense holder and incense, little coffee cups and a sieve.



Plate 23 Coffee making set brought to the UK by Sanai's children

The importance attached to familiar products, the showcasing of food at community events, and the lengths to which people will go to procure authentic, or quasi-authentic goods demonstrate that their value and worth exceeds their practical function. Food and material goods are invested with the power to represent an entire culture or people, to invoke feelings of nostalgia, to demonstrate and reinforce identity, and to build homely feelings (Mintz, 1996, Hage, 1997, Mankekar, 2005).

8.4 Nostalgia, return and the contested value of food

While I marvelled at the growing availability of diverse foods in Leeds people in my research were often critical of the quality and taste of fresh produce in particular. I had a lengthy discussion with Sara from Cameroon on categorizations of yam and cassava and their availability and cost at different outlets in Leeds. Having established that almost all of the basic ingredients she had been familiar with at home were available in Leeds I commented to this effect, to which Sara dismissively responded 'but none of them really taste the same as at home'. The yams available in Leeds provided sufficient value coherence (Appadurai, 1986) for her to consider them as a 'home' food, but their inferior flavour also conjured longing for yams grown by her mother, stimulating a sense of loss and dislocation.

Familiar food and material goods may create a sense of security, and represent a form of continuity. However, in considering the relationship of people to things, it is necessary to remember that forming continuity with lives left behind through practices of eating and

drinking isn't necessarily a positive experience. Deka, who was pessimistic about the increasing divisions and hostility between different clans in the city as the Somali population grew, criticized the Somali women's group, saying 'they just go there and drink tea and argue'. Likewise she said of the Leeds Somali Community cafe 'they have a nice place with nice name written, but it is just a place for Somali men to drink coffee. They don't help people. It is just for themselves.' The solidarity implied by sharing time drinking tea or coffee spelled for Deka more chances for the tribal conflict that had precipitated their exile to be entrenched in the UK.

Things are inextricable from social life (Mankekar, 2005), and as Appadurai points out, 'politics (in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power) is what links value and exchange in the social life of commodities' (Appadurai, 1986: 57). Both Hage and Mankekar note how foods may evoke ambivalent and contradictory emotions, either positive or negative nostalgia. Both the absence and presence of things may trigger nostalgia (Hage, 1997), a nostalgia which only exists because of what has been left behind. Importantly in relation to forced migrants, they also point out that a yearning for home should not be equated with a desire to return, as is sometimes implied. In refugee literature too, Malkki points out the assumption that refugees have a desire to return (1995b). No-one I met spoke of a desire to go 'home', or at least, not in its present state. As discussed in chapter four on people's housing experiences, conversations were overwhelmingly dominated by talking about the asylum system, day-to-day survival and learning about local UK contexts. People rarely spoke of past experiences and likewise attempts to talk about aspirations for the future were usually rebuffed. People actively stop themselves from thinking about the future when it is so uncertain, and because the asylum system seems so arbitrary. The past may be overshadowed by painful memories making contemplating 'home' difficult, especially when return seems unlikely or impossible. This hiatus emphasizes the importance of temporal enjoyment of food in the present. I shall return to this aspect below.

Engaging with and enjoying the nostalgia of food varied across individuals, as indicated in the examples just given in relation to home-orientation. Two further significant areas of variation suggested by the research are economy and gender. The availability of goods in the UK, and increasingly in Leeds, doesn't necessarily mean everyone can have access to them with ease. Access depends in part on having the knowledge or contacts to procure them, and having sufficient funds to pay the premium for special items. A monetary value is added to goods that migrate, while the value of goods transforms through migration.

8.4.1 The value of migrating foods

One day I went to visit one of the committee members of the Zimbabwean Refugee Community in Leeds. When I arrived at his house he was out, but his wife Beatrice invited me in for a cup of tea (much to my delight as I had had few opportunities to talk with the wives of the men I knew in the community organization). We chatted, and the topic came around to the Zimbabwean shop near the end of her street. It had been open a couple of months. Beatrice told me how she thought the shop had probably opened in Leeds to profit from the new market for Zimbabwean goods, as previously Zimbabweans would drive to a Zimbabwean shop in Luton to buy things. Because the things in the shop were expensive, she only shopped there occasionally as a special treat.

The shop sold various Zimbabwean things—biltong (dried salted meat strips), Castle beer, certain creams, a type of small, salted, dried fish caught in Kariba dam (*Matemba*) and soft drinks. Although some of these things were considered quintessentially Zimbabwean—such as the *matemba* fish, Castle beer and biltong, others are products that can be bought in the UK, such as Nestle baby food, rice, and sweets, albeit sometimes under different brand names. It is worth noting that none of these products are exclusively Zimbabwean—*matemba* is eaten on the other side of Kariba dam in Zambia, Castle beer and biltong would be considered by most as South African, not Zimbabwean. But their significance and role in the lives of the people I knew from Zimbabwe are as items which embody Zimbabwe-as-home. Arguments can be made about the extent to which any food or good can ‘truly’ represent (or embody) a culture or nation. It is the symbolic role of food as an identity marker, and the meanings made by those in my research which I wish to focus on here. Lemon Twist, mentioned below, might be produced in South Africa—but for Beatrice and her family (and no doubt other Zimbabweans), it is Zimbabwean, particularly in contrast to UK food and goods.

Beatrice explained that they sometimes go to get Lemon Fanta from the Continental Stores shop which sells African-origin Lemon Fanta, not UK Fanta. Beatrice thought it was from Nigeria, not Zimbabwe, but it has the same flavour of the Fanta they had at home, while UK Fanta tastes different. However, above the African Fanta in their scale of preference sat the Zimbabwean brand Lemon Twist. A small bottle of Lemon Twist at the Zimbabwean shop cost 85p, while a can of African Lemon Fanta containing more in volume costs 50p. She said they would buy a 50p can regularly, while the children would be treated to a bottle of Lemon Twist once a month as it’s nice to have the familiar flavour.

This case demonstrates a number of important points in relation to purchasing nostalgic foods and goods. Imported goods are usually more expensive in comparison to the same product readily available in UK. Their relative value in the UK is higher than at home, so items that were once staples (or bought regularly) become luxuries. In her study of a village on the border of reunified Germany, Berdahl notes how the effort and social networking needed to acquire certain goods and furnishings under socialist isolation meant these luxuries became a form of honour or reputation, and so the object of envy (Berdahl, 1999: 123-125). Scarcity transformed certain goods into luxuries. As Beatrice said, buying things from the shop was a treat—given that the goods are more expensive than their UK (or ‘African’) equivalent, one can put a price on nostalgia. The taste of home comes at a cost which has to be balanced carefully within a limited budget. The fact that people such as Beatrice continue to pay over-the-odds for authentic products demonstrates the importance to people of familiar and nostalgic foods, and, indeed, sustains a market to create and serve new businesses. Furthermore, treats may be particularly important in the context of the disempowerment of imposed poverty and the curbing of hope resulting from being in the asylum system. In a study of the consumption practices of highly indebted people in Finland, Lehtonen notes the importance of rewards and delicacies to making life worth living (Lehtonen, 1999).

As noted earlier, not all familiar goods are equal in their capacity to evoke feelings of ‘home’: the African Lemon Fanta was a second best to the Zimbabwean Lemon Twist. This could be simply a matter of taste, preference in flavour. But, taste alone cannot fully explain all hierarchies of value. In fact, Beatrice had also bought *matemba* fish at the shop, even though her children don’t like the salty flavour, and she said she wasn’t so keen on it herself. When the Zimbabwean RCO were asked to cook for a community event organized by LASSN they went to great lengths to buy cow’s heels as part of the Zimbabwean spread. A fair amount of humour surrounded the dish at the party. The dish was unsavoury to non-Zimbabweans present, yet even the Zimbabweans didn’t manage to finish them off, many saying they didn’t really like it. However, the women who had cooked were adamant that it should be there as cow’s heels are a special dish in Zimbabwe. So, the significance of food as a representation of ‘home’ can be as important as taste, preference, and flavour.

Objects are transformed in monetary and symbolic value through migration. Not only are imported goods more expensive than their equivalent UK counterparts, they are more expensive than they were ‘at home’. As the physical movement of familiar foods and goods

shift them from the ordinary to the luxury, their symbolic value is transformed. They move from being an ordinary object to being the object of nostalgia—rare and evocative of a ‘home’ left behind. In addition, familiarity can be achieved through substitutes, which could be thought of as quasi-authentic.

8.4.2 Food as security and freedom

The farofa (toasted manioc flour) mentioned earlier as something sought after and exchanged among Vivi and her Angolan friends, would be added to almost any meal. I once saw one of the children who had come back to Vivi’s house after school scrunch her nose up at a plate of pasta with tomato sauce, then march defiantly into the kitchen to demand farofa. Once she had liberally sprinkled farofa on the pasta she tucked in enthusiastically. This is perhaps a way of making almost any food a bit Angolan, or otherwise familiar, in the same way that Marzieh at the community events had been keen to educate me on how to spot Iranian rice through the addition of dried redcurrants. Farofa ‘makes Angolan’ the pasta as redcurrants ‘make Iranian’ the rice. A habitus has a tendency to persevere in its own being, as Hage puts it, ‘a *habitus* will aim at home-building: the creation of the space in which its strategic dispositions can be maximized’ (Hage, 1997: 103).

Preparing and eating nostalgic food momentarily creates a link to home, culture and nation (Hage, 1997, Mankekar, 2005). Bauman suggests that the desire for community is about seeking safety in an insecure world (Bauman, 2001). If food, through sites of cafes and shops, and the practices of cooking and eating, can be seen as representing community, it may also represent security and freedom. Familiar food and goods can provide a continuity and security in an otherwise insecure, disjunctive world for people who are asylum seekers or who have refugee status. Even planning a few days into the future or the following week often seemed impossible, as discussed in chapter four on housing. Typically people would express directly that they don’t know what the future holds from one day to the next, if they’ll still be in the same house, whether they will be deported. In contrast to this insecure world, food, music, dance, clothing, photographs, incense, ornaments and other cultural artefacts are steadfastly real and tangible; they are visible and aesthetic. They form continuity with lives left behind that staves off total alienation in the asylum country.

Short-termism may help to explain the apparently ‘irrational’ economy of buying expensive nostalgic foods. Accumulation of wealth is pointless if one may lose it all if detained or

deported. Furthermore, eating is a daily necessity and perhaps the only certain routine in precarious lives. Considering the extent of daily insecurities and sparse house interiors, the homeliness of food is brought into sharp relief. Mintz, in his anthropological study of food, suggests that tasting food is tasting freedom. He states: 'the employment of food to achieve a feeling of well-being or freedom is widely felt and understood' (Mintz, 1996: 13). Mintz is speaking in general terms, qualifying this notion in relation to the 'modest' idea of deserving a break to eat after a period of work, 'yet, this act of choosing to consume apparently can provide a temporary, even if mostly spurious, sense of choice, of self, and thereby of freedom' (Mintz, 1996: 13). To extend Mintz' notion to the context of refugees in Leeds, it is possible to view the purchase, preparation, and consumption of special foods as a source of freedom—a sense of choice and self within lives dominated by the powerlessness of the asylum system and the limitations of exile and refugee status.

The temporary nature of choosing to consume certain food at a particular time may be exactly where the sense of choice and freedom potentially attached to food lies for asylum seekers reluctant to look back and unable to plan for the future. In circumstances of restricted finances shopping constitutes shopping for food as little else can be afforded, and so is a vital source of pleasure (cf Lehtonen, 1999: 255). While people are limited in their economic capacity to indulge in the freedom of tasting home through expensive imported foods and goods, perhaps the fact that people living on low incomes are sometimes prepared to pay the premium for familiar foods reinforces and amplifies their symbolic value (in much the way that paying high prices for tickets to parties demonstrates how important those events are). Obviously, Zimbabwean foods are only 'special' because they are not in Zimbabwe. In other words, foods and goods taken for granted at home become invested with (heightened) power in the context of exile and migration.

8.5 Men make food, women cook cuisine

Christna often left the door of her flat open so that her friends and neighbours could come and go to watch television and to cook or eat. She often said to me that it is important to eat with people as she said you eat less alone. Conversely, I sometimes got the impression that cooking for one person, and not sharing food when eating, was an activity which particularly exacerbated people's feelings of isolation, alienation and loss. Shopping, cooking and eating were key activities, often social activities, among all of the women in my research. They all made frequent food shopping trips to the market in the city centre or other local shops. Indeed, I once spent a large part of a day making 'Koki' beans with

Christna, which involved an elaborate and lengthy amount of preparation over a day or more, followed by a slow baking in a low oven for a couple of hours. Christna said 'I do it this way because I am bored'— the choice of a dish involving painstakingly long preparation being a way to make constructive use of time and resulting in a tasty meal to enjoy at the end. Cooking and eating was thus not just a necessity in terms of subsistence and basic nourishment, but also formed a key activity in otherwise relatively empty, boring days.

The Angolan women that I knew—Vivi and her friends—would almost always eat together at one or another of their houses. Because some of their children go to school together it would make sense for them to be collected by one parent. Vivi, or one of her friends, would often cook in the middle of the day so that a meal was ready not long after they got back from school. Any visitors or boyfriends visiting would be fed first, usually sitting on the sofa, then the children would eat on the floor. At any one of their houses there was often a large pot of something sitting on the stove, so a meal would be shared or provided for any of the children or a passing visitor at any time. The boyfriends of Vivi and Gonguita who both had refugee status and jobs (albeit intermittently) would sometimes provide treats such as a better cut of meat or seafood. All of the Angolans I met berated the price and quality of fish and seafood in the UK. Riqui once complained at length to me about the incredibly poor and expensive fish and seafood available in the UK, which being an island, she would expect to be in an even better position to produce good fish than Angola. The employed men also won favour with the kids by providing chocolates and sweets, which they considered superior to their mothers' home baked biscuits and sweet pastries.

Women's embodied skill as accomplished cooks means they have a particular role as providers of the potent link between food and community, and between individual, home and nation. Individuals saw commensality as a key activity. The domestic eating group is fluid because of marginal status. The people one eats with at home are your friends—but they may leave or disappear. Some people's houses are more 'social' than others; some are more likely to have people coming and going and eating and sharing food. Alan, a single Kurdish man frequently eats at the house of his female first cousin, Zahra, and her daughters, even though he cooked reasonably well (which was considered notable for a Kurdish man). I heard several times of men going to eat in the houses of women, particularly mothers with children in the house, but almost never heard of this happening the other way around.

Despite the dangers of sweeping cross-cultural generalizations, people in my research without exception took cooking to properly be a female role. For many of the men I knew, living away from home and in non-catered accommodation was their first experience of cooking. They knew almost nothing about cooking, and simply eating enough food was something of a challenge. One of the members of the Zimbabwean RCO in Leeds told me how he and his wife had arrived separately, and because of the limitations of the dispersal system and differing levels of support, were living separately—he in a town outside Leeds with their daughter, she in London with friends. He called on the assistance of Zimbabwean women he had met who lived nearby for help in cooking and caring for his daughter. He said he and his daughter did simply go sometimes to eat at one of their houses, but also that they were attempting to give him cooking lessons to allow him to prepare a few simple dishes. One of Sara's male friends (from Cameroon) lived with his wife, but told me that before they met and got married in the UK, he ate almost nothing other than chicken and chips.

It is perhaps useful here to make a distinction between food and cuisine. While many men 'managed' and got by eating food, their lack of skill and knowledge in the kitchen denies possibilities for nostalgic and familiar cuisine. This is why most of them could not engage in the crucial community-marking activity of cooking for community events. In the context of food, then, perhaps men have less power as agents of nostalgia, and, therefore, feelings of home and the type of security familiar foods provide. Mintz, in discussing the boundaries and definition of cuisine suggests that:

A cuisine requires a population that eats that cuisine with sufficient frequency to consider themselves experts on it. They all believe, and care that they believe, that they know what it consists of, how it is made, and how it should taste. In short, a genuine cuisine has common social roots; it is the food of a community—albeit of a very large community. (Mintz, 1996: 96)

He therefore believes that cuisine can only be regional, and that national cuisine is a contradiction in terms—an invention of nation-builders and restaurateurs (Mintz, 1996). Through this perspective, it follows that for certain dishes to be representative of an authentic cuisine they must have an essential link with place. Thus, women, as providers of cuisine which is not 'just' food hold a particular role in linking people who share their regional background to the homeland. Through cooking and eating, the domestic realm comes to signify 'back home', relating individuals to past experiences, to specific

relationships with others, as well as the imagined large community of regional or national cuisine (see also Hage, 1997).

8.5.1 Change, transformation and substitution

Sanai, from Eritrea, spoke little English and, especially for her first year or so in the UK, had almost exclusively Eritrean friends, went to the Eritrean church, and could have been constructed from the outside as poorly adapted to life in the UK. However, her cooking skills challenge such a view. She always prepared food when she knew I was coming to visit, and no activity or discussion could begin without first eating some food and drinking some clove tea. The fundamental element of Eritrean and (northern Ethiopian) cuisine is Njera—a kind of pancake made from slightly fermented batter. The central ingredient is tef—an Ethiopian grain not easily available in the UK. Given this fact, Sanai had experimented with other flours in the UK but the results were disappointing. When she moved to London she thought she might be able to get tef, but her Eritrean friend confirmed that it is hard to come by, and considered that substituting with other flours just doesn't work. Eritrean and Ethiopian restaurants do, however, sell 'genuine' tef Njera. Although Sanai stayed near to an Eritrean restaurant she said the ready-made Njera was too expensive to buy for home use (she was economically prevented from that indulgence). Ful—beans, served as a stew or a kind of paste, are also important in Eritrean cuisine, but Sanai struggled to recognise the types she had seen in the UK shops. Sanai thus made do as best she could. A tin of canned baked beans mixed with some spices and cooked up with some extra tomatoes and tomato paste would be mopped up with lightly toasted thin white sliced bread. The general format of an Eritrean meal was in this way maintained—eating a type of stew or thick sauce with a type of bread. Without the open fire and Eritrean tea pot she she later acquired, clove tea was prepared by putting cloves in the kettle. These forms of substitution allowed Sanai to achieve a form of being Eritrean in cooking and eating, even with unfamiliar ingredients and utensils.

I would lastly like to emphasize the role of food in adaptation to new lives in the UK. In demotic discourse among people who are refugees and asylum seekers the continuation of own culture and the adaptation to, or adoption of, elements of 'Other' culture are features of daily debate and contestation. This contestation often pivoted around eating habits, as well as clothing style and musical taste as noted in the previous chapter. Hage notes that the adoption of familiar products, goods and practices is also part of a process of adaptation (Hage, 1997). Thus, both things seen as 'British' and those seen as 'homely' are

relevant in thinking on integration. Although demonstrating continuity and familiarity, food, goods, and their meaning are transformed in and through migration (Appadurai, 1993). Objects and practices themselves are not all necessarily fixed. They may not represent a form of pristine cultural communication direct from the homeland. Cuisine might merge and alter in the face of culinary contact with Other foods, and in response to available ingredients which may not faithfully reproduce familiar dishes and tastes. Constructions in both refugee and British public discourse tend towards conceptualizations of scales of integration or adaptation—different people at different times may be more or less integrated according to putative indicators. Yet even those who may be perceived as being at the lower end of any such scale—not integrated—are forced to appropriate things and practices from ‘home’ according to local contexts. Crucially, it would be erroneous to view the reproduction of cultural practices, foods, and goods in shops and cafes, at community events, and in the domestic domain as a form of encapsulation or pristine cultural continuity. Patently, most of the time people operate in a qualitatively different environment from that with which they were previously familiar before arrival in the UK. Food may have an unrivalled position as the most prominent form of (daily) continuity, yet in itself it is not (always) a faithful reproduction, and besides, familiar food can only create a ‘temporary, even if mostly spurious, sense of choice, of self’ (Mintz, 1996).

8.6 Conclusions

While the emotional valence of food lies in a link to specific spaces and times that people have left behind, the sense of security enabled by the nostalgic homely feelings through food is equally a mode of being in a new place (Hage, 1997). As indicated in the reference to the ‘swan bake’ and ‘eat donkeys’ tabloid headlines, the tangible power of food makes it prominent in both private and public discourse on cultural contact. The scandalizing of ‘asylum seeker’ food habits is at odds with the usual place of food as representing a ‘celebratory multiculturalism’ (see also Hage, 1997, Parker, 2000). Food is politicized and commodified in integration and multicultural practice and discourse.

The sharing of food beyond groups formed around language or ‘culture’—for example, with the funding of catered community events by refugee agencies—is also a potent symbol of community. The discourse of the small voluntary sector and religious groups seeks to emphasize the belonging of new refugees—the shared moral duty for care and common humanity across cultures. Rather than challenging the boundaries of community, this is a

different, cross-cultural invocation of the idea of community, similar to the concepts of international community inherent in international law. The security of community through food may be found by way of a number of overlapping community-like identifications. For the majority of refugees, even the limited potential for socializing and legitimation enabled by new shops and cafes is irrelevant, as the few new businesses represent only a handful of nationalities. However, they may offer some imagined unity and security through wider associations such as 'refugee', 'African', 'Black' or 'immigrant'.

In writing about the displacement of refugees in Africa, Allen and Turton point out that while infrastructure and shelter may be rebuilt with relative ease and speed, 'those things which really make social life viable are harder to pin down' (1996: 13). As with dancing, cooking is an embodied practice that women bring with them, even if they have little else. A focus on food demonstrates particularly strongly the intersection of community by gender: women have a central role as providers of familiar cuisine, thus at once embodying home and adaptation to the UK. The proposition of food as power is reached through an analysis of freedom in choice and security in familiarity. Cooking and eating encapsulate homely feelings that are a result of nostalgia for past lives and a way of actively creating a new life in the present.

The sharing, exchange and gifting of foods and practices of cooking and eating, I suggest, may be one highly significant locus of establishing social relationships following upheaval, and in the uncertain times of awaiting a decision on an asylum case and being new to the UK. I have argued for the centrality of food to community praxis and imaginings, while at the same time attempting to show how varied capacities and characteristics place people differentially in their ability to engage with and enjoy nostalgic, homely possibilities of food. The opportunities for home-building with material objects brought at initial or future visits 'home' that have been noted as important for other migrants are severely restricted by the limits of asylum migration. In spite of, and perhaps because of these limitations, the recreation of moments of community through food may be especially important for asylum seekers and refugees.

9 Conclusions

Community is a complex concept that is variously interpreted and experienced. Positivist endeavours to define exactly what constitutes (a) community cannot account for the multiplicity of interpretations and scope that are clearly inherent in theories, uses, and manifestations of community. Since we began by rejecting the possibility of there being a satisfactory definition, the purpose of this conclusion is not, therefore, to proffer an answer to whether 'refugee community' exists. Definitions of community are contested, but to reject the term simply leaves the problem of how to replace it (Delanty, 2003: 2). Equally, it is not useful for the purposes of social analysis to simply acknowledge that community is variously interpreted and to take this as a rationale to abandon the task of exploring both how community is understood by people who use the term, and what features are being associated with the term when community is ascribed to people by academics, policy-makers, 'community leaders', and so on. So, I will briefly revisit some of the key theoretical approaches to community, and say something about the relevance of the material presented in this thesis to these approaches.

Firstly, Cohen advocates viewing community as a symbol, therefore allowing for the possibility that people who view themselves and are viewed by others as a community hold various interpretations of what that might mean (Cohen, 1985). This is an approach that is of great value to policy-makers as they can utilize a term recognised for its emotional valence and know that it carries importance for people, but be quite vague about their definition. Policies can be written to encourage 'community', and within limited parameters, this can allow for a variety of appropriations. Amit proposes that community is realized in the dynamic interaction between imagined communities and actual, limited social ties (Amit, 2002). This implies there may be a mutual dependency between the concepts of community as a thing—an existing interrelated group of people—and community as a feeling or construct that enables a sense of togetherness with unseen others. Hage has suggested that the feeling of home is interlinked to the feeling of community: a place of shared symbolic forms, shared language, shared morality and values, and a place where 'at least some people can be morally relied upon for help' (Hage, 1997). Hage thereby not only draws together symbolic, instrumental and functional approaches, but also acknowledges an embodied, affective element (Frazer, 1999, Amit, 2002, Dawson, 2002) and places them all centrally as aspects of community. This fusion helpfully moves beyond limitations of interpretive approaches that promote reading cultural performance as text and of symbolic interactionism that focuses on meaning and boundary. Such approaches, as Werbner has observed, miss a

recognition that 'culture in performance does not simply exemplify communication or social conflict—it represents an experience of embodiment and hence identity' (2005: 11).

If community is to be theorized as heterogeneous (Werbner, 2005) and a paradoxical experience (Burkett, 2001), it is perhaps most useful to indicate some of the salient parameters that emerged from this research as relevant to understanding 'refugee community'. There are numerous ways that the ethnographic material presented in this thesis might be related to broader theoretical discussions. Given the position of place and territoriality as a matter of particular contention in theorizing community, and the clear relevance of questions around 'displacement' for refugees, this is a matter I will discuss here. I will also return to the question of community and policy and to issues of the delineation of refugees as a special case in the study of migrants. Finally, I propose that the ethnography presents instrumentalism and the interplay of quotidian and performative experiences of community as key to developing understandings of community, particularly among refugees.

9.1 Place, policy and migrants: areas of contestation

9.1.1 Community and place

Post-structuralist critiques charge 'community studies' with the exaggeration of external boundaries and an artificial encapsulation of people constructed as being part of a community. Such critiques have particularly focused on the territorialization of community (and culture) with a certain fixed place. It was suggested from the outset that the problem is not place, but fixedness; relationships to place should not be either assumed or ignored, but acknowledged as relational and transformative. As many observers suggest, critique of emplacement must be tempered, and the hype and hyperbole of displacement and de-territorialization (Massey, 1992) doused with the stubborn empirical evidence of the enduring relationship of people to places. The continuing social significance of place despite pervasive movement is widely noted: in what ways is place important for understandings of 'refugee community'?

The first step is in the question posed: to acknowledge that there are a variety of ways that place is important both for actual social ties and imagined community. There are different scales of place that may impact social life, from day-to-day practicalities of local life to the

context of the nation-state, and across nations through international connections. This deserves a nuanced approach to people-place relations. In this research some key categories include: new-comers gaining familiarity with new localities in the UK; practicalities of location for RCOs and others in providing assistance; displacement from family and former lives, and experiences of exile and dislocation. While borders have been sometimes hailed as increasingly insignificant under the emergence of globalization, Ong has suggested that perhaps it is rather that the relationship of people and nation-states to borders is realigning (Ong, 1999). Refugees are people defined on the basis of having crossed national borders: for people seeking asylum, borders and nations are not only important, but shape their ontology and daily lives. The jurisdiction of nations—both countries of origin that generate violence and persecution, and countries of exile that develop policies to control those seeking asylum—has a powerful impact on the lives of refugees.

It is frequently observed that the flows of globalization have brought about the free movement of capital but that this has largely not been the case for people. Refugees are not granted the free association with places enjoyed by the global elite who frequent the non-places of airport lounges, transit zones, multi-national corporations and hotel lobbies (Augé, 1995, Hannerz, 1996). Other types of migrants may be more likely to enjoy return, yo-yo and chain migration which helps to substantiate transnational links. Asylum seekers awaiting a decision live in a limbo that is more non-national than transnational, in terms of not having rights afforded to citizens. Even after gaining status, refugees continue to experience restrictions on movement including the limited options for family reunion and the restriction of rights to return to the country from which asylum has been claimed. Of course, through travel, television, communication technologies, and so on, people are more linked up than was ever possible in the past. In this context, webcams, and the sending and exchange of videos and photographs may hold a particular importance in continuing to maintain family life across borders. Despite restrictions, the lives of refugees, like other migrants, are partly lived through transnational relationships, but attention to these must be balanced with local relations and commitments in the UK.

The contexts of locality in the UK have a profound influence on daily life. This is both in terms of the context of state control through asylum policies, and the context of 'neighbourhood' or locality. National policy restricts possibilities for visiting friends, and access to desired food products, while media and politicians play a role in experiences of discrimination and racism. Other mundane realities draw locality into social experience through the practicalities of daily life. As Massey has curtly remarked: 'Much of life for

many people, even at the heart of the first world, still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes. Hardly a graphic illustration of time-space compression' (1992: 8). Gaining familiarity with a place, and attachment to places as locations of negative or positive experiences are important to making sense of new contexts and to negotiating daily life. Kurdish people I knew in Hull often told me of their desire to move to Leeds where they felt it was possible to be more anonymous—less stigmatized in the larger city. If they did not stay in the dispersal site where they had been sent, people mostly wanted to go to places where there were certain people they wanted to be with or perceived opportunities, such as for work or study. Those refused status are forced to go wherever they have social relations strong enough that they can 'morally rely' on others for support with basic needs. The need for instrumental assistance means often people need to physically be there to help, especially at moments of crisis. This is exemplified in the abandonment of dispersal locations to be with supportive people for those refused or surviving on subsistence-only asylum support. Place-based funding for community organizations makes it difficult for RCOs to assist people who turn to them through social networks, who, because of the enforced nature of dispersal may be living elsewhere. At the same time, the single most yearned for resource for RCOs was a community or office space.

Appadurai suggests that locality contextualizes social relationships, even if some of those are across different spaces and draw on multiple references: 'the task of producing locality (as a structure of feeling, a property of social life, and an ideology of situated community) is increasingly a struggle' (Appadurai, 1996: 189). The fluidity of precariousness limits the possibility of deepening attachment to a certain locality, and requires flexibility in relationships to place. The compulsory dispersal system can be seen, in Appadurai's terms, as a disciplinary, context-driving tool, but one that nevertheless allows for the production of locality within uncertainty (1996). Dispersal can be seen as bold social engineering that has permanently altered the experiences of locality, both for new migrants, and for those already living in the places in which they arrive. Albeit that there has been a long history of immigration to the UK and prior examples of involuntary dispersal of refugees, the nature of contemporary migration of people from many different countries differentiates the present system from previous major migrations of populations from a certain country or locality. Not only is the UK a new context for most refugees, but dispersal has resulted in the shifting of experiences of locality for people in the places where new arrivals are housed. In the process of reception, attending English classes and support services, people seeking asylum socialize with 'super-diverse' refugees from numerous countries, political

persuasions, religions, social positions, and so on. The broad brush of context-driving locality inherent to the dispersal system is diversified through individual agency in the ways that people react differently to the situation, thereby forming new and differentiated localities. The lack of belonging, or the fluidity of relation to place highlights the importance of fleeting moments of community such as parties and music events for facilitating social relations.

9.1.2 Community and policy

The presentation of 'refugee community' in voluntary and statutory discourse is often a simplified, reified one. However, the process by which community is institutionalized and represented is itself not ossified, but relational and transformative. As dispersal has developed, and approaches to RCOs matured, for example, there has been increasing sensitivity to divisions within ethnic or national groups. Community development workers and advice workers are learning all the time about such complexities. Working with refugees from many countries requires practitioners and researchers to have a degree of multilingual and multicultural competency, some would say, to be cosmopolitan. Although less malleable, government approaches have gradually begun to acknowledge diversity within groups of refugees that place people differentially according to political divisions, distinct experiences of persecution, and so on. 'Studying up' to understand the cultural processes by which certain understandings of community become dominant requires continued critical attention (Okely, 1997, Shore and Wright, 1997). Despite increasing acknowledgement of diversity, it is less common for the impacts of divisions and differences on daily social life to be examined. It is hoped that this thesis begins to address this gap.

Policy and studies of policy often focus on systems and functional-structural analyses. All types of policy, not just in relation to immigration and asylum, make use of simplified, broad rubrics as organizing principles applied to large and heterogeneous groups. Although refugees are just as diverse as any group of people from a legally defined geographical zone, it is of great use to decision-makers to avoid confronting social complexities and take a positivist, politically-informed stance in seeking organizational frameworks (Apthorpe, 1997). As Apthorpe has observed, clear typologies fit policy more easily than 'plain' efforts to 'tell it like it is', because 'style can be as menacingly powerful as substance' in influencing changes in policy (1997: 51). There are some limited opportunities for people who are refugees to contribute and shape language in policy, albeit within certain confines of styles of speech and 'participatory' governing systems (Griffiths et al., 2005).

Elizabeth Frazer specifically addresses community as a popular descriptive term for certain groups within the framework of communitarianism (Frazer, 1999). Recognising multiplexity as too constraining for many communitarians, she identifies a list of uses as 'partial communities' including those tied by place, a foundation (ethical community, political community), belief or practice (religious, linguistic or business community), communities of interest, communities of sentiments, communities of fate—the list goes on. It is certainly remarkable to note that any empirical research in contemporary times could possibly assume a clearly defined community among refugees, of all people, given that by definition they are people for whom movement and multiple affiliations are pre-eminent. Even the strictest of focus in a writing product does not preclude space for a sentence to acknowledge that use of the label 'community' for a group of people may be an oversimplification. Many uses that attribute 'community' to refugees and national or ethnic subgroups must normally be referring to partial communities. The common factor between these 'communities' is that other descriptive terms would suffice (ibid.): this begs the question of what the point is of calling certain groups or institutions a 'community'.

Despite its slipperiness and complexity, community is generally held to be something more than, or different from, a group of people who happen to have lived in a distinguishable territory. Given this differentiation, I see no reason why, when referring to people who share nationality, the word 'population' might not easily, and more accurately, take the place of 'community' as a descriptive term. This would be a simple lexical remedy to the 'problem' of diversity within groups externally labelled as a 'community'. It might also go some way to avoiding the common leap made between referring to migrant groups distinguished by nationality and associating this commonality with moral obligation, either to one another, or as an entity to society.

Does it matter that community is conventionally deployed as a categorical label? The 'trouble' with community, Nigel Rapport reminds us, 'is that the concept has furnished an arena within which prejudices might continue to flourish' (Amit and Rapport, 2002: 170). I have further suggested that the assumption of self-help in governmental uses of community to apply to refugees and other 'community groups' is important to bear in mind in the context of a shrinking welfare state and state co-option of the voluntary sector. Also, recognition that the popularity of claims to community may stem from its positive evaluative connotations, a 'feel-good factor' that deflects criticism, should signal alarm in the attachment of 'community' to refugees, a group that are highly marginalized and treated harshly by the government. Frazer argues that the description of some formation or

relation as a community is invariably a commendation: if refugees have community they must be doing alright, right? Community is not a term applicable to a group which is oppressed in such a way that its members share only misery. A sense of community is not acquired from 'immiserated persons failing to share' but might be created through rising above a crisis in sharing and mutual support (Frazer, 1999: 83). Thus, the question must be asked whether a key attraction for the UK government in using the term community for refugees is a way of abdicating responsibility to address poverty and marginalization experienced by refugees. There is a basic paradox in approaches to community in asylum policy, a system increasingly dependent upon and legitimized by dichotomizing asylum seekers and refugees. It first atomises people in the case-by-case asylum system, then approaches the settlement of refugees by positing community as central to integration.

However, essentializing categorizations of 'deserving' and 'undeserving', (read 'political' and 'economic') are also used by refugees. As Gerd Baumann points out in reference to essentialist views of culture and ethnic identity, critiques of essentialism sometimes overlook the fact that informants themselves make use of essentialist categories (Baumann, 1995). This observation is also relevant to the use of cultural and ethnic reifications among refugees in Leeds, though perhaps not in the developed way Baumann describes his Southall informants discussing 'culture' and 'community'. Informants' reifications, nonetheless, need to be treated as data, rather than peddled as analytical guidelines (Baumann, 1995: 726). A common currency in the Putnam-influenced communitarian doxa of approaches to community development in the UK is the notion that single-identity groups based on common culture or origin should be supported to provide strong bases for bridging between them (Gilchrist, 2004, Griffiths et al., 2005). Gilchrist specifically opposes Granovetter's concept of 'weak ties' as central to bridging gaps between social clusters to 'binding' thick ties of kinship and friendship within migrant groups. This is also linked to the idea that community formation is empowering in face of suppression or opposition. As the discussion on RCOs showed, common culture or origin do not, by their nature, imply strong commonality. Any experience of empowerment may mask continuing marginalization, and besides, is largely restricted to those involved in RCOs, which may stand on the periphery of refugee social activity (Griffiths et al., 2005).

RCOs, practitioners and policy-makers favour functional and instrumental interpretations of community in order to make decisions over resource allocation in their daily operations, and, I have suggested, this operation is assisted by recourse to a construction of a moral framework against which to judge good and bad community. In many ways, this moral

framework plays out a concern with defining community that was the preoccupation of early twentieth century analysts. In moving away from defining the physical existence of community, Anderson suggested that communities are not distinguished by their genuineness or falseness, but in the manner in which they are imagined (1991(1983)). It appears that one manner in which community is imagined among RCOs, community development workers and refugees is through contesting what they consider community is, is not, or should be.

That formal community associations are encouraged to form by current policy that allocates funds through this mechanism can hardly be countered, but their relationship to pre-existing networks or conflation with imagined diasporic communities must be analysed on a case by case basis. Community incorporates informal manifestations and formal structures, or in Tönnies' terms, 'the essence of both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is found interwoven in all kinds of associations' (Tönnies, 1955 (1887): 18). Indeed, the assumed 'natural' formation of people into 'communities' on an informal basis is the very tendency that formal policies on community seek to encourage and, arguably, manipulate.

It is not clear that the development of groups of new refugees into what are viewed as 'new communities' is dependent on institutional intervention. The state is one player in a complex picture of competing influences on new forms of association that are equally guided by individual agency and propensities towards identity-building practices. Conversely, however, it is clear that the operation of community-promoting policies is heavily impacted by 'informal' existing and emergent social groupings. This interaction is most clearly visible with RCOs—they being the key formal community structure. Refugee association is not dependent on management by the state, but the state dependency on RCOs as central to their management of settlement and integration binds these policies intimately with refugee social groupings. The simplistic mosaic of refugee communities represented through RCOs is complicated by boundless social universes (Marx, 1990, Griffiths et al., 2005) that incorporate multiple levels of mistrust (Hynes, 2003) and many differences and allegiances.

9.1.3 People, migrants or refugees: who makes 'refugee community'?

There is concern about how to theorize refugees as a group for social scientific study. People who have come to the UK and claimed asylum themselves experience different spaces, places and moments when they are defined by others, and realize themselves more or less in terms of categories such as refugee, migrant, parent, child, newcomer, woman or

man, old or young. At times the arguments presented in this thesis have drawn on these distinct but overlapping identities to analyse experiences of and responses to 'community'. Though aspects of asylum and immigration policies permeate daily life, it is far from my intention to suggest that asylum or refugee labels define the whole lives of the people in this research.

The idea of overlapping identities is not new to social theory, though it is frequently observed that the conditions of late modernity and global cultural flows have impacted the complexity and fluidity of multiple affiliations (e.g. Massey, 1992, Appadurai, 1993, Hannerz, 1996, Ong, 1999). Interest and theorizing on hybridity has been pursued mostly in relation to migrants, but are just as relevant to refugees-as-migrants. I came to know the people involved in my research as friends, mothers, musicians, activists, students, excellent cooks, accomplished dancers and music-lovers; I knew them as women and men, some younger, some older. They were also individuals whose primary life-project, at the time of the fieldwork, was to achieve settlement in the UK as a result of feeling forced out of their countries and away from their families in order to safeguard their lives and their freedom. I have argued throughout this thesis that the political dimensions of media and public policy, and the particulars of the restrictive elements of asylum and immigration policy create power dynamics that place structural constraints on everyday life for refugees in the UK. The experience of seeking asylum in contemporary Britain comes with intense administration and resulting close and extensive exposure to the intricacies of social policies. Often, these social policies were incomprehensible to the people in this research who were subject to them, but the experience of being made a subject by them was impossible to avoid.

The process of producing an account and analysis framed by the stigmatized term 'refugee' requires a reflexive awareness of the risks of perpetuating a circularity between a legal construct and social category. The reproduction of refugee in a social study as an analytical category is inextricably linked to the reification of the notion of refugees as a recognisable social category. While in their interactions with statutory and voluntary bodies conventional notions of community are commonly imposed on people who are refugees, their lives, like those of any of us (including researchers and policy-makers) exist within a boundless social universe. People in this research never claimed themselves as experts in refugee experience any more than I could claim a position to speak about the disparate category of 'refugees' in an authoritative manner as a result of limited ethnography. To attempt to make bold statements related to socially-constructed categories of people would therefore be

dishonest to the situated lives of the people who contributed to this research, and indefensible from a methodological and theoretical position.

However, a form of partial imagined commonality with other refugees in the UK may result from labelling processes and similar experiences of interaction with the Home Office. Furthermore, the hegemony of the nation-state of the country of origin may be extended over citizens who are refugees (Kearney, 1995: 553). It may even be suggested that witnessing and experiencing historical contexts of civil breakdown, unrest, and war serves to foster a certain national imagined commonality between exiled people. In the case of Zimbabwe, for example, all Zimbabweans, including expatriate migrants who have not been resident in Zimbabwe for long periods are in a partial way brought together through being forced to reappraise their sense of belonging to a country that was relatively stable before a rapid economic, democratic and societal breakdown. The tools of persecution used by states result in a common sense among their citizens of fear and of threats of brutality and control.

It is the notion that there may be some commonalities between various experiences of persecution and exile that encourages positive discrimination towards refugees for certain roles of community liaison and advice work in the voluntary sector. Events targeted at refugees from all nations foster this sense of shared experience, and possibly even a wider sense of mutuality through notions of global social justice. In these settings, the term 'refugee' may move beyond a legal categorization, encouraging a sense of shared social experience. The notion of a 'refugee experience' teeters on the edge of an idealized refugee label, though sharing conditions of reception and settlement in a new locality may perhaps be differentiated from an assumption of commonality based on the conditions of flight.

There are pitfalls in characterizing the refugee experience as one dominated by powerlessness and need, though subscribing to the image can bring material benefits for refugee community organizations and individual refugees (Zetter, 1991, Malkki, 1995a). Certainly, some of the people in this research did not want to have any part in 'refugee' events, or be seen attending refugee services. Hence, while a boundary of refugee community may be applied to particular people by certain parties, this identity is not always self-ascribed. The flexibility and transformation of new identities in novel localities means that identification with different roles and labels changes over time, and may not reach an 'end-point' where all is clear-cut and decided.

9.2 Refugee community: areas for investigation

9.2.1 The heterogeneity of 'refugee community'

Three aspects of the ways in which refugee community might be imagined have already been suggested: contextual relationships to places and localities; the construction of refugee community by policy, and the differentiation of refugee experience from that of other types of migrants. There were numerous other overlapping forms of conceptualizing community that emerged in fieldwork including language and as religion. Linguistic unity encourages cross-national affiliations, which may be overlaid with a broad sense of cultural affiliation across regions. In Leeds, it was sometimes possible to see RCOs falling into tentative regional groupings where, in meetings, for example, sympathies between RCOs representing countries in the Middle East, Central Africa or Horn of Africa were visible. Where informal social groups included those from different nations, such regional and linguistic links did seem to provide a sense of shared identity, for example, between French-speaking West Africans.

Religion came up repeatedly in fieldwork, and it is important to acknowledge this significance with some tentative observations. Churches and mosques could serve as places of sanctuary and escape, and were one of the few places where refugees had interactions with long-term British residents outside of contract relations with refugee sector workers. Furthermore, this type of contact allowed for an escape from the refugee label, under the commonality of shared belief, often termed religious community. For most people in the research, worshipping had been a habitual practice in their country of origin. Although some continued to worship regularly (and others did not), their experiences of contact with different denominations and perspectives within their religion in mosques and churches in Leeds altered their understandings of their religion (cf Vertovec, 2006). As it was not a focus of this research, data on religion was limited in this ethnography, but was sufficient to highlight the area as one requiring attention. Religion forms a vital domain of adaptation for new refugees for whom cultural practice and religious belief may previously have been more synchronized, and this represents an important area for further study in understanding community experiences.

9.2.2 Instrumental community?

The idea that social relationships are important to migration and settlement of migrants is well-established in studies that take a social network approach (Van Hear, 1998, Crisp,

1999, Simich et al., 2003, Williams, 2006). Despite the acknowledgement of mutual help and assistance as an important element of community, the notion of an instrumental community among refugees and migrants has not been directly addressed. This research suggests that 'community' among recently arrived refugees presents itself as strongly instrumental, especially for those negotiating the complexities of the asylum system. This is demonstrated by the importance of 'weak ties' that shape the establishment of initial social relationships. Similarly, the assessments made by individual refugees about refugee community organizations, and the judgements made by RCO leaders about the efficacy of their own organizations frequently revolved around whether they were being 'useful' at resolving problems—a task made exceptionally hard in the light of complex policies, limited entitlements and services, and the inflexible bureaucracy of the Home Office. Community, when referred to directly by refugees (which was rare) was only defined as something that is useful.

It is likely that the primacy of instrumentalism in social relations reflects the settlement process and immigration status. Relationships founded on assistance and help may be more prevalent among newly arrived refugees, particularly those awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, and especially those who have been refused and are reliant on friends to support them with their basic needs. Some new arrivals may find themselves among a fairly extensive set of social relationships of people from a similar national or ethnic boundary—a recent, tentative and fragmented barely-established 'community'. Others may find this and avoid contact. Many, including some of the people who were central to this ethnography, did not identify with or find a wider group of associates with commonalities (or at least, not at the time of the research). Negotiation of newness may mean people are not yet at a point of understanding old identities in a new context. Also, it stands to reason that with the overlaying of networks of exchange and support, and with increased sharing and familiarity over time, relations can become 'deeper', or multiplex.

While instrumental relationships are clearly useful as a means to practical ends for those recently-arrived, I have further suggested that instrumental relationships are of particular value as an interim measure in the context of limited language skills and a precarious life. Instrumental relationships enable people not only to get useful help from new friends, but also to maintain relationships on a non-threatening level in the context of perceived danger. The sense of not having a life or not feeling secure to share information from former lives because of shame or threat of danger operates to maintain relationships caught in the present. Why invest in relationships that might have to be broken in the future because of

structural restraints (i.e. mobility), especially when new ways of negotiating close relationships from the past are still being worked out? Hage suggests that length of stay is likely to translate into a more developed ability to engage in home-building (1997). As I have highlighted throughout the thesis, any such ability is also fundamentally linked to immigration status. Gaining refugee status is likely to mark for most people the beginning of an opportunity to indulge in longer-term investments in home-building and social relationships. Until such time, strategies of survival for asylum seekers hang around forms of community that are necessarily temporal and momentary.

Kelly has reported that, over time, Bosnians who were more enthusiastic about making links during the early stages of settlement became disillusioned about a sense of duty to support one another (Kelly, 2000). Certainly, personal commitments and the strain of voluntary work in a difficult area seemed in Leeds to cause shifts in personnel among RCO committees as people's initial enthusiasm to support 'the community' waned. This reinforces the need to keep in mind the fluidity of forms and spaces of association over time. Alternately, Werbner argues that Pakistanis in Britain are part of communities that are 'culturally and materially inscribed, based on mutual gift-giving, credit, help, and voluntary action' (Werbner, 2005). Either way, the question of instrumentalism is central to understanding relationships of exchange, mutual support, shared morality and help among migrants. Teasing out how instrumental relationships may develop and change once the basics of settlement have been established, according to changes in immigration status, contact with family, housing, employment and so on may be critical to understanding the emergence of sustained fields of social relations among refugees over time.

9.2.3 Tradition, cultural reproduction and the creation of spaces and moments of community: quotidian and performative community

Asylum seekers and refugees in the UK are not part of a constant field of social interactions in a neighbourhood. Mobility and precariousness means people move around. Reliance on mobile phones as a way of staying in touch means that losing your phone, or phone number, can result in losing your friends. This can be put to use if one decides not to associate with a certain person any more—calls may be left unanswered. In this context, momentary, ephemeral forms of association such as parties and sharing food take on a critical role in enabling social ties and in engaging in a way that draws on imagined senses of community. Events and parties, or the imagined community communicated through flyers, posters, shops and restaurants perhaps display the possibility of particular communities, the potential for developing a sustained field of social relations with people

who share certain symbolic forms. While there is no simple equation between nationality, ethnicity and community, the likelihood that people coming from the same country or region will share symbolic forms, language and a common sense of morality makes a feeling of belonging more likely and possible—it does not make it inevitable, however. Language was a significant, practical factor enabling social networks, but the fact of shared language does not necessarily convey shared values or experiences. The idea of sameness and familiarity contained in community may create the sense of security that Bauman identifies as being the cause for the current popularity of the concept (2001). Indeed, a desire for the familiar, and for being able to be in a space enabling ‘maximal communicative power’ (Bourdieu in Hage, 1997) are demonstrated through cooking, dancing and music events that allow for a momentary sense of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ in the midst of insecure lives.

For refugees there can be many aspects of past lives that they are happy to escape. Conflicts, tribal identities, and political differences are not ‘left behind at Heathrow’ but continue to shape association in private relationships and informal settings, as well as formalized community organizations. Some people actively choose to disengage from perpetuating these differences, by avoiding association with people, meetings or events they consider political. This avoidance of ‘politics’ permeated all social relationships through the control of information and secrecy. Hence, orientation to forms of association experienced in refugees’ past lives is mixed. Despite the difficulties of life as an asylum seeker in the UK, the new migration context can provide fresh opportunities to be selective about identifying with certain forms and aspects of ‘culture’ or ‘community’. This was demonstrated, for example, in strategic use of identities, in taking on new names, not speaking tribal languages, attempts to avoid questions about tribal affiliation, and so on.

The idea of security in familiar cultural practices or restrictiveness of identities left behind should not fall into a characterization of refugees as having come from a more ‘traditional’ place where they were suspended in social relations resembling classical imaginings of community. It has been shown in the thesis that moments of community based around continuity with former cultural practices and identity markers incorporate discontinuities, and meld ‘there’ and ‘here’. Commenting on cultural reproduction among Pakistanis in Britain, Werbner points out that ‘the translocation of cultural practices to Britain was not automatic, a matter of nostalgic clinging to ‘tradition’, but the product of locally grounded power struggles’ (Werbner, 2005: 8). Events, parties, cafes and restaurants offer sites for negotiating power-based contestations of culture and community for recently-arrived

refugees in the UK. The notion that a sense of community is a more peripheral, marginal experience is in keeping with the idea that *communitas* is formed in and through liminal moments and spaces (Turner, 1969). It may therefore be important to make a distinction between RCOs, events and parties as performative community moments in the (diasporic) public sphere and quotidian practices that realize social relations and imagined community through everyday sharing of food, transnational communication and exchange, help and support for those in need, and so on. A distinction between day-to-day and 'special' community moments may be an important move in improving understandings of the paradoxical tendencies of community toward both separation and interlinking. Recently-arrived refugees don't live in a community, though they may enter and leave community-building experiences or moments where social ties may be quickly made, and easily lost. Indeed it has been suggested that momentary experience may be inherent to the nature of community. Frazer, in reviewing theoretical approaches to the concept proposes that the conditions of community mean it is elusive and episodic, and will only be experienced as fleeting (Frazer, 1999: 83). Hence, while the context of precariousness and fluidity is central to understanding social forms among refugees, this may simply expose more strongly something quite central to community. The 'problem' of reconciling difference and heterogeneity among people considered from within and without as a 'community' may not so much be about their affiliation to shared symbols despite fissions, but about euphoric unity only being a fleeting moment of belonging.

Certain realizations of community such as events, a café, or sharing food can help to build both actual social ties and the sense or feeling of community. This 'community' experience is spatially limited and temporal: these realizations occur in particular moments and locations. These moments and locations may be lost, found, transformed, or avoided. A person coming to the UK from another country arrives with multiple affiliations and overlapping identities that instantly begin to transform and adapt in relation to new social settings and structural limitations. Certain types of community moment may provide an opportunity to feel included (or excluded) on the basis of one, or several, of these identifications that can create a sense of comfort, homeliness, shared values, and support. These interactions and imaginaries may be encouraged or impeded by structural factors such as social policy and poverty. Each person has the agency to engage or disengage with such events, activities, or imagined communities. Their reasons for doing so are likely to be strategic decisions contingent upon past and ongoing features of 'politics', persecution, or migration.

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