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‘Who Do You See?’

How do unaccompanied young women and UK social workers construct and understand each other in practice encounters?

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Statement

I declare that this thesis, in the same or different form, has not been and will not be submitted to this or any other University for a degree.

Signed: *RPLarkin*

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Summary

This thesis combines creative qualitative research (Mannay 2016) with autoethnography (Muncey 2010) to consider social work practice with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young women in England. It explores how unaccompanied young women and practitioners construct and understand each other within micro-level practice encounters at this cultural moment, and examines how this may be implicated in young women's experiences of social workers and in practitioners' responses to them. As a practitioner insider-researcher (Costley et al 2010), with current experience of this work, I position myself as one of the 'unstable subjects' being considered here, grappling with '*concepts-on-the move*' (Jackson and Mазzie 2012) and conceiving of knowledge as situated and always formed through power (Trinh 1991).

The empirical study used a mixed-method approach (Hesse-Biber 2010), collecting qualitative data over a twelve-month period. Data was gathered with eight research participants, five practitioners and three young women. Free drawing was used in unstructured, creative interviews (Mannay 2016), to disrupt accepted ways of seeing and talking (Yates 2010) and to access new knowledges. In addition, personal reflections were collected in an autoethnographic diary over ten months. The participant transcripts were analysed using an extended form of Mauthner and Doucet's (1998) Voice-Centred Relational (VCR) analysis, to explore the relational experiences of practice encounters. An analytic innovation was made in the development of additional relational data 'poems', adding to Mauthner and Doucet's (1998) existing VCR method. Maclure's (2013) concept of analysis as finding moments of *disconcertion* and *wonder* in the data was utilised to analyse the participants' drawings and the autoethnographic thread.

Doreen Massey's (1994; 2004; 2013; 2014) theoretical work is employed to conceptualise how understandings develop within gendered social relations that construct the practice spaces, always located within power and situated in space/time. Drawing on post-structural notions of the relational self (Weigert 2010), participants are

theorised as engaged in a continual process of *molecular becoming* (Deleuze et al 2003). In addition, Wetherell's (2012) theory of 'affective-discursive practice' is used to explore how understandings may emerge within and through affect, in a process of relational and situated '*embodied meaning-making*' (ibid. p19).

Research findings are presented in four thematic chapters, locating understandings within the power/gender relations (Massey 1994; 2005) that construct the key encounter spaces. The young women are framed as active in the relational production of understandings, challenging informational ways of knowing which accord practitioners the '*privileged position of vision*' (Froggett 2002, p172). I argue that relational understandings are spatial, shifting and partial, emerging through both 'ways of thinking' and 'ways of feeling'. Social work spaces are theorised as *porous* spaces (Massey 2005), where boundaries are continually contested and young women can be excluded or included in *hierarchies of belonging* (Back et al 2012).

This thesis offers substantive new knowledge about social work practice with unaccompanied young women and makes a number of original contributions. Unaccompanied young women's voices are rarely heard in research or in debates about forced migration (Asaf 2017). By interweaving autoethnography with stories and drawings from young women and practitioners, I offer a new, multi-voiced lens into practice encounter spaces. The multi-disciplinary theoretical frames of Massey (1994; 2005) and Wetherell (2012, 2015a, 2015b) offer an original approach to research which explores how relational understandings may emerge and impact within social work practice. The research has a number of implications for practice, and for future research, which are identified. At a time of polarising and potentially excluding constructions of the refugee and migrant, this thesis offers new and valuable knowledge about a pressing area of social work practice.

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There are many people who have supported me through this process. Firstly, I am extremely grateful to the young women and practitioners who have shared their stories with me in this project and to all the young people I have met in my social work role. I have learnt so much from each of you and continue to do so every day.

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The time I have spent with fellow students has been a highlight and I thank Tom, Fiona, Tirrion and Machan for their humour, generosity and honest feedback. My friendship with Roma Thomas has enriched this experience and I am grateful for her insights and encouragement, for walks on the beach discussing theory and for making me laugh when things felt overwhelming.

As a researcher-practitioner I could not have completed this thesis without the support of my manager Suzanne, who valued my studies even when the organisation had other priorities and who trusted me to manage the competing demands of social work and doctoral research.

Finally I would like to thank Gary and Adam, for their unfailing love, support and patience and for believing in me when I doubted myself. I could not have written this without them.

'Where I come from, the opposite of learning
is death. The price of speaking is flesh.
The weight of being a woman scars
deeper than the most unforgiving of wounds

But not today, not among my sisters,
not in this room, not in the next,
Not in a world where I can stand,
me here woman, proud

speaking like the world didn't try to erase me.
wearing my wings and vaulting
fists raised toward the sky

When your existence is an act of defiance, live.'

Extract from 'Classrooms' by Emitithal Mahmoud (2018)

Starting Point: Meeting Kumba

It was a particular moment in 2012 that led me to this research. I was sitting on a sofa in the spacious lounge of a foster carer's home, in a leafy town in southern England. Beside me was a young woman. I will call her Kumba. It was the first time we had met.

Kumba had arrived with an unidentified man who had, seemingly, abandoned her at the port and taken her suitcase. She had only the clothes she was wearing. Kumba said she thought she was coming to live with family in the UK. Instead she had been taken somewhere she had not chosen, by adults she had never met before. It was a place where nobody spoke her language, where the food, the temperature, the smells and the sounds were unfamiliar. The social worker had taken away her phone. An adult was with her everywhere she went. We sat together on the sofa, an interpreter close by, and I tried to work out what Kumba understood about what was happening to her.

There are moments in social work when the power you hold feels almost tangible and this was such a moment. I was unsettled by how very little we knew or understood about Kumba, and by a sense of her complete isolation in the UK. There were questions about her age, her nationality and even her name. Who was this young woman? What had her life been like before we met on that day? Why was she here? I recall feeling physically aware of my age, my whiteness, my Englishness. Was this protection or constraint? How could I help her?

‘Human being, human streaming, we believe in human feeling

If you take away the heart – what’s left of the human?’

Extract from the song ‘Human’, written by immigration detainees

(Music in Detention Project 2017)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns social work practice with unaccompanied, asylum-seeking young women in the UK and was written in the context of highly charged political and social debates about migration. Doctoral research has been described as a solitary, even lonely, pursuit but there have been times when I felt the whole world was debating refugees and what the response should be to the '*worst refugee crisis of our time*' (Amnesty 2015). However, questions about what type of 'crisis' this has been, and for whom, remain a subject of debate (Sigona 2018). In 2016 almost 1.3 million people applied for asylum in EU countries, many fleeing the continuing war in Syria (Eurostat 2018). It is a sobering thought that the Central Mediterranean is now believed to contain the bodies of more than 14,500 migrants, drowned there since 2014 (IOM 2018). Overcrowded boats have become familiar images of migration, Ai WeiWei even turning thousands of abandoned orange life jackets into sculpture (The Observer 2016). Yet the voices of young women are infrequently heard in the literature, or in social debates about forced migration, and this research seeks to make a contribution towards increasing young women's visibility.

There are many complex reasons for migration, and it can take many forms, but this doctoral research focusses on a particular group of young people who arrive in the UK: unaccompanied young women. In the UK, unaccompanied young people are defined as those who are:

- under 18 years of age when the claim is submitted
- claiming in their own right
- separated from both parents and not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so

(Home Office 2017).

Around 20,000 unaccompanied young people are estimated to have arrived in Europe in 2017 (UNICEF 2018), although statistics vary. The responses of individual states differ but, when young women are identified as unaccompanied in the UK, they become 'looked after' within the care system (DfE 2017a). Social work therefore has a key role to play in their care, support and protection, making it an important site for social research. Of course, social work practice is itself shaped by the political and social context in which it takes place and, in recent years, the government has worked to create a 'hostile environment' for 'illegal' migrants, those without a documented right to live and work in the UK (Kirkup and Winnett 2012; Moore 2013). Those seeking asylum, as is their right under international law, have become caught up in these wider constructions of illegality. Refugees and asylum-seekers have been framed as 'undeserving' during a time of austerity (Farmer 2017), and the asylum-seeker as 'threat' has been a dominant discourse in UK media and parliamentary texts since 2000 (Masocha and Simpson 2011). It is a difficult time to be applying for refuge in the UK and children and young people are not exempt from these exclusionary practices. The discourse of burden-sharing, for example, is found in Local Authority negotiations about the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied young people (London Councils 2018), framing them as dependent and a drain on resources, rather than potential contributors to society. Given that social work does not take place in a social vacuum, research is needed which can offer a perspective on how this may be impacting on young people using public services.

This thesis is concerned with the experiences of young women and social work practitioners who meet in social work spaces, within the cultural moment described above, and it explores the understandings that may emerge there. It is important to say, from the start, that I make no claims to objectivity here, as I have been a practising social worker for over twenty years. Throughout this project I have worked with unaccompanied young people, both young men and young women, in my capacity as an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for 'looked after' children. This is a statutory role, and the main focus of the IRO role is ensuring that 'looked after' children have high-quality care plans which are being implemented without delay, and that children and

young people's wishes and feelings are being considered throughout.

As an insider-researcher, I cannot apply an external lens to the profession. For me, the abstract debates on immigration conjure up faces of young people who are missing, or young women who are building possible futures while they wait for news about families or asylum claims. My role as IRO differs from that of the allocated social worker and provides a particular lens on practice. I therefore offer a contribution to knowledge from a perspective rarely heard in the literature, or in academic or public spaces where young migrants are discussed. I am not claiming this as the 'truth' about social work with unaccompanied young women but, as one truth amongst many, I believe it increases our knowledge about some highly complex and challenging social issues.

The invisibility of young women in the literature, and the sparse knowledge I found when looking for research to support my practice, are key reasons for my focus on young women. However, there was another motivation. Simply put, being with young women in practice felt different to being with young men and I had a sense that we shared an experience of being female which acted as a point of connection. Writing as a white, older, British woman, I acknowledge that feminism has been heavily critiqued for taking a universal view of gender (hooks 2015; Lorde 2007), and I suggest an intersectional lens offers richer understandings (Purkaysatha 2012b). A debate has also re-emerged in relation to trans-women and their inclusion in feminist spaces, with fierce disagreements about whether gender and sex are chromosomally, biologically or socially defined (Beauchamp and D'Harlingue 2012; Hines 2017). This is not a question I am attempting to answer here and a debate I return to in Chapter 3. I would argue, however, that my lived experience been profoundly shaped by my identity as a woman and by the biological body I occupy, as well as the gendered constructions of that body.

It is also important to consider that debates about gender are not always universal, and young women may come from cultures where aspects of gender may be constructed in very different, potentially binary, ways (Ussher et al 2017; WRC 2005). What I found myself asking in practice was whether the young women were experiencing their lives as gendered and whether gender had any relevance for them in their interactions with

social workers. Given the current absence of feminist theory being used in social work practice, at least in the spaces I occupy, I was also unsure how practitioners may be thinking and feeling about gender and the potential impact on their work with young women. Questions about gender were therefore starting points for this project and, for this reason, I have not started with any fixed constructions.

Similarly I am not starting with any fixed notions of agency and power, having found no definition that satisfactorily reflects the complex ways that power and agency intertwine within social work practice. I agree with Giddens (1984) that power relations are always in flux, but have found his model of agency and structure too rigid and less helpful. Foucault's (1977, 1980) notion of 'capillary' power better describes my experience of power flowing between, and through, individuals in social work spaces. Yet the subject can become lost here, and Foucault (ibid.) offers no robust explanation of how social change may happen, whether through individual or collective action. This is less useful for social work practice where change is a driving force (Jeffery 2011). In my practice I experience young people and practitioners as highly agentic, but these forms of agency are always situated within power, and it is this inter-relationship I wish to explore in this project.

My intention, then, is to unpick some of the complex and shifting dynamics that may be shaping social work encounters. This does not mean, however, that I am championing social work practice in all its forms. Practice, as distinct from law and policy, describes what social workers *do* in their professional role. It is a term frequently used but rarely defined. Considering its centrality to the work, there is relatively little literature that considers what takes place in encounters with children and young people, and practice ethnographies are rare (Ferguson 2010; 2016a). There are some suggestions that practice can be seen as the less interesting, less creative focus of social work literature:

‘what a pleasure to read a book that is intellectually stimulating and relevant for social work but not bogged down in day to day practice!’ (Naylor 2017 p382)

As a practitioner-researcher I am troubled by this view, experiencing practice as a site of possibility where my own understandings and ways of being meet the lived experience of a young person, always in unique and often unpredictable ways. Staying

close to practice, and maintaining the challenge of putting theory into action in the moment, has been a key driver in my professional choices. My experience is better described by Adams et al (2005), who link practice with a process of continual thinking, evaluating and reflecting:

‘the social worker practitioner engages in practice much as a musician performs. Each performance is unique. Practice, therefore, is a creative act of choosing between myriad possibilities’ (ibid. p7)

I therefore intend to make an argument for the importance of practice, its distinctiveness from what is written in policy and law, and its potential as a site of creativity and change.

Thesis Structure: Telling the Story

Although the literature can describe research as a linear process (Robson 2011), my experience was one of moving back and forward between data collection, transcription and analysis. However, for practical reasons, the chapters describe the research stages sequentially. Additional information is provided in the appendices and signposted in the text when relevant.

I begin, in Chapter 2, by exploring the knowledge base and the literature that already exists about social work with unaccompanied young people, with a particular focus on what is known about young women. I define my main research question and sub-questions at the end of this chapter. In Chapter 3 I describe my methodological framework and introduce my main theoretical frames. Chapter 4 considers the selected research methods, the ethical issues involved in this project, the process of gaining access to the sites and the data collection phase. Data analysis is explored in Chapter 5.

I present my research findings from Chapter 6 to Chapter 9. While theory is used to consider the data through these chapters, there is a fuller theoretical analysis in Chapter 10. Finally, in Chapter 11, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of this research, consider the implications for social work practice and identify a possible direction for

future research.

Some Notes on Terminology

I use the term unaccompanied, rather than separated, because it is the main term used in UK social work policy and practice. I recognise that terms used about migration are contested, and this is a key discussion in this thesis. When I refer to young men and young women, this should be taken as meaning unaccompanied young people. Although I use the term young woman, it would perhaps be more precise to say they are young people who are identified, by themselves or others, as female.

If 'indigenous' young people are referred to, or other individuals, I make this explicit. The term 'indigenous' is currently used in social work practice to describe children and young people who identify as British, some of whom may be British citizens. It is also sometimes used to describe children who may have migrated with their families or other carers, but who then have a lived history in the UK before coming into care. In this way it differentiates young people who become 'looked after' following a period of family care, from those who enter the UK without family and become 'looked after' on arrival or shortly afterwards. However I recognise that indigeneity is a contested concept, less an existing fact than a '*frame of political requirements*' (Valkonen et al 2017). I also know from my practice experience that young people in the UK care system have diverse and complex histories and individual identities which cannot be represented by a single term, and 'indigenous' is therefore used within quotes.

A child is understood to be someone under 18, but I recognise the difficulties of establishing age with young migrants (Crawley and Kelly 2012). As most unaccompanied young people entering the UK are teenagers, I mainly use the term young person or people. The term practitioner refers to a social worker who is working in front-line services, directly with young people.

I begin this thesis, in the following chapter, by considering what is already known about unaccompanied young women, the existing research base and the gaps in the literature.

I start by exploring the key themes relating to gender, age and migration, before considering the knowledge base for social work with unaccompanied young women in the UK and the research question that evolved from the literature review.

Chapter 2

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

In this chapter I examine what is already known about unaccompanied young women, with a particular emphasis on social work responses. As part of the Professional Doctorate process, the literature was explored within my Critical Analytic Study (CAS), completed in 2015. Here, I revisit the key messages from my CAS and consider the literature published since its completion. I begin with an overview of the literature on gender, age and migration and the themes that emerge. I then explore the literature concerning young women's experiences as migrants and as 'looked after' young people in the UK. The literature relating to practitioner experiences is sparse, but is also considered.

Methodology

As my methodology, I used the model of Critical Interpretative Synthesis developed by Dixon-Woods and her colleagues (2006). An extract from the CAS describing this methodology and the search/inclusion criteria is found in Appendix 1.

I recognise that research always takes place within a political context (Clough and Nutbrown 2012) and that data sets can vary and terms are problematic. Humphris and Sigona (2016), for example, found significant differences in the way unaccompanied children were defined and counted in Europe. They argue this not only leads to inconsistent data collection, but to young people being positioned differently to the protective frameworks within nation states. This can illustrate what state actors want to draw attention to, the numbers of people crossing borders for example, and what they may not, such as figures on detention and return.

Despite these caveats the literature does paint a rich, although sometimes troubling, picture of the experiences of young women at times of forced migration, and some of

the responses they have received from social work services in host countries, including the UK. It also offers some evidence of the ways that young women can be constructed, and this is where I begin.

Gender, Age and Migration: An Overview

UNHCR (2018a) says that 50% of displaced people are women and girls, but they have been called the '*world's biggest minority*' (Forced Migration Research Network 2017). There is now a body of literature arguing that women's experiences can differ at every stage of forced migration (Crawley 2001; Gerard and Pickering 2014; Hoang 2011; Kelson and Delaet 1999; Morrice 2016; Palmary et al 2010; Sirreyeh 2010, 2013a), but female voices remain under-represented. Asaf (2017), for example, notes the invisibility of Syrian women and girls, and her struggle to find 'scholarly work' about female experiences of the war.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which the UK is a signatory, defines a refugee as:

'someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (UNHCR 1951)

Gender is invisible in this definition but some forms of persecution are now recognised as gender-related and women seen as a 'particular social group' (Crawley 2001). There remain debates about the extent to which women are protected, limited or assisted by international responses to forced migration (Edwards 2010), but gender-based persecution is now accepted as a reason to claim asylum, for men and boys as well as women and girls:

'Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private' (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015, p5).

It is important to note here that gender is not the only identity that can affect migration experiences, as lived experience can develop within and across multiple identities

(Mattsson 2014; Purkaysatha 2014). There is evidence that experiences can be affected by class (Urbanska 2016), by ethnicity (Ahmed 2000), by religion (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010; Mavelli and Wilson 2017), by age (Slade and Borovnik 2018), by disability (Crock et al 2012), and for people identifying as LGBTQI (Fournier et al 2018). Yet there remains evidence that gender is a variable with a potentially distinct impact. Dahinden et al (2014), for example, argue that ethnicity, gender and religion are all implicated in the construction of the 'oppressed' Muslim women, but they have their own narratives and specific logics which need to be considered differently in research.

I am not arguing that women's experiences are more severe than those of men, but rather that lived experiences of forced migration can differ across genders and may require a different response. Women and girls can be targeted with sexual violence at refugee camps, for example, when they fulfil their social role of collecting firewood or getting food (WRC 2005). There are concerns, however, that feminist campaigns have foregrounded oppression over agency, constructing asylum-seeking women as '*passive, dependent, vulnerable victims in need of protection*' (Oswin 2001 p 348). As Oswin (ibid.) warns, this reliance on humanitarianism can obscure women's rights, making it easier for states to restrict entry on the basis of particular constructions of female refugees. Constructions of passivity can also misrepresent the complexity of women's identities. Women can act agentially as leaders in communities affected by crisis (ActionAid 2016), for example, and adult women and girls can themselves be combatants and perpetrators of abuses during war (Loken 2017).

A similar debate about protection, agency and rights exists in relation to refugee children. In the UK policy states, for example, that:

'unaccompanied asylum seeking children and child victims of human trafficking are some of the most vulnerable children in the country'. (DfE 2017a).

The 'vulnerable child' is a powerful construction, and may represent a truth about their position at a given time, but the literature suggests power is working through all these ways of thinking. While young women may be in search of safety and support, it is important to remember they do not categorise themselves as refugees, or as unaccompanied, but that these are definitions imposed by adults in positions of

authority. There is a tension in the literature between constructions of the ‘vulnerable, blameless child’ and the ‘agentic, independent young migrant’. Danewid (2017) highlights the relational nature of these constructions, how we frame ourselves in the process of constructing others. When social workers position unaccompanied young women as children, for example, they place themselves in the position of adult protector (Larkin 2015), legitimising themselves in power.

Using the intersecting lenses of age and gender, there is a growing international awareness that young women may be positioned in particular ways during times of conflict and forced migration (Raddatz 2013; Stark et al 2018). The Women’s Refugee Commission (2014a) argues that adolescent girls (those between 10 and 19) are at particular risk of being overlooked in humanitarian crises, due to the private social sphere they can occupy:

‘Girls who are separated from their families, married or have a disability, or any combination of these circumstances, face even greater risk of all forms of abuse and hardship. As families cope with separation, loss of livelihoods, access to basic needs, and other stress and shocks, girls often take on increased responsibilities in caring for dependents, carrying out household chores, and engaging in livelihood activities at the cost of their education and physical safety. These circumstances restrict girls’ mobility, visibility and access to lifesaving services. Isolated from their peers, support groups and the wider community, adolescent girls are often invisible to humanitarian relief effort’ (ibid. p1).

Some NGO projects have developed in response to these concerns, targeting refugee girls’ education internationally (UNHCR 2018b), or offering localised projects for displaced young women (RefuShe 2018). Although reducing social inequality is a key goal of such projects, there is evidence that the physical experience of living as a young woman is also a significant factor. Ivanova et al’s (2018) systematic review found limited knowledge among displaced and refugee adolescent girls about their sexual health, and concluded that this contributed to mortality via pregnancy-related complications. Ussher et al (2017) argue that cultural discourses of secrecy and shame around female sexual embodiment can make it difficult for young women to make informed choices and to participate in their own sexual health care. During conflict or displacement girls can be targeted for rape, leading to pregnancy or possible HIV transmission (WCR 2014b). They can also be married when their periods begin, sometimes seen as providing safety (Grabska 2010), but this can also lead to increased risks of early maternal death

and disability, unsafe abortions, and untreated sexually transmitted diseases (2014a, 2014b). When access to sanitation, water, and hygiene facilities in camps has been provided, it can increase young women's participation in education and social projects (Action Aid 2016). This literature suggests, therefore, that the physical bodies of young women, and the ways in which biological processes are framed, are a factor in their experiences. Researchers and practitioners may therefore need to pay attention to the embodied experiences of young women's migration, as well as to their social, legal and political positioning.

The literature on trafficking for exploitation is also concerned with the constructions of female bodies and the gender-power relations that shape and define these exploitations. Young women can be trafficked for sexual, labour or domestic exploitation (Bokhari and Kelly 2012; Connolly 2014) or brokered marriages (Hume and Sidun 2017), and adolescent girls can be targeted by trafficking networks with promises of jobs and travel (Sarkar 2015). Miller-Perrin and Wurtele's (2017) literature review found girls aged 15 to 19 were at greatest risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation internationally. The line between sex work and trafficking is blurry and highly contested (Gerassi 2015), however, as is the line between trafficking and smuggling (Crawley 2001). Definitions of trafficking have been critiqued (Cree et al 2014), and there are concerns that boys' exploitation goes unreported (Hickle and Roe-Sepowitz 2014; Pearce 2011). Women can also be procurers for trafficking groups (UNODC 2016), so the knowledge base is not yet robust and assumptions about safe females may undermine young women's safety.

Palmary et al (2010) notes that agency is a vexing topic for feminist academics here and I share Hume and Sidun's (2017) concerns that the 'helpless trafficked women' narrative can diminish women's and girls' narratives of strength and, paradoxically, increase their vulnerability to exploitation. Research with teenagers at risk of exploitation in the UK has made a similar call for a stronger focus on agency and rights, concluding this may better support the development of a trusting relationship between practitioners and young people (Lefevre et al 2017). It is important to separate consent and agency here, and to recognise that these are both framed by cultural power relations that impact on

the strategies that migrant young women may be able to utilise (Rushing et al 2010). I also agree with Palmary et al (2010) that we need to avoid conflating trafficked women and children as if they were one group, although I am aware the line between adult, youth and child differs across cultures (Hyde et al 2010), so such categorisations need to be approached with care.

The literature shows that the way we describe migrants can affect how we think and act toward them, and categories can shape the legal and moral obligations that societies feel toward people who try to cross borders (Sigona 2018). Crawley and Skleparis (2017) critique the continued '*categorical fetishism*' (p2), questioning the usefulness of data which:

'continues to treat the categories 'refugee' and 'migrant' as if they simply exist, out there, as empty vessels into which people can be placed in some neutral ordering process like a small child putting bricks into a series of coloured buckets' (ibid. p2)

I agree with Masocha (2013) that social work research needs to consider how the profession may maintain or disrupt constructions of the asylum-seeker, and the implications for practice with those who migrate. Of course, young women are also using a range of constructions to navigate their everyday lives but, as it is not young people who write law, policy or media stories, these constructions are less easily accessed. Following on from these broad debates, I will now consider what is already known about young women's experiences of forced migration, beginning with the literature that explores why young women may leave their country of origin and what is known about their subsequent journeys.

Routes to the UK: Risks and Opportunities

The reasons young people give for migration are varied but include war, forms of sexual violence, death of family members and political persecution, as well as perceived economic and educational opportunities (Heaphy et al 2007; Hopkins and Hill 2008; Kohli 2007). There is evidence of gendered migration experiences here. More young men give conflict, forced recruitment and political violence as reasons for leaving, whilst most of the young women focus on personal experiences of trauma or home-based

violence which includes forced marriage or female genital mutilation (Adams 2009; Ayotte and Williamson 2001, Chase et al 2008; Hopkins and Hill 2008; Thomas et al 2004). Some Ugandan young women in the UK, for example, have described being held in rebel camps where they were forced to work and repeatedly assaulted by soldiers, before either escaping or being sent abroad for further exploitation (Heaphy et al 2007). Young women may therefore be fleeing unwanted or unsafe situations, rather than always embarking on a planned, international journey (Denov and Bryan 2012).

There is very little evidence about the decision-making processes that may take place when children are sent away or leave. Cultural gendered practices may have an impact here. While young men have been sent to the UK to escape poverty and conflict in Afghanistan (Gladwell 2012), for example, young women were kept within the family and few reached the UK. Transport routes can also differ, as people may make choices based on differing perceived vulnerabilities. Sarkar (2015) reports that trafficked women and children can be hidden in the floors of buses or lorries, in trains, or on boats. There are examples of young women flying into the UK from Ethiopia and Tanzania (Chase et al 2008; Kidane 2007), and my practice experience is that young women are more likely to arrive in the UK by plane than by lorry, but this is an under-researched area.

The literature shows migration to be an active process, where young women are making decisions at every stage (Thomson 2013), but there is an increasing awareness of the precarious and high-risk journeys that young people undertake. Some leave with siblings or family members but become separated at a later stage, through strategic decisions or through exploitation, death or other circumstances (Denov and Bryan 2012). Being with family members has been linked to resilience in refugee children (Mohamed 2012), so separation may remove an important source of emotional support and protection (Fazel et al 2012). Physical objects can become highly significant in this context, but belongings can easily be lost or stolen (Kidane 2001).

It is not just a time of loss, however, and there can be a strong aspirational element to migration journeys, which can be sustaining on perilous journeys and after arrival (Derluryn et al 2014; Kohli 2007; Allsopp and Chase 2017). Digital technology can be

important in these liminal spaces of migration, and this is a growing area of research. Unaccompanied young men in Germany placed digital media on a par with food, as a necessity to plan journeys but also as a way of developing transnational social networks (Kutscher and Kreß 2018). I found no similar studies specifically about young women's use of digital technology on journeys or in host countries. Maitland et al (2015) found young women in Za'arti camp in Jordan were slightly less likely to have access to mobile phones than young men, so access may be affected by gender-power relations. UNHCR (2016) says that refugees can only benefit from digital connectivity but mobile phones can be used to track and contact young women being trafficked for exploitation (Sarkar 2015), so I suggest there is more to consider about balancing rights and risks here.

Although young people can have a destination in mind, this is not always easily reachable and hopes are not always met on arrival. Some young women have described travelling with expectations of an education in the UK, only to find themselves in exploitative situations after arrival (Connolly 2014). Other young women have described having no idea where they were going (Hopkins and Hill 2008). Smugglers are powerful actors in migration journeys, and gender and power can work relationally here. Young women travelling alone through Europe, for example, have reported being forced into 'transactional sex' with smugglers (Freedman 2016), again raising questions about how female bodies are seen by others during migration:

'he told me he'd get me safely on the boat, but once there he gave me an ultimatum, either do sex things or have no food. He told me if I didn't he would tell them I was illegal' (Maryam, a young woman quoted in Treisman 2017 p169).

'Sheena stressed that the 'agent is not a protector and often abuses' the children. Martine stated, 'rape is often part of the price to pay for getting here' and suggested that some agents used a tactic which she described as 'you give me your body and I'll get you out of here' (Hopkins and Hill 2008 p264).

The idea of *journey* suggests constant movement when in fact migration can include long periods of being geographically static. There can be periods of hiatus when borders are closed or resources exhausted and it can become difficult to separate periods of migration from periods of settlement (Crawley and Skleparis 2017). Some journeys are swift and sudden; Selam Kidane (2007) arrived in London within twenty-four hours of leaving Addis Ababa. In contrast, Nadine (Chase et al 2008) describes fleeing Rwanda

with her parents, at the age of 6, moving through two camps before the nuns in an orphanage took her to board a plane. She arrived alone in the UK aged 15.

A body of research describes the negative impact of war and displacement on refugee young people's emotional health (Betancourt et al 2010; Bloch 2014; Hodes et al 2008; Isfahani 2008; Sanchez-Cao et al 2013; Thommessen et al 2013; Treisman 2017 are examples). There are also calls for children and young people to be seen as resourceful in migration and for research to more explicitly consider the social and political context of young people's experiences (Dombo and Ahearn 2017; Denov and Bryan 2012) and to adopt a more robust rights-based approach (Cemlyn and Briskman 2003). Orgocka (2012) prefers the term 'independent child migrants', arguing terms like 'separated' minimise young people's involvement in migration acts. While I am not denying young people have agency, I suggest the term 'independent child migrant' may mask the power relations and cultural practices which affect young migrants. It sits uncomfortably against some young women's accounts of having no part in the decision to leave (Hopkins and Hill 2008; Kidane 2001; Thomas et al 2004). Wells (2011) concluded that young people's migration was impossible without a social network, regardless of gender, and so focussing on independence may also lose an important relational context.

I also question whether it is helpful to consider agency as a cognitive, rational process, where motivations are always explicit at the time of action. In Thomson's (2013) research, for example, Somali young women in Nairobi describe barricading themselves into makeshift housing at night to avoid further physical and sexual harm. Thomson's (ibid.) analysis is that their silence is agentic but '*hardly a reflection of the fears they face*' (p605). While she provides a powerful account of their precarious lives, I find it unhelpful to exclude the affective domain in this way. I suggest a relational lens, which includes the affective dimensions of experience, may be needed to consider the complex ways that young women are able to enact their agency during forced migration.

The literature on young women's initial migration, although sparse, shows that journeys are complex and individual experiences vary. Sirreyeh (2010) guards against the

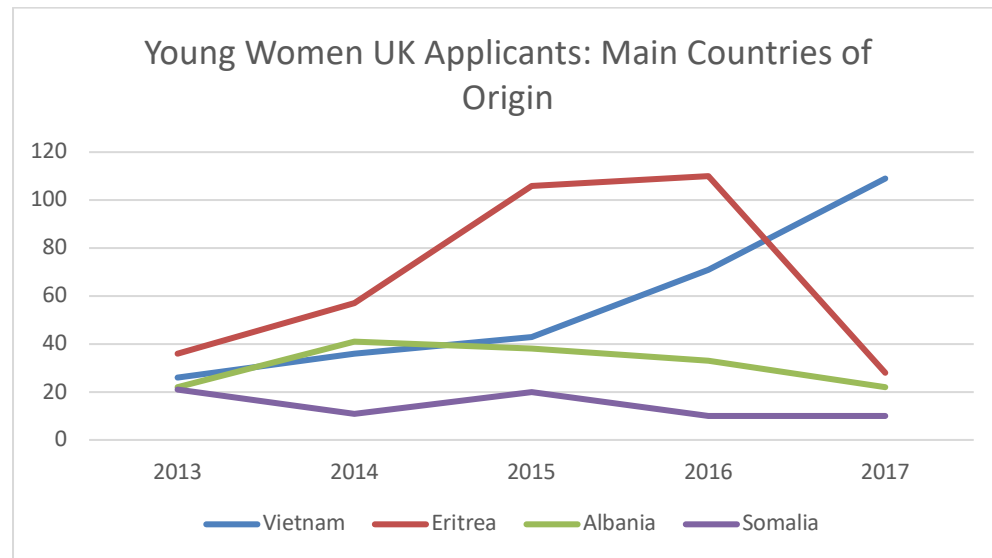
simplistic notion of young women travelling from a place of danger to a place of safety and, in the following section I will consider what is known about young women who cross the border into the UK.

Finding Routes Within the UK

Between 2016 and 2017 the number of unaccompanied girls and young women claiming asylum in the UK rose by 19% but they remain a minority within a minority (Refugee Council 2018a). In 2017, 241 young women made an asylum application, just under 11% of the 2,206 asylum claims from unaccompanied minors. The majority of young women were recorded as aged 16 or 17 (171), with 43 recorded aged 14 to 15, and 15 recorded as under 14 (Home Office 2018). It is important to note that these figures do not capture all young women, because not all young people make asylum applications. Young women travelling on EU adult passports, for example, can be met by traffickers at ports and not identified by any immigration processes (Kelly 2012). Younger girls, abandoned at borders or removed from adults suspected of trafficking, can become 'looked after' through UK safeguarding processes and may not be categorised as unaccompanied.

Since figures have been collected, the majority of UK claims have been from young men, and the number of girls was falling before an increase in 2016 (Refugee Council 2018a). While most young people who applied in 2017 received some form of permission to remain (Refugee Council 2018c), none of the current legal options offer security of residence in the UK as a first decision. Other outcomes can be a planned return to the country of origin (Finch 2012), detention and deportation or going missing from care (Dennis 2007). The critical need for timely, skilled and informed legal representation cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

Unsurprisingly, asylum application figures reflect international situations and there have been continual shifts in the main countries of origin for young women:



(Data from Refugee Council 2018c)

As the graph shows, Vietnam is the main country of origin for girls at the time of writing, reflecting the growing concerns about the increasing numbers of Vietnamese young people being brought to the UK for forms of exploitation (ECPAT 2018). The countries of origin for young women differ from those for adult women, currently Iran, Albania, Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan (Refugee Council 2018a). This suggests there are different contexts affecting adult women's and young women's migration and that age needs to be considered as a factor in individual experience. Gender remains a factor to consider, however, as the main countries for unaccompanied young men are different again, namely Sudan, Eritrea, Albania and Afghanistan (ibid.). Both age and gender may therefore be implicated in reasons for migration. Some of the knowledge gained about adult women and young men may also have limitations when applied to young women and I would suggest this supports the validity of research which considers young women as a specific group.

A number of inter-agency protocols and 'toolkits' exist to help practitioners identify unaccompanied and trafficked children at borders (DfE 2017a; Ishalo 2012), but making these distinctions is rarely straightforward in practice. If they become 'looked after' in England under the Children Act 1989, young women become subject to yet another range of law, policy and procedure, and establishing age is a critical step here (Crawley and Kelly 2012). In the UK, it is social workers who have the responsibility of carrying out

age assessments to establish if a young person is under 18 (DfE 2017a). These assessments have been critiqued as euro-centric and problematic (Cemlyn and Nye 2012; Gower 2011), however, and no reliable method for establishing age is available, nationally or internationally.

As of March 31st 2017, young women made up 8% of all unaccompanied young people in local authority accommodation, and 0.5% of the total 'looked after' population in England: 390 out of 72,670 (DfE 2017b). The relatively small number of young women has a number of potential implications. Social networks can be important sources of support for young asylum-seekers (Wells 2011) but, depending on location, the small numbers of young women may reduce opportunities for peer networks to develop. Even if social workers are in specialist asylum teams, they are still likely to be primarily working with young men, limiting opportunities to develop practice experience with young women. Policy and organisational systems have developed from knowledge gained predominantly from work with young men who, as noted above, can also come from a different set of countries than young women. Local Authorities have different numbers of unaccompanied young people, related to their location, and so experience has not developed evenly across the profession.

The figures also show that the majority of 'looked after' children in England and Wales are 'indigenous' and, as of March 31st 2017, 75% were recorded as white (DfE 2017b). Unless a practitioner is in a specialist team, it would be reasonable to assume they are working with predominantly white British children in care. Interestingly, the DfE (2017b) attributes the increase in young people of 'non-white ethnicity' to the increasing number of unaccompanied young people. Whiteness is presented as the norm here and the multitude of other possible ethnicities have become grouped into a position of 'otherness' (Ahmed 2000).

The smaller number of unaccompanied young women has also made it harder to locate and include them as research participants, a factor that also affected this project. Local authority data can be inconsistent (Humphris and Sigona 2016) making reliable analysis difficult. Some researchers have attempted to involve young women but were not able

to engage them (Wade et al 2012). When they have been involved, the intersectional nature of their lives, and the small numbers, has made it difficult for generalised comments about gender to be made (Chase et al 2008). In the following section I explore the knowledge base for social work practice with unaccompanied young women, what is known about their encounters with social workers in the UK and the ways of thinking and feeling about practitioners that young women have shared in research.

Young Women and Social Work: Encounters in the UK

From the moment a young woman is identified as potentially unaccompanied, professionals begin to gather information about her. The police may be seeking evidence of trafficking or criminal activity (Ishola 2012). Border officers and Home Office staff will be seeking information about immigration status and asylum claims (Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration 2018). Social workers are looking for a history on which to base their initial assessments (Payne 2014). Doctors may want a medical history and teachers an educational history (Rutter 2000). All this at a time when a young woman's emotional and physical resources may be low and she is trying to find her way in a new country.

In social work theory, understanding a young person's life history is seen as an essential step for assessment and emotional support (Drammeh 2010; Payne 2014). Done well, assessments are processes of 'complexity thinking' (Adams et al 2005), offering spaces for practitioners to consider, with a young person, what is known and what interventions are needed. Practitioners have said they want to be better able to communicate with young women and to know more about their pasts (Larkin 2015), but a number of barriers to communication exist in this context, such as language differences, access to interpreting services, and different cultural practices and belief systems (Kohli 2007; Merry et al 2011). Practitioners can have very little information about young women on arrival and the sources used for 'indigenous' children can be irrelevant (Simpson 2005). The main source of knowledge can then become the young woman herself, leading to pressure to speak:

‘sometimes they don’t understand when you are sad. They keep asking you question. It makes me angry, it makes me want to shout. It makes me remember all the bad things and they don’t understand that. If they ask me questions, I will suffer for months’ (Hellen, a young woman quoted in Chase et al 2008).

There is a clear affective dimension to communication in this context. Trauma and fear can be present, and young women have described their lack of trust in authority figures (Groark et al 2011; Hopkins 2007). Silence has been linked to grief and trauma in young people (Kohli 2006) but Ni Raghallaigh (2014) argues that young people’s mistrust can also be ‘*a strategic behaviour, aimed at self protection*’ (p89). A young woman in her research said her social worker did not trust her story, so she did not feel able to tell her everything. The other young participants, of mixed genders, gave five broad reasons for their mistrust of others: past experiences or fear and betrayal, being accustomed to mistrusting in early life, being mistrusted by others, not knowing people well enough over time and concerns about what would happen if they told the truth. However trust is analysed in the literature, there is consensus that it is an key component in the process of communication and understanding.

When they do encounter social workers, young people of all genders have described their difficulties in understanding what practitioners *do* (Chase 2010). This is unsurprising, as social work is a contested concept. After 20 years, I still find it difficult to describe what I do and the focus of the work perpetually shifts. When unaccompanied young women are provided with an appropriate level of individualised support, there is evidence they can do well in all their settings (Wade et al 2012), and this has been my practice experience. Some young women and men have described their social workers as providers of ‘*advice, guidance and emotional support and encouragement*’ (ibid. p302). Yet there are also examples of young women feeling disbelieved by practitioners when they do not fulfil the construction of the traumatised victim. Genevive, for example, told researchers her social worker did not believe she has been held by an adult abuser because she was assertive, and could navigate the underground without help (O’Higgins 2012).

What emerges from research is evidence of pockets of good practice, sometimes based on team approaches (Pearce 2012) but more often located within individual

practitioners (Chase et al 2008; Kohli 2007; Larkin 2015; Meloni and Chase 2017; Wade et al 2012). In some areas services are delivered through specialist teams, but there is no clear evidence that they provide higher standards of care, although there are concerns that skills and knowledge are lost when teams are disbanded (Sigona et al 2017). The location of the practitioner appears to be less critical to young people than their individual knowledge base, their experience, their access to resources and their ability to engage (Wade et al 2012). Training and experience may also be factors. Mitchell (2007), for example, found the procedural approach by unqualified workers in a specialist team was less popular with young people than the more engaged work of qualified social workers in a mainstream team. What comes through is that individual practice is important and young people do not consider practitioners to be interchangeable.

Yet, while some practitioners may be aware that effective communication draws on the emotional, visual and sensed (Lefevre 2018), there are concerns that the neo-liberal model had reduced face to face contacts with service users (Broadhurst and Mason 2014), and that it excludes the non-calculable ways of knowing (Froggett 2002). Chase's work (Allsopp and Chase 2017; Chase et al 2008; Chase 2010) describes the impact on young men and women when bureaucratic practice is foregrounded over individualised engagement. When young women do experience a consistent and containing response, this is something they value:

‘I feel like social services are like your parents, aren't they? That you can reach out to’ (Christiana, a young woman quoted in Chase et al 2008)

Young women have described hopes for a sense of welcome and stability in the UK (Chase 2010; Connolly 2014), but they can have very little choice about forms of accommodation, or their locations. Some local authorities offer only semi-independent placements to unaccompanied young people over 16 (Pearce 2012; Sirryeh 2013b), so young people can find themselves immediately expected to negotiate UK life with limited levels of support. Gender can be a factor here, as young women in Kent were placed in foster families while young men were more often placed in shared accommodation (Watters 2008), and this remains the policy. Wade et al (2012) found no association between culturally matched foster placements and improved outcomes,

for young women or young men. Instead it was their relationships with the adults that young people identified as most significant in feeling safe and supported in their accommodation. Interestingly, gender relations were described as a source of conflict by practitioners and female carers, but only in relation to young men. Some young men were described as 'disrespectful', because their cultural models of femininity did not frame adult women as rule-makers in the home, and one carer framed a young man as a potential risk to her teenage daughter. No such concerns arose about young women.

Some gender differences in emotional needs are described in the literature but findings can be contradictory. Bean et al's (2007) research in Belgium and the Netherlands found both unaccompanied and accompanied young women reported higher levels of internalised distress (anxiety and depression) than young men, who reported higher levels of externalised, behavioural impacts. In contrast, Fazel et al (2012) concluded, from their literature review, that boys' increased ability to internalise 'disorders' was a protective factor, and that refugee girls (unaccompanied and accompanied) were more likely to have mental health needs. I am unsure, however, whether this internalisation equates to a lack of mental health needs as Fazel et al (ibid.) suggest. Not expressing emotional pain, verbally or through behaviour, is not the same as not experiencing it, as the young women in Bean et al's (2007) study describe. In other research, both unaccompanied young women and young men have described troubling emotions that were impacting on their everyday lives (Chase et al 2008).

There are also cross-cultural differences in the ways that mental health is understood (Treisman 2017), and if young women are reluctant to access mental health services, the social worker can become a main source of emotional support. There are different views on the practitioner role here, and the participants in Kohli's (2007) research took different approaches to young people's emotional needs. Gender may influence professional perspectives on emotional support. Social workers have said they find unaccompanied young women more willing, or able, to verbalise their feelings than young men and can approach encounters with young women with this expectation (Larkin 2015).

Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) concluded that the refugee young men and women in their research used 'emotional suppression' to maintain resilience and suggested that professionals should focus on practical tasks. As a practitioner I am unsure that the practical and the emotional can be separated in such a way. The 'practical task' of applying to the Red Cross for family tracing, for example, involves discussions with young people that are highly emotive. Neither does young people's reluctance, or struggle, to voice their feelings mean that these are not present in the encounter, affecting the communicative process (Lefevre 2018) and the understandings that emerge through it. What is clear from the literature is that social workers need to communicate with young women in skilled and sensitive ways from their very first encounters. There is evidence that some social workers can balance the practical and emotional needs of unaccompanied young people, even within task-led organisations (Kohli 2007; Larkin 2015), but feelings of surveillance can step in when communication and relationship are absent.

Adult refugees in the UK have stressed the importance of technology to maintain links with transnational families (Williams 2006), raising questions about whether such links are being supported for 'looked after' young women. There is a lack of research which includes family member voices, although some young people have lost all family members so these connections cannot always be re-established (Kidane 2001). Making contact may also place family members at risk, so this needs to be handled in an informed and sensitive manner. When family members are physically absent, cultural connections and social networks are seen as ways to build resilience for refugees (Beirens et al 2007; O'Hagan 2001; Wells 2011). However, separated young people have said they want to make their own choices about which aspects of culture they want to maintain (Heaphy et al 2007; Wade et al 2012), so supporting this this would require engagement with the young woman. There are dangers that understandings not explored with young women may draw on post-colonial frames of rescue and dominance (Danewid 2017). For example, I find Lees and Jovett's (2002) conclusion that unaccompanied young women need to escape '*oppressive cultures*' (p15) uncomfortably close to Ong's (2003) description of '*compassionate domination*' (p167), where social workers become engaged in a process of cultural erasure.

Not all unaccompanied young women remain 'looked after', however, and there are concerns about the number that go missing each year and the potential for their exploitation (ECPAT 2016; Pearce 2011). Local authorities can be inconsistent in recording these missing episodes, if they keep data at all (Humphris and Sigona 2016), making some young people invisible to services designed to support them. The figures also raise concerns about whether the approaches to young women are effectively engaging them. There is little in the literature about how young women experience trafficking safety planning and there are questions to be asked about the child-rights aspects of these plans, usually implemented outside any legal arena or formal appeal processes. That is not to say that protection is unnecessary, but rather that this work is not being sufficiently explored or scrutinised.

Young women officially leave statutory care at 18, becoming entitled to support under Care Leaving legislation if they qualify, but there is a scarcity of data on what happens to them afterwards (Humphris and Sigona 2016). Young people are expected to have an evolving Pathway Plan from 16, so many young people can be expected to think about leaving care almost from the moment they arrive into it. In the UK, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC) leave to remain expires at 17 and a half, making it an anxiety-provoking time for young people.

Separated young people, without secure legal status and often living precarious lives, can struggle to develop a '*perception of a projected self within a future life trajectory*' (Chase 2013), an essential component of well-being. In response, EU states are being asked to provide 'durable solutions' for unaccompanied young people (Allsopp and Chase 2017) and, in 2017, this notion emerged in UK policy (DfE 2017a). Yet UK policy describes transition planning as a highly rational, procedural process where the complexities of situated practice are reduced to a series of informational tasks and the emotional becomes invisible. After years of working in this field, I am unconvinced that '*a holistic and informative approach*' (DfE 2017a) is sufficient to support young women who are managing the anxiety of an unknown future. One practitioner has described how young people may disengage or act like '*the ostrich*' as they near 18 (Allsopp and

Chase 2017), and this has been my experience with young women in practice. The boundaries of social work power itself are also made more visible here.

The dominance of immigration law becomes clearer as young women reach 18, making policy self-contradictory. Social work is presented as the mitigating factor for the lack of durable solutions - the same solutions that the policy says practitioners must work to provide. As an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), I find it difficult to imagine discussing a Pathway Plan for an 'indigenous' young person that involved them going to live in a country with on-going conflict, or to an environment that none of the involved adults had visited. Of course this could be seen as a failing of international social work, and I have no wish to frame all other countries as 'other', but it does highlight differences in what is considered acceptable for different groups of young people. Kidane (2007) says social workers should explore all opportunities for permanence for unaccompanied young people but the absence of a permanency narrative in the literature, so visible in relation to 'indigenous' looked after children, is striking. This may, in part, relate to age but I suggest we are still far from providing the durable solutions that young women need.

Summary: Locating the Research Question

Despite the wide range of disciplines writing in this area, young women's voices are infrequently heard in the literature and no studies were found that specifically considered unaccompanied young women's experience of social work in the UK. The existing research does, however, highlight the significance of the social work role with unaccompanied young people, and the need to respond flexibly to individual need. Although the voices of UK social workers are even more minimal in the literature, some have asked for more support to better understand and engage with unaccompanied young women (Larkin 2015). Pockets of good practice are not enough, however, and there is little examination of the role of social workers in areas such as asylum interviews and anti-trafficking processes. The literature shows that services can provide safe care and opportunities to achieve individual goals but there is also evidence that unexplored emotional responses may exclude and silence young people, and narrow constructions

of gender, age and refugees can work against them.

Given the current social and political attention being paid to forced migration, UK social work academia is noticeably quiet on the topic. Much of the research is therefore from disciplines 'looking in' on social work practice, although social work is, of course, accountable for the interventions made in people's lives and needs to pay attention to all studies. I am particularly mindful that, as a doctoral student, I discovered a body of rich and multi-disciplinary literature I was unaware of as a practitioner, so even the existing literature is not reliably making its way to practice spaces. I would suggest, therefore, that social work would benefit from widening its knowledge base.

While an important multi-disciplinary knowledge base is building, the micro-level of everyday social work practice with unaccompanied young people needs more examination. It would be foolish to argue that policy or law are not significant, as they define the national responses to migrants and frame the statutory social work role, but that does not mean the micro-level is an unimportant site for research. As the literature shows, social workers are not just enactors of policy and law, but are actively interpreting them at the micro-level. There are examples of young people experiencing connections and misconnections with practitioners, even when the organisational, policy and legal context are the same. More needs to be understood about these micro-level encounters, from the perspective of both young woman and practitioners and the following research question was therefore developed:

How do unaccompanied young women and social workers experience and construct each other and how might this influence social work practice with young women in the UK?

To answer this question, the following sub-questions were devised:

- How do the young women subjectively and emotionally experience their encounters with social workers in the UK?
- How do the young women think UK social workers reach an understanding about them?

- In what ways do the social work practitioners experience, and make sense of, unaccompanied young women and what does this mean for their practice with them?
- In what ways are these experiences and constructions gendered and understood to be gendered?
- How could these relational and subjective experiences be understood theoretically and what are the implications for social work practice?

Having explored the existing knowledge base, and identified the research questions, I now consider which methodological and theoretical frameworks I have used within this research. These are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter I discuss my methodological frameworks and describe the theoretical lenses I brought to the research. The notion of the researcher as a 'blank slate', is strongly contested and there has been a revision of the concept of neutrality across all methodologies (Block et al 2013; Greene 2012), resulting in the development of a range of approaches. I have been a social worker for over twenty years and my aim is not to deny my positionality; another researcher would have collected different data and other interpretations of the data are possible. Shaw and Norton (2007) stress the need for researchers to clarify their epistemological position, because conceptual frameworks affect the knowledge gained through research, and this is where I will begin.

My experience echoes that of Jackson and Mazzei (2012), who describe research as a '*constant, continuous process of making and unmaking*' (p1), where theory and data construct temporary meanings which continually transform. I therefore consider this academic text as a form of representation, one that can be contested by other interpretations of the data (Christensen and James 2008; Lather 2002). Similarly I share Maclure's (2013) doubts about research narratives that claim to represent a stable truth. Instead, I found this research to be an active process which resists certainty, much as I have experienced social work as a career. Berlant (2004) similarly warns us to question any feelings of intellectual comfort, arguing that a full consideration of the world involves feelings of doubt and distress. Rather than excise these from research, Dauphinee (2010) asks academics to include those things which trouble them and that they do not have an answer for:

“not knowing’ does not require silence. It requires the articulation of that unknowing, and the reasons for that unknowing, so that discussion and debate...can continue to move in fruitful directions’ (ibid. p809)

Not staying silent about such uncertainty, however, creates some methodological,

ethical and personal challenges, and I return to these through this thesis. I begin, in the following section, by considering my ontological and epistemological frames.

Ontology and Epistemology: The Conceptual Base

To explore how young women and practitioners may be understanding each other, I have needed to consider how I define knowledge and how this relates to my broader world-view and understandings of power. I find it impossible to think about the social world without considering how power is operating across and within it. Perhaps this is because I have spent my adult life in a profession where power and its limits are continually contested, and where my use of authority can have life-changing effects on individuals. In this research I take a post-structural view of the social world, conceiving of knowledge as situated and constructed but always formed through power:

‘the fight against realism is.. not a denial of reality and of meaning, but rather a determination to keep meaning creative.. to challenge the fixity of realism as a style and an arrested form of representation.. validated to perpetuate the illusion of a stable world’ (Trinh 1991 p164)

I draw particularly on Doreen Massey’s (1994; 2004; 2005) theory of space/time. Her work is well-respected in the field of geography and political studies (Featherstone and Painter 2013) but less familiar in social work academia and practice. Massey (1994) describes the lived world as a multiplicity of spaces which are always temporally situated and intersecting in antagonistic relations. As social actors move, space/time is being continually constructed by an *‘ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations’* (ibid. p3), in which they are uniquely positioned. Importantly, this means that space/time is experienced differently by each social actor, specifically because of their different positions within the power relations. The differing experiences of a young person and their social worker could certainly be read in this way and it offers scope to consider the process of change. More than this, as Grossberg (2013) notes, Massey encourages us to challenge the underlying processes which construct our forms of reality, a reality which can appear to be inevitable but which is itself a production of power.

Power is also implicated in movement across space/time and Massey’s (1994; 2005) work therefore offers a helpful model when thinking about forms of migration. For

Massey (ibid.) each person's lived experience is unique because they move along differentiated trajectories, but *power/geometry* still affects the control individuals can exert on their travel along these trajectories. The holiday-maker, the international businesswoman or the refugee child, for example, are all positioned very differently in flows of movement, and they differ in their relation to the power dynamics that affect these flows. As a feminist scholar, Massey (1994; 2004; 2014) also foregrounds gender, seeing it not as a product of power-relations but bound into the very social relations that construct space and place. To think of power is to think about gender:

‘challenging certain of the ways in which space and place are currently conceptualized implies also, indeed necessitates, challenging the currently dominant form of gender definitions and gender relations’ (1994 p2).

Exploring my own understandings of gender has therefore been important, not least because this research specifically involves young women. Notions of gender have significantly shifted in my lifetime, and continue to do so, and I have no wish to claim an authority over who can call themselves a woman. Academics have long debated how female bodies may be shaped through shifting power relations, if they can be defined at all (Ahmed 2000; Butler 2006; Hines 2017; Nast and Pile 1998; Velte and Ortega 2015). The way that ‘woman’ is constructed is under renewed challenge from trans-gendered scholars (Green and Bey 2017), and Europe is living with a post-colonial legacy which can construct black bodies as dangerous (Danewid 2017) and female Muslim bodies as oppressed and unagentic (Dahinden et al 2014). Gendered and racialised bodies therefore remain contested sites, as are the spaces where these bodies are welcomed, tolerated or excluded. I would suggest, therefore, drawing on the research discussed in Chapter 2, that young women's experiences of forced migration can be affected by the ways that biological processes are understood across cultural and social spaces, and that the body is implicated throughout. In this thesis, I am therefore conceiving of migration as a physical, social and cultural experience, impacted by biology and by the gendered meanings that are attached to the bodies of young women, by themselves and others, as they move through particular spaces over time.

Gender is not just implicated in the research site but involved in the production of knowledge itself, an argument made by feminist scholars over many years (Hesse-Biber

2010, 2012). Foucault's (1977, 1980) theories of the interconnectedness of knowledge and power have been influential here, although he does not focus specifically on gender. Drawing on this body of work, Massey (2005) argues that sites of knowledge production, the monasteries, universities and science parks, have historically been implicit in maintaining gender distinction and expelling women:

‘It is an outcome of a longer, deeper history of gender construction which itself was/is spatially embedded within the making of defensive, specialised places of knowledge’ (ibid. p144)

It is not only women who have been excluded from these sites, however, and western feminism has been validly charged with foregrounding the experiences of white, European, middle-class women. Social research has been similarly critiqued for making black women's experience visible only through *‘the authoritative, imperial voice of whiteness’* (Mirza 1997 p10), and there are many cautionary tales of white researchers imposing euro-centric perspectives on non-white subjects (Banks 2001; Te Riele and Brooks 2013). Philosophical lenses have also been linked with certain ways of thinking about prejudice and power. Davis (1983), for example, argues that, by moving away from ideas of structural oppression, European post-structuralism has allowed white women to avoid their own responsibility in the maintenance of racist structures.

As a white British citizen, researching with migrant young women and social workers with diverse identities, I have remained mindful of such critiques. Social work has its own problematic history of involvement in colonial projects (Jonsson 2013), and I suggest that practitioners need to continually examine the underlying assumptions that affect their perceptions of difference. There also need to be spaces where multiple perspectives on practice and policy are heard. Questions about who is involved in knowledge production have been raised in relation to transgendered people (Green and Bey 2017), to people with disabilities (Ellem et al 2008), and those from working-class backgrounds (Fine 2012). Unaccompanied young women are themselves a diverse group of individuals and an intersectional lens is therefore being used here, recognising that we all live within the scope of a number of interconnected identities (Crenshaw 1989; Purkayastha 2012; Vervliet et al 2014). However, I acknowledge that this intersectional lens is still filtered through my own positionality, including my own

identification as a white, cisgender woman.

Age, and constructions of childhood, are also factors here. While age is a chronological marker that can denote stages of growth, childhood is understood to be a social construction (Gabriel 2014; Hyde et al 2010). Constructions of the child, and their relational connections to family, may therefore impact on the identities young people are able or willing to foreground in particular spaces (Clark-Kazak 2009). Kidane (2007), who arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied girl, claims refugee children have to reconfigure their ideas of age in a new place. Nayak and Kehily (2008) similarly suggest that all young people are engaged in a gendered process of *coming-into being*, making a helpful link between shifting identities and a process of *becoming*. Massey (2005) draws on Deleuze et al's (2003) notion of *molecular becoming* in her work, although she critiques his foregrounding of time over the spatial. Deleuze positions power within the molar, or macro-level, which tries to fix becomings into categories (Coleman and Ringrose 2013). This process of fixing potential becomings could describe the categorisation of those who migrate (Crawley and Skleparis 2017; Goodman et al 2017) and can work to create particular notions of gender or ethnicity (Ahmed 2003). Oswin (2001), for example, argues that current protocols for women seeking asylum have fixed the notion of the refugee woman and created expectations of women's de-politicised passivity.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1983), the *molecular* (or micro-level) is a process of disruption to *molar* (macro-level) power, but Massey (1994) argues that micro-level spaces are not merely reactive to the global. Instead she argues they are sites of both power *and* resistance, whose potential can be utilised in the process of change, and this offers a useful way of thinking about the social work practice space. What Massey and Deleuze share is a fluid notion of *becoming* (Coleman and Ringrose 2013). There is no eventual *being* in this concept, for a child or an adult, and, therefore, an on-going potential for change:

'a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin or destination..a line of becoming has only a middle' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p 293).

If we conceive of individual trajectories as this process of *molecular becoming*, then place can be seen as continual attempts to fix notions of *being*, to stabilise identities (Massey 1994). Place is a '*particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings*' (Massey 1994 p5). It is an event in space/time, when power/gender relations are working to fix meanings, and set boundaries, but where such containment is impossible:

'the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that 'beyond'. Places viewed this way are open and porous.'
(Massey *ibid.* p5)

Immigration debates are examples of such attempts to fix the meaning of place and local authorities similarly try to define their boundaries through age-assessment, and discourses which differentiate between young people (Connolly 2014; Crawley and Kelly 2012). Massey (1994, 2005) argues against the fallacy of attempted homogeneity and for the importance of multiplicity and change. It is an explicitly political position which recognises that contested spaces are a feature of human history, but that our understanding of the past is itself a storied, cultural construction (Hall 1997; hooks 2015). There is also an emotional dimension to occupying places where boundaries continue to shift, however inevitably, and anxiety and fear can emerge. Attempts to fix the identity of a place have been framed as reactionary and exclusionary (Ahmed 2000) but Massey (1994) argues that, rather than dismiss the apparent need for attachment to place, we need to acknowledge its role in the affective process of identity formation. Weigert (2010) agrees that identity is strongly linked to affect, arguing that:

'the simultaneous sense of sameness and difference of self with one's self in past and future, as well as of other as temporally imagined is infused with affectivity. Such felt knowledge or known feelings enter the very make up of Whom we experience our selves to be, and Whom we take the others we face to be as well. Selves and others are affectively weighted objects in deeper and more consequential ways than other objects that make up the circumstances of our lives'.
(*ibid.* p264)

Understanding ourselves, in relation to others, is therefore an affective process, which Massey grounds in particular spaces. Where we are in space/time, and who we are with,

shape who we can become.

The concept of *self*, the ways in which the internal meets the external, has been a source of theoretical discussion for centuries and is not a debate I can settle, although I do find it hard to conceive of any human being having a rational, unemotional response to the world. Gender, and gendered bodies, are also implicated here. Academics continue to debate how affect may be implicated in our constructions of the social world and our relations within it (Berlant 2004; Crepaz 2008). Yet, there remains a schism between what is deemed as emotional (read as feminine and unreliable) and rational (read as masculine and valid) (Massey 2004). Emotion is further linked to the feminine through its location in female bodies, long associated with ‘unruly’ feelings and desires (Hustvedt 2017). Ahmed (2014) argues that emotions are also implicated in the relational production of social bodies, and that we need to pay attention to them as forms of knowledge:

‘we need to consider how emotions operate to ‘make’ and ‘shape’ bodies as forms of action, which also involve orientations towards others. Emotions, for the British National Front, may pose a danger to the national body of appearing soft. But the narrative itself is an emotional one: the reading of others as bogus is a reaction to the presence of othersattending to emotions might show us how all actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others’ (ibid. p4).

I agree that attention needs to be paid to the relational, affective domains of our lives. Yet, interestingly, Ahmed (2000) has said she does not favour research which focuses on the feelings or thoughts of those in exile. In her view, this can exclude the impact of the bodily, social and political and deny the impact of privilege and power. I agree each experience has a wider context that needs to be considered but, in excluding these experiential accounts, she risks losing the subject (Wetherell 2012). When Ahmed (2000) says that emotions become *stuck* to certain bodies, such as the asylum seeker, she helpfully draws attention to how emotions may work to construct the ‘other’, but she is less clear on the process through which these emotions may *circulate* or *stick*. They are somehow operating outside of the bodies that she argues we need to be concerned with.

For this project, I found Wetherell's (2012) notion of *affective practice* a more helpful way forward. Her model draws together a range of theories, to consider affect and its implications for social research, and it is a philosophical fit with Massey's work. Wetherell (ibid.) defines affect as '*embodied meaning-making*', sensed experiences located within physical bodies which are themselves socially situated. Affective practice is:

'a figuration where body possibilities and routines becomes recruited or entangled together with meaning-making, and with other social and material figurations. It is an organic complex in which all the parts relationally constitute each other' (Wetherell 2012 p19).

The relational aspect is important here. Wetherell (2015a; 2015b) describes affect working within the interactions between social actors, and between social actors and their environments. This offers a way of linking what may be felt, or understood, with what may be done, or not done, for young women in social work. Wetherell (2012) also argues that individual affective practice is '*trans-individual and collective*' (p122), containing the traces of past contexts. This gives scope for considering the individual practices of social workers, as well as the wider social practices within the profession.

Wetherell (2012), a social psychologist herself, uses a breadth of inter-disciplinary theories to develop her approach. She takes a different stance to other scholars of affect who tend to be located in particular disciplines, but she is not alone in arguing that the complex social world needs a multidisciplinary perspective (Hustvedt 2016). Wetherell (ibid.) includes elements of psycho-analytical theory, as well as work from neuro-scientific, social and cultural studies. She is sceptical, however, about some aspects of psychotherapeutic theory, questioning whether the psychological is the organising force that she feels Klein and Freud describe. Instead she argues that power, and an individual's available cultural resources, need to be given more consideration. However Wetherell (ibid.) does allow for the unconscious in her conception of affective practice, arguing that we move in and out of knowing when we act, and our motivations can only be partially understood, even by ourselves:

'affective practice sediments and solidifies in individual lives. We can, as result, be surprised by pattern, not because it is deliberately pushed out from consciousness, but because we have not yet had the chance to formulate the conjunctions in just

this way, or to engage in the kind of reflexive reconstructions required. Our affective performance bears a complex relation to our past affective practice and relational history' (Wetherell 2012, p.129)

Wetherell's (2012) notion of settling into *affective patterns* is a helpful frame to consider how social workers and young women may respond to each other and, importantly, to consider how they may be disrupted. I am aware there are some issues in using the affective practice model here. Wetherell (ibid.) says it would be most effective in ethnographic research where interactions are directly observed, rather than with later accounts given in interviews. I acknowledge these limitations but would suggest that it still offers a lens to consider what may be happening in social work encounters, and the affective dimensions of this work.

As well as a theoretical framework, I also needed a methodological framework for the research process, although of course these are interconnected and need to be compatible. I consider this in the following section.

The Methodological Threads

As this research was exploring understandings and lived experience, a qualitative methodology was selected (Krysik and Finn 2013; Robson 2011). Whilst the findings are context-specific, qualitative research can provide evidence of some of the ways forced migrants tell their stories, understand their worlds and act within them (Eastmond 2007) and it is therefore an appropriate methodology for this research question. The aim has been to develop rich, rigorous and well-argued research which can lead to *analytical generalisability*, and the development of new theory (Polit and Beck 2010). Statistical generalisability is not the goal here, and would not be possible within a study of this size and scope (Roberts 2011). Instead I have taken a 'practice-near' approach, which involves:

'a noticing and revealing of the fine-grained texture of the forms of life of the people studied: their customs, practices, lived experience of political and organisational structures, and their everyday interactive order' (Froggett and Briggs 2012 p.4)

Feminist researchers have stressed the need to foreground women's voices in studies that claim to examine their lives (Hesse-Biber 2012; Maynard 2004). Notions of voice

have been under scrutiny, however, and Dauphinee (2010) says participants often raise questions that are not represented in research, as they cannot be easily responded to. Jackson and Mazzei (2009) similarly comment that researchers can seek out 'easily translatable' voices and ignore the complexities, re-interpretations and silences. Although I am mindful of what is *not* said in every research project, I would still promote research which may shift our thinking and understanding of lived experience. Given the power we hold as practitioners to intervene in young people's lives, I believe we have an ethical imperative to create spaces where young people can offer their own perspectives. As Delgado (1989) argues, we need to pay attention to the 'counter-stories', and the ways they may challenge the dominant narratives in social work practice and policy.

There are other critiques of qualitative approaches. While I agree that social workers need to be purposeful and accountable, I disagree that the main purpose of social work research is to gather evidence to aid the '*prediction and control of behaviour*' (Thyer 2012 p122). Social work does not have to predict, or control, to be 'transformational' (Adams et al 2005) and I have strong ethical concerns about what possibilities for change are closed down by fixed ideas. As Froggett (2002) notes, the '*illusion of predictive power*' (p132) can be a defence against the discomfort of uncertainty and may undermine the capacity of practitioners to tolerate partial understandings and respond to complexity. I am aware, though, that social work makes a claim that '*social improvement can be achieved by interpersonal influence and action*' (Payne et al 2006 p1) and practitioners intervene in people's lives on the basis of this claim. Given the potential impact of these interventions, or the lack of them, research does have an important role in reflecting on what may be taking place in practice.

Others argue that in times of limited resources (although I have never known a time this was not the case), only forms of research which support 'evidence-based' practice are ethically justifiable (Krysk and Finn 2013). I am troubled, though, by which forms of evidence are valued here and what might remain unseen in statistical data (Moya 2011; Fine 2012). I suggest we need multiple streams of knowledge to build rich understandings of complex dynamics (Hustvedt 2017). For these reasons, this project

uses both creative and autoethnographic approaches, within a qualitative framework. The methods used will be described in the following chapter, but here I will discuss the conceptual frameworks for these.

The Creative Lens

There are numerous ways to describe creativity and it can be a culturally bound concept (Kara 2015). The term ‘creative’ is used here to describe the inclusion of art-based, non-verbal forms of communication within the research process (Mannay 2016). Images are used frequently in academia in the forms of graphs and charts (Banks 2001) and yet there has been a reluctance to include drawings or paintings in social research, as this is seen as less valid. Interviews are a popular and productive choice but one danger in prioritising *voice* is that it foregrounds spoken words over other embodied forms of communication (Broadhurst and Mason 2014). The use of images in research is not unproblematic, however, and I agree with Banks (2001) that they are carriers of multiple, culturally situated, meanings. Stories may be told in embodied, symbolic and fractured ways (Lefevre 2018), and are not always accessible to the teller in clear and coherent forms. Introducing images offers an alternative ways for these stories to be communicated but, more than this, it can involve ways of thinking that challenge the accepted ways of seeing and doing (Yates 2010).

In creative research, art is introduced as a form of communication and knowledge production, rather than as an aesthetic object or therapeutic tool. Yet some of the same processes can be at play. Carnes (1979) notes how visual and verbal thinking use different parts of the brain and so access different ways of understanding. More recently, Ramm (2005) argues that the sensory body, as well as the mind, are involved in the act of drawing, claiming that:

‘the evidence that emotional experience seems to change and to recede during the process of drawing supports the idea that drawing connects with the unconscious, primary, experience of thought and feeling (ibid. p72)

Sunday’s (2015) description of ‘relational art’ as a way to ‘*create encounters that open dialogue*’ (p235) was a useful frame. I conceived of the art as developing through an on-

going dialogue between researcher and participant, as a co-production. As Hall (1997) notes, the image is never static, but is being continually constructed by the viewer, always in a social, relational context. Interpretation is therefore seen as an act of power but I am unconvinced that the interpretation of images is always more problematic than interpretations of spoken words, and language could be viewed as equally constructed and positioned (Wetherell 2012). Rather than offering any single 'truth' about the images, I acknowledge that multiple interpretations are available. In framing creative research as a relational activity, my positionality as insider-researcher affects my responses to the images after they leave the research site, as well as during their creation in the research process and this will be considered in later chapters. First I will consider how, having developed a methodological framework for research with participants, I began to think about my own position in relation to this project.

The Insider-Researcher Lens

As a social work professional I have considered myself as an insider-researcher throughout this project. Insider-researchers have been defined as those who share the same professional or organisational position as the participants (Costley et al 2010) or have a common social or cultural position (Kim 2012). It is recognised that insiders may generate different knowledge than outsiders, but the extent to which this knowledge is more or less valid is debated (Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014). I agree with Kim (2012) that the boundaries between insider and outsider can move during a research project and I certainly felt myself shifting in allegiances, moving toward and away from my identification as a social worker as I moved between feelings of pride, frustration and shame.

As a woman researcher, researching with a predominantly female group of participants, I could have drawn on feminist scholars to position myself as a another type of insider, one whose gender gives me a '*lived familiarity*' (Griffith 1998, p362) with the female participants. Yet I have been reluctant to claim this status, because the extent to which gender may be a point of connection has been one of the areas I have sought to explore. To assume this connection from the start risked missing narratives which may

foreground other identities. The ways in which I have represented my insider status have also changed over time, as I discuss in the following section.

The Autoethnographic Lens

It was not my intention to include an autoethnographic strand to this project and it was a decision made quite late in the process. As the project moved forward, however, I increasingly felt the need to account for the knowledge I was gaining in my professional role and the lens I was applying. I moved from viewing my positionality as something to acknowledge, but somehow put aside, to something integral to the project and I therefore included an autoethnographic thread.

Practice-near research in social work can evoke a range of emotional responses (Cooper 2009). I have invested many years in my career as a social worker and knew there would be things I would more easily see and hear, and aspects which would be emotionally painful and possibly avoided and I therefore consider myself a 'vulnerable observer' (Ellis 1999) in this process. Clough and Nutbrown (2012) argue that all social research can be a form of active 'radical enquiry', which asks new questions of familiar surroundings. Regularly coming out of practice, into academic spaces, heightened my awareness of the many different perspectives on social work and the gaps in my own knowledge. To widen my lens, I used doctoral supervision, study groups, seminars and social work spaces to share my perspectives and to hear other positions. I recognised some of my attempts to avoid uncomfortable aspects of the research process (Costley et al 2010), and consider these moments of discomfort through this thesis. Yet I remain unconvinced that reflexivity, in Giddens's (2013) terms of monitoring my own actions, is sufficient to remove the impact of my positionality. My position as practitioner-researcher will have affected the data collected, and the interpretations presented, and it felt disingenuous to exclude this. More than this, these experiences give a lens into a lived experience of social work practice with young women which is infrequently found in the literature. I therefore offer a relational text, one where the writer:

'renders her- or himself visible and invites [you] into their tussle with ideas and practices' (Simon 2012 p2).

As with all approaches, autoethnography has limitations and no single definition has been developed (Muncey 2010). It has been critiqued as self-indulgent and lacking rigour (Phillips 1987), but is becoming more established in social research. I agree with Denzin (2003) that there is value in research which draws on biography to make private experiences public, particularly where these may counter dominant discourses. My intention has been to trouble fixed ways of understanding, drawing on moments of wonder and disconcertion in the data (Maclure 2013) and considering what implications these may have. This approach differs from purely autoethnographic projects which make the researcher the '*epistemological and ontological nexus on which the research turns*' (Spry 2001 p711 quoted in Muncey 2010). I have no wish to occupy this space, or to decentre the participants' accounts.

Reed-Danahay (1997) says that autoethnography describes an internal reality, but I struggle with this notion of a stable truth. Instead I view myself as one of the 'unstable subjects' being considered here, a practitioner-researcher who is grappling with '*concepts-on-the move*' (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). Anderson's (2006) realist model of analytical autoethnography is also troubling, and I am unsure why theorisation necessitates removing the emotional content. I disagree that forms of 'evocative' ethnography are a '*self-absorbed digression*' (Anderson 2006 p385). Gulwali Passarlay's account of his journey from Afghanistan to the UK could be described as evocative (Passarlay and Ghouri 2016) but, rather than dismissing this as emotional, I suggest it contains perspectives that social work would benefit from reflecting on.

Having confirmed my theoretical and methodological frameworks, I needed to select appropriate methods for the collection of data and begin the project. The following chapter will describe the methods used in this research project and discuss the data collection phase. I also consider the ethical aspects of this research and how I negotiated these.

Chapter 4

NAVIGATING METHODS, ACCESS, ETHICS AND DATA

This chapter describes the methods selected and the data collection phase of the research project. Issues of access, consent and ethics are considered here. As with many research projects, there have been adjustments in direction and scope, and I did not find research to be the linear process that many textbooks seem to describe. This was not unfamiliar. I know from social work that a detailed care plan rarely translates into a seamless intervention with families.

A mixed-method approach was developed (Hesse-Biber 2010), in line with the qualitative methodology. Methods were selected because of their ability to produce data which could answer the research questions and because they were practically achievable by a single researcher within the timeframe and resources available (Roberts 2011). The two methods used were creative interviews and autoethnography. A second stage to the project was considered, where materials produced would be shared in a focus group setting with practitioners, with young women acting as co-facilitators. Although one young woman showed some initial interest in being a co-facilitator, she decided not to pursue this and so this was not progressed.

I recognise that speaking to participants about an encounter, rather than observing directly, produces different data and is one step removed from practice spaces. An ethnographic method was considered but I concluded that this would have been problematic. I would be an insider-researcher with a professional, and potentially conflicting, role to fulfil. I also felt that gathering data directly from encounters between the young person and their practitioner would pose too many risks to their working relationship. Exploring feelings of belief and trust between them, for example, could be ethically problematic. Having completed the project, and heard dilemmas about what participants said they felt able to say, or not say, in the presence of others, I suggest a method observing encounters would have gathered different data although this would

still be potentially useful and complementary research. While I acknowledge that the data gathered in interviews can only offer partial views of a situated, practice encounter (Wetherell 2012), I would argue that they can offer knowledge about the relational dynamics and conceptualisations that may affect these encounters. They can therefore add to our knowledge.

The Creative Interview Method

The main body of data was collected through individual ‘creative interviews’ (Mannay 2016) with social workers and with young women. Creative interviews differ from structured or semi-structured interviews because the researcher does not bring a pre-existing set of questions. Instead the researcher starts with an open question and images are created by the participant as they speak. Creative interviewing therefore differs from elicitation interviews (Harper 2002), because the image is not made beforehand but co-constructed in the research space. I therefore considered the drawings as *‘an act rather than a given’* (Yates 2010 p 289). O’Kane (2008) argues that projects without structured questions may better reflect themes that are significant to participants, and it may therefore give participants more control over the *‘story they want to tell’* (Yates 2010, p288). Other scholars are more doubtful that creative methods automatically increase voice and argue that the analysis and dissemination phases are equally important in the research process (Driessnack and Furukawa 2011). A drawing can be unseen by a researcher, as much as a voice can go unheard.

This method had the potential to answer the research question but there were other reasons for the selection. I was aware that studies which used face-to-face encounters with young migrants had achieved greater participation from young people (Chase 2008; Sirriyeh 2010), than those which have used more depersonalised ways of collecting data (Wade et al 2012). Creative tools are used to communicate in social work practice (Lefevre 2018), so this method was within my skill-set. Images can be used to show relational connections and communicate complex ideas in accessible ways (Askins and Paine 2011; Banks 2001) and so were suitable for this project. They also offered a different lens for the participants to use. Interviews with social workers have been

described as accountable sites, where practitioners portray themselves as having the best intentions (Masocha 2013). Creative methods offered a way of potentially disrupting these accounts, of '*making the familiar strange*' (Mannay 2016 p31), and opening up routes to new knowledge.

Visual methods have worked well with participants who do not share a language with the researcher, or where articulating experience may be difficult (O'Kane 2008; Sirriyeh 2010; Mannay 2016). I am aware from social work practice that sitting alongside young people during a shared activity, rather than in face to face talk, can engage young people more effectively. Sirriyeh (2010), for example, used photo-voice to produce data about the meaning of home for refugee women living in Yorkshire. She argued that a creative approach allowed her to enter the narrative at a different point and that the images produced feelings and accounts that may have been minimised in more structured interviews. I also wanted to avoid the interrogative approach young asylum-seekers may have already experienced in formal interviews (Chase 2009) and thought that making the research process interesting could increase the chances of young people agreeing to take part (Bagnoli and Clark 2010).

I planned to offer all the participants three ways to participate and these could be used in combination:

1. Narrative Interviews: the opportunity to talk if art-based activity was uncomfortable
2. Creative interviews using free association drawing: participants would be given pens and paper during the interview to draw freely.
3. Creative interviews using thematic collage: participants would be given a variety of pre-prepared templates of bodies, faces, buildings and speech bubbles. They would also have a range of materials with different texture and colours.

There are limitations to gathering data in this way, as with all methods. Being asked to draw can invoke feelings of stress or inadequacy which needed to be recognised. I acknowledged that art-based activities can be uncomfortable for some and that it

needed to be offered as a choice (Christensen and James 2008). O’Kane (2008) guards against making activities too ‘childish’ for young people, but I would suggest that rigid cultural ideas of ‘teenage behaviour’ can be constricting. I have worked with a number of older, ‘indigenous’ children who have enjoyed the opportunity to express themselves creatively, within spaces where they could revisit aspects of childhood, and I was reluctant to impose ideas of what activities were age-appropriate. There were also risks that a focus on the production of the art could act as a distraction to the research process (Mannay 2016). There are also issues about the interpretation of images during data analysis which will be considered below.

The Autoethnographic Method

The second method was autoethnography. Muncey (2010), an advocate of autoethnography, describes it as a qualitative research strategy, unsure herself if it is a research method in its own right. It developed out of ethnography, a form of qualitative inquiry that produced accounts of participants’ ways of living (Denzin 2003; Ellis 1998, 1999). It goes a step further than an ethnographic account, however, to include biography as data (Davies 2008), which can be collected in the multiple ways available to all qualitative researchers.

I chose to keep a diary, recording data with text and audio. A diary kept for several months offered a contrast to the interview data, gathered over much shorter timescales. It had the advantage of being more practically achievable than a wholly written account, because recordings could be made when time or writing materials were not available. Making audio diary entries also differs from my everyday practice of recording, of giving an account of my own practice in professional written language. Although I recognised they would be another form of self-representation, audio accounts therefore offered an alternative way of making the familiar strange (Mannay 2016).

Having selected my methods, I then had to identify the research sites, gain access and identify participants. The following section will consider this process, and the ethical and practical issues involved.

The Research Process: Finding a Way In

Access was a particular challenge in this project. This was not unexpected, given the relatively small number of young women in the UK and the need to gain consent from gatekeeping organisations. Using existing data (Humphris and Sigone 2016), my own practice knowledge and the responses from my own Freedom of Information requests, I approached those local authorities with the highest number of young women in southern England. I also contacted three NGOs with specific services for young people and trafficked young women. Flyers were distributed at practice conferences, academic seminars and training events about migration and information was sent by email to practitioner networks. Although some organisations showed initial interest, and negotiations began, the majority of local authorities denied access and none of the voluntary organisations gave consent. Similarly, although there was some initial interest and discussion with practitioners through informal networks, this did not result in any participants joining the project.

Two main reasons were given for denying access. Firstly, there was a concern about young people being asked to repeat their stories and the need to protect them from repeatedly taking part in research projects. This was a particular concern of the NGOs. A second reason given was that employees had no time to take part, or to support young women to participate, and it would detract from their professional duties. This was a particular concern of the local authorities. The social and political context is significant here. As discussed in Chapter 2, the number of unaccompanied young people coming into the UK after 2014 had increased, coupled with an increasing interest from researchers and journalists. A discourse of services-under-pressure had emerged strongly from local authorities such as Kent (The Guardian 2015) and scrutiny of their care of had also increased. This context may work against local authorities taking a more open stance toward researchers.

My own emerging skills as a researcher were another factor and I would now approach access differently. I was over-optimistic that discussions would lead to agreement, particularly when detailed proposals had been resubmitted. In hindsight I wish I had

been less cautious in my applications for access and taken more risks. I postponed a second round of requests while negotiations took place and then, when access was denied, I had insufficient time to progress other requests. My concern to make the project manageable had, in hindsight, made me over-cautious. I was less confident about promoting myself in the role of researcher than I am in the role of social worker and could have articulated the benefits of involvement in research more clearly to the organisations.

Practice encounters with children are sites of intimacy (Ferguson 2016) and I began to recognise how positionality affects views about who has access to these sites. My own feelings changed depending on which day of my week it was. As a researcher I wished to examine what may be taking place in these sites but, as a practitioner, I wanted to preserve young people's privacy within these spaces. This raises questions about who gives consent to the participation of young people and to what extent paternalistic models may be preventing young people from taking part in research about their lives (Boddy 2014). I am now more aware of how social workers can both promote and prevent young women's engagement in research about their lives. The paternalistic approach also emerged in the settings I did have access to. Some workers were reluctant to contact young women, making decisions *for* them, rather than in consultation *with* them, about whether they would want to participate.

Finding the Participants

As with all research, the size, nature and location of the sample group had an impact on the methods of data collection and analysis (Robson 2011). To recruit participants with the relevant experiences and knowledge, I initially used purposive sampling (Silverman 2014). Snowball sampling was then used to recruit further participants (Bryman 2012). Participants were drawn from two groups:

- Young women aged between 14 and 21, who had come to the UK more than 6 months ago, who had been identified as potentially unaccompanied and who had encountered social work practitioners

- Social work practitioners who had direct experience of work with unaccompanied young women

This age range covered most young women who are 'looked after' and included those receiving services as care leavers, although I recognise age can be contested. As already discussed, the ways in which migrants are categorised is problematic (Crawley and Skleparis 2017; Goodman et al 2017), so the sample group reflected the gatekeepers' understandings of being unaccompanied, the age range and their knowledge of young people in their services. The sample is not representative or statistically generalisable.

Only young women who had arrived over six months ago were approached, in recognition that arrival may be a time of heightened dislocation for young people (Kohli 2007). The time gap also allowed young women to develop experiences that they could reflect on, a sense of the different professional groupings and some potential skills in English. This did not exclude young women who did not speak English, because interpreters were provided. Researchers have been more successful in achieving participation when young women were approached through known adults (Chase 2008; Sirriyeh 2010), so young women were contacted through social workers, residential workers and carers. No young women I worked with in my practitioner role were approached. Social workers were contacted by email or telephone and some made contact after hearing about the project from colleagues. I had an existing professional relationship with some of the practitioners but all research contacts were separated from any professional contacts. However, I recognise that their construction of my professional role will have affected the data gathered and that practitioners would still be engaged in a form of accounting for their work (Masocha 2013).

Gaining Informed Consent

Consent is understood to be a continuing, emotional awareness rather than a single act (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). I conceived of all the participants as competent social actors (O'Kane 2008; Mason and Hood 2011), and adopted a strengths perspective (Cree

and Myers 2012) that viewed them as able to make choices about their participation. Yet gaining informed consent remains a complex issue in relation to young people who may feel unable to say 'no' to adults or within research which crosses languages and cultures (Boddy 2014). There were also power dynamics in the organisation which could create pressure on practitioners, particularly as I was an insider-researcher who had a professional position outside of my research role.

Different approaches to consent were adopted, depending on the participant's situation and their language skills. All those who expressed interest were sent copies of the consent form and information leaflet before any interview. Two sets of information leaflets were produced for the practitioners and the young women (see Appendices 2 and 3) and different consent forms were also produced (see Appendices 4 and 5). I had telephone, text or email contact with all but one of the participants before the interviews and the other young person was contacted via a residential worker. Time was allowed between requests for consent and agreement and some participants decided to withdraw in this time.

I was aware that translating documents and employing interpreters is ethically and practically preferable in cross-cultural research (Boddy 2014). Interpreters were provided by the local authorities, to support young women's participation, and booked by the social workers. However the local authorities did not translate documents for service users, and no external funding was available, so translation of information leaflets could not be offered. Instead, the interpreter read the consent forms and information leaflets before consent was accepted and the interview started. Before any of the interviews began the participants were asked to re-read the consent form, or it was read to them by myself or the interpreter. Audio recording started only after consent forms were signed.

Participants were encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns throughout. At the end of each interview participants were given another opportunity to withdraw their participation or remove sections of the data. One participant took advantage of this and sections of her data were redacted. With one exception, participants asked not to be

sent copies of the transcripts. Some said they didn't want to read their accounts or to have it read to them, while others said they would not have the time and it would place them under pressure to do this. Contact details were left with the participants, should they wish to request a copy of the transcript or raise any concerns. The timescale for any changes to the data was made clear.

Collecting the Data

The data was gathered within local authorities in the south of England. Given the small number of young women, no further details are given here about the settings to minimise the chance of identification. The data was collected between September 2016 and September 2017 and consists of three streams:

- audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews with young women and practitioners;
- drawings produced by participants;
- an autoethnographic diary – audio and written.

A total of nine interviews were held, with eight participants. These were made up of three young women and five practitioners, anonymised in the table below:

Name (anonymised)	Position	Identified Gender
Grace	Young Woman (care leaver 18+)	Female
Salam	Young Woman (care leaver 18+)	Female
Mia	Young Woman ('looked after' – under 18)	Female
Alice	Social Worker	Female
Chris	Social Worker	Male
Elaine	Social Worker	Female

Eva	Social Worker	Female
Susan	Social Worker (Care Leaving Service)	Female

The young women described encounters with total of eight practitioners and the practitioners talked about eight young women (a grid of relationships is in Appendix 6). Interviews with the young women were held where they were living at that time. A more neutral venue was offered but declined by the young women and none wanted to come into a more formal office space. One practitioner interview took place in an academic library. Other practitioners were interviewed within local authority offices, but away from their usual work spaces. There were differences in how much time participants offered for the interviews, reflecting their individual positions to the research and within the organisation. One practitioner had recently left their post and gave no fixed time limit. The other practitioners asked for interviews to be within their working day and allowed an hour for this. The young women set no time limits, but one interview was limited by the organisational practice of booking interpreters for one hour. A further interview was then held with this young woman, as it was agreed she had more she wanted to say.

Each participant had access to large sheets of paper and a set of pens from the start of the interview. All but one of the participants used the materials during their interview, most frequently about halfway through the research conversation. Collage materials and figures were also available but none of the participants used these. One young woman said she only wanted to talk and so no drawing was produced. Practitioners were asked to think of a young woman they had worked with and to talk about her. Young women were asked to tell me about the social workers they had met in the UK.

For the autoethnography thread, I completed a diary between November 2016 and September 2017. The diary consisted of written reflections and audio recordings about my experiences as an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for 'looked after' young people, including my work with unaccompanied young men and women. My first concern was to protect the confidentiality of those I meet as an IRO and who had not

consented to be part of this research. I therefore ensured that no details or biographical information about them were included and they could not be identified in the data. Instead I aimed to make diary entries that considered my own constructions, responses and ways of understanding. There were also some reflections that I found myself unwilling to share publically and, giving myself the same rights as other participants, I have chosen not to include these.

Ethical Practice

Throughout the project I have aimed to practice ethically and to balance my responsibilities as a researcher and a social worker. Yet, while researchers might aim for research to be a positive experience, research may also have unforeseen negative impact on participants that need to be recognised (Euwema 2008). While ethical issues are reflected on through this thesis, there were some particular issues which I will now consider.

Ethical clearance was given by the University of Sussex and through the Local Authority Research Governance process. While such oversight is important, I agree with Te Riele and Brooks (2013) that a reliance on procedural ethics may give false reassurance. My experience of attempting ethical research mirrors my experience of social work practice; it is a series of ethically important 'moments' (McEvoy et al 2017) which require emotional labour to negotiate.

Power dynamics impact any research, but there are specific issues in research with young people, due to the marginalised social positions they occupy (Boddy 2014; Mason and Hood 2011). Punch (2002) argues that ethics can swamp debates about research with children and young people, sometimes preventing their involvement. I agree with Boddy (2014) that power needs to be used ethically to ensure young people's rights to both participation *and* protection. Morrow's (2009) description of the 'different competencies' of children and young people is helpful here, as it allows for differentiations to be made for context, developmental age, experience and individual ability. This is highly relevant for research with young women who have come into the

UK from other cultures, and where conceptions of childhood and youth may differ from those of the researcher or practitioners. As a single researcher, I did not have the benefit of a diverse research team, so acknowledged the young women as the source of their own '*culturally specific expertise*' (Boddy 2014 p101). However I have also taken opportunities to reflect with others, in a range of settings, including those who have a different cultural background to my own.

There are additional issues in research with those affected by immigration services where informed consent can be a complex notion (Hugman et al 2011). Confidentiality and anonymity are particular issues for young women who have been trafficked or who are fleeing persecution and for whom identification may pose a risk (Pearce 2011). Very limited information is given here about the research sites, to reduce the possibility that young women could be identified. Any identifying details were held separately from the transcripts and recordings in a lockable cabinet and confidentiality was maintained through all stages of the project. I knew that recording of interviews may be uncomfortable for young people who may already feel under surveillance (Chase 2010). Specific consent was therefore requested for the recording and I gave reassurances that I would be the only person to hear their voice. It was made clear that research would not impact on any outstanding asylum claims or the services they were receiving from the local authority (Drake 2014). All participants names were anonymised and most participants chose a name for themselves.

As an experienced social worker, I was able to respond to both verbal and non-verbal cues about consent (Te Riele and Brooks 2013) and the possible differences in cultural expressions were recognised (Lefevre 2018). I ensured that all the participants were in a calm state before I left the interview space and spoke with the young women about how they may feel later and what support they could access. Even so, the balance between participation and protection was not always easy to navigate. One young woman did become upset during the interview and the recording was stopped until she indicated she wanted to continue. Following the interview her social worker was contacted, with her knowledge, and they agreed to contact her that day. All the young women had professionals who could offer support and who were aware of the research

interview. However, during the course of the interview it became clear that not all the young women were experiencing these workers as supportive. My contact details were left with the young women and I contacted them afterwards, to thank them and allow them the chance to reflect with me if needed.

There were also moments when I found the researcher role hard to maintain and experienced a frustrating sense of powerlessness, even though my authority as a social worker is itself limited. This was particularly the case when the young women asked me for some form of help, which all of them did. As a new researcher this was an uncomfortable position, being so familiar with the power available in my practice role. I offered what help I could, passing on messages and providing information, but remaining clear about the limits of the researcher role.

Perhaps the most troubling ethical moment was a young woman's account of Islamophobia and racism within two placements. These were experiences she had already shared with her social workers and passed to those in authority. The young woman was not asking me to help her resolve these situations. She did ask for help with another concern, so I knew she was able to do so if needed. Yet, in hearing these accounts of prejudice, my response was one of anger and shame, as a social worker, an insider-researcher (Costley et al 2010) and as a UK citizen. I was aware of having to navigate a series of emotional responses through the interview and in the decisions I have since made about how to respond. It is a piece of data I have shared in more than one analysis group and this has raised other issues: the extent to which I trust colleagues to have acted appropriately and my concern about the role of my profession in the maintenance of such views. In this way, ethical issues within the project have reflected some wider ethical issues within the topic being researched.

There were also ethical issues in relation to the practitioners. At times the power dynamics between an IRO and a social worker felt very present in the interviews. Despite my verbal reassurances that I was not evaluating practice, some practitioners asked me whether they were giving the 'right answer'. At other times I found my professional role was an asset. I could understand the professional language being used and my

experience positioned me as a colleague who already knew '*what it's like to do the job*' (Costley et al 2010). I was concerned, however, that this may lead some practitioners to overlook my role as researcher and so I reminded each practitioner of their right to withdraw any sections at the end of the interview.

This led to another ethical moment, when a practitioner made contact to raise concerns that a young woman might identify herself in the data and read that her social worker had doubted her story. The practitioner was concerned this may undermine the trust she had been working to build with the young woman and cause her distress. She asked for a copy of the transcript and redacted sections of her interview. While I had no wish to undermine this relationship, I did feel some disappointment that some rich sections were removed. Yet it also supported my developing notion that social workers had very few spaces in which to explore some of the conflicting feelings about the young women they worked with, and that these may be feelings which are hard to share safely in many spaces.

Having completed the data collection, I then began the process of transcription and analysis and the next chapter will consider these stages of the research process

Chapter 5

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter describes the processes of data analysis. I reflect on the different methods available for the multiple strands of data, the methods selected and the strengths and limitations of these.

Transcribing the Data

Fairclough (2003) notes that turning a socially-situated conversation into written text inevitably involves decisions about what to omit and what to stress, and these choices need to be justifiable. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, with repetitions, pauses, intonations and emotional expressions such as sighs and laughter noted in the text (Kvale 2009). The bulk of the autoethnographic diary was already in written form. Sections of the audio diary were listened to during the analysis stage and some parts were transcribed into data sections.

I transcribed the interviews myself, coming to see this as part of the analysis process, my responses and thoughts forming as I transcribed. Although the transcripts were used as the main source of analysis, I periodically returned to the audio files to hear the voices of the participants and to consider the more affective dimensions of the research space. Once the transcripts were completed, I began the process of more structured analysis and writing.

Analysing the Data

Although there are different methods of analysis described in the literature, more focus is given to the other stages of research. There can be little detail about what researchers actually do when they analyse and I have experienced the line between analysis and writing as very indistinct.

Given the different streams of data, more than one method of analysis was needed. The pilot project for this research (Larkin 2015) used a form of discourse analysis, but for the main project I wanted a method that could more effectively encompass the relational and affective dimensions of the data. I decided against a traditional thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), looking instead for a way of exploring, and disrupting, what may be said and not said. Maclure (2013) argues for qualitative data analysis that occupies the liminal condition of 'wonder', a relational state between knowing and unknowing that creates space for the new. She questions whether data coding processes exclude the 'curiosities' that lie at the boundaries of knowledge and offers an alternative view:

‘we could think of engagements with data..as experiments with order and disorder, in which provisional and partial taxonomies are formed, but are always subject to metamorphosis, as new connections spark among words, bodies, objects, and ideas’
(ibid. p229)

This reflects my experience of the analysis process, which I found frustrating, fascinating and always shifting. For the interview texts I used Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998; Doucet and Mauthner 2008), feminist model of Voice-Centred Relational (VCR) analysis which they developed from the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992; 1993 referenced in Mauthner and Doucet 1998). The VCR method involves analysing the data through repeated readings, each with a particular focus:

- Reading 1: for plot and researcher’s responses to the narrative
- Reading 2: for the Voice of the ‘I’
- Reading 3: for relationships
- Reading 4: for cultural and social contexts

(Mauthner and Doucet 1998)

The VCR method fits with my research questions and theoretical frames, and an example of the data being read in this way is in Appendix 7. As with other feminist work, this model acknowledges that power dynamics are present in the analysis stage, affecting which stories are attended to and which are not (Maynard 2004). Drawing on a relational ontology, Mauthner and Doucet (1998) consider humans to be embedded in

social relations and aim to reflect this within the analysis process:

‘the voice-centred relational method...represents an attempt to translate this relational ontology into methodology and into concrete methods of data analysis by exploring individuals’ narrative accounts in terms of their relationships to the people around them and their relationships to the broader social, structural and cultural contexts within which they live. Our version of the method is also deeply rooted within the broader tradition of feminist research practice and the increasingly rich and wide field of qualitative research’ (ibid. p4).

Doucet and Mauthner (2008) suggest participants can be known through our experience of them as agentic subjects, as well as through the stories they tell of themselves, but only ever partially. The research process itself is seen as relational and reflexive and I certainly recognise the observation that *‘in analysing data we are confronted by ourselves’* (Mauthner and Doucet 1998 p5). However, although the VCR model provided a detailed analysis, I experienced a disconnection between the highly relational nature of my research questions and the method’s foregrounding of the *I-Poems*.

I-Poems are an analytical technique, which can pull out rich data on individualised experience but I felt they excluded richer understandings of relationships with other actors. I found the reading for relational networks too generalised to pull out specific connections in a way that could be robustly considered alongside the ‘I’ statements. I therefore developed *Us-Poems* and *(S)He-Poems*, designed to highlight how young women and practitioners were positioning and constructing each other within the interviews and the ways of thinking and feeling that were being drawn on. These will be returned to in the research findings chapters and in the theoretical analysis that follows.

As with all analytical approaches, I acknowledge that there are some limitations in presenting data in this way. It is my interpretations of the data which are used to group extracts into ‘thematic poems’. This technique also separates the participants’ statements from the interview narrative that surrounded them. For these reasons, I have avoided relying only on this form of data-presentation and have included the ‘poems’ amongst the drawn images, longer sections of data from individual interviews and entries from my auto-ethnographic diary.

As a single researcher, using the VCR model brings some other challenges. Mauthner

and Doucet (1998) worked in a team, reflecting on the data in group settings. I did take opportunities to present data and reflect with others in supervision, analysis groups, seminars and professional spaces but much of the analysis was done alone. Time was also a factor. Mauthner and Doucet (ibid.) took over a year for analysis but I did not have this timeframe, so knowing when the analysis was complete was therefore challenging. Each time I returned to the data I was likely to see something else, viewing it from a different point in time and with different priorities, and so completion became a pragmatic decision as much as a conceptual one. Maynard (2004) raises further worries that the highly reflexive nature of this model could lead to the researcher becoming more visible in the process than the participants. As an insider-researcher (Costley et al 2010) who is including an autoethnographic thread I have been mindful of this throughout, but am aware I may be open to that challenge.

Although the Mauthner and Doucet (1998) model was helpful in analysing the transcripts, another approach was needed for the drawings and the autoethnographic diary notes. The suggested approaches to visual images are often extended versions of textual analysis. Silverman (2014), for example, suggests semiotics or conversational analysis, but neither felt appropriate for this research and I was mindful of the need to find analytic approaches which were theoretically complementary. I spent some time thinking about whether the images were data, and what could be said, and not said, about the drawings. Different positions are taken in the literature. Sirriyeh (2010), for example, describes images as a medium of communication between the researcher and the audience rather than data. Yet participants' photos do appear alongside their words in her work, so their status can appear ambiguous. Isfahani (2008), in contrast, includes Hanna's art therapy drawings as data but, I suggest, the co-construction of these within the therapeutic relationship is not sufficiently considered. In both studies, however, the images provide powerful representations of what participants may have been communicating and their inclusion in the text also allows for other interpretations to be made by the reader.

In this project, the drawings were a source of the understandings I was forming about the participants, their constructions and their experiences. They also had an emotional

context, and communicated feelings that seemed beyond words for some participants. To exclude them as data seemed disingenuous. I agree with Yates (2010) that, whilst images don't include any stable 'objective' meaning, they are a strand within a complex picture and can therefore be validly seen as data. However, I also acknowledge that the interpretation of an image is an act of power and that it is problematic to frame an interpretation as a form of external 'truth' (Banks 2001; Wood and Kidman 2013). Instead I offer my responses to the images as a positioned interpretation and include them in the findings chapters, so that readers can make their own interpretations and contributions to the analysis.

I am also positioned, but in a different way, to the autoethnographic thread. This provided the most difficult question about analysis and the literature is sparse here. Muncey's (2010) otherwise detailed argument for autoethnographic research, for example, moves straight from writing the autoethnography to dissemination. For both the images and the autoethnography I therefore returned to Maclure's (2013) notion of analysis as finding moments of 'wonder' in the data:

'this potentiality can be felt on occasions where something—perhaps a comment in an interview, a fragment of a field note, an anecdote, an object, or a strange facial expression—seems to reach out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data, to grasp us. These moments confound the industrious, mechanical search for meanings, patterns, codes, or themes; but at the same time, they exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought' (ibid. p228).

I analysed the data from the interviews as the first stage, returning to the autoethnographic diary at a later point, aiming to foreground the participants' voices. This had the added advantage of allowing time to elapse between completing the diary and reading it again, potentially offering new perspectives. In the diary entries I looked for tensions and connections with the participant data, and for those moments that could '*animate further thought*' as Maclure (ibid.) describes.

The research findings, and my analysis of the data, are presented in the following chapters. I begin, in Chapter 6, by considering the understandings of young women's lives before coming to the UK. Chapters 7 and 8 are structured around the key spaces where young women and practitioners encounter each other: the border space and the

living space. In Chapter 9 I consider the interconnecting spaces for both young women and practitioners, and the implications for the relational understandings that emerge.

Chapter 6

FINDINGS: PRECEDING SPACES

This chapter considers what was said, and understood, about young women's experiences in their countries of origin and the reasons for their migration. Although this was not a question directly asked of the young women, understandings of these preceding experiences were significant in how the young women and the practitioners responded to each other.

Migration: Stories and Understandings

None of the young women gave detailed accounts of their lives before they arrived in the UK but some understandings did emerge of their experiences and the meanings they attributed to these. The aspirational nature of young people's migration decisions is powerfully illustrated by the words of Grace, a young woman from an African country, which are brought together in the thematic *I-Poem* below:

I want a better life, to be safe, to protect myself, so that's why I choose to live in the UK

Education I found is very important because a lot of women or young lady in my country, they're not allowed to complete them education

I wear a hijab or not so it is my choice. In my country I do not have that freedom

Here I be like, if I'm 15 or 16 I'm underage .. no one can force me to marry.

I can have a better future, if I have a bad past experience

I have a voice

(Grace, Young Woman)

It is notable that, whilst physical safety is a concern for Grace, it comes after her wish for a 'better life'. For Grace, this 'better life' involves access to education and freedom of religious practice and is described in terms of gender and age. What comes through most strongly in her interview is her wish to have agency and a voice in the spaces she occupies in the world. Grace wants to have the ability to make choices: about what she says, when and whom she marries, what she wears, which subjects she studies, where she lives and how she spends her time. These were things denied to her in her country of origin and which informed her decision to leave:

'I never going to forgot my own country.. I love my own country and I wish if we had a good education.. a good health.. a good community to live ...I wish if we had that I never going to go out of my country .. I would live in my country .. but because I do not have that and I want a better life.. to be safe.. to protect myself... so that's why I choose to live in the UK' (Grace, Young Woman)

There can be a tendency to view the lives of unaccompanied young people only in terms of their migration and to frame their childhoods only in terms of loss and distress (Kidane 2007). Unlike Grace, Mia framed her migration less as a chance for reinvention but as a way to maintain the care she had already experienced and the life plans she has already formed, but in a safer environment. Mia had come from a family she experienced as caring and who were relatively affluent. She had already attended school and wanted to be a doctor, an aspiration she hoped to fulfil in the UK:

'I've fled from my country. I had a distressed life, a distressed journey' (Mia, Young Woman).

'when you arrive in this country you bring with you your family background, everything OK your family used to do for you, so you expect everyone in this country treat you the same' (Mia, Young Woman)

Whereas Grace arrived hoping for changes, Mia had arrived hoping for continuity and with an expectation that the caring relationships in her new home would reflect those in her country of origin.

The practitioners had varying levels of information and understanding about how, and why, young women came to the UK, a variability that has been found in a number of other studies (Kohli 2007; Wade et al 2012). Gender was not consistently foregrounded in their understandings of young women's migration, but it was present. All the

practitioners struggled with the process of gathering and assessing information, although their responses to this varied. The dominance of the trauma narrative was resisted in places, and there was evidence of practitioners trying to seek out more positive narratives from the past. Some described having small pieces of specific information, without a richer context, whilst others talked of having generalised understandings without specific details:

‘I knew that she was a persecuted Christian. I knew that she’d been separated from her Mum’ (Alice, Practitioner)

‘I didn’t know what she had suffered but I knew that she had had a kind of horrendous time and her family had had a horrendous time in [country of origin]. There’d been a lot of violence, abuse, you know, and that she’d suffered, although I wasn’t quite sure exactly to what extent’ (Chris, Practitioner)

‘well obviously there was difficulties for her to have to leave the country, her journey over here and she doesn’t seem to mention any of that’ (Elaine, Practitioner)

‘she showed me many photos of how great the parties were’ (Alice, Practitioner)

The lack of description does not automatically indicate a lack of knowledge, however, as some information was withheld in interviews. Practitioners were trying to balance their participation in the research with their duty of confidentiality, and showed an awareness of the sensitive nature of some of the young women’s biographies. This need for sensitivity was an ethical consideration in my own interviews with the young women. Salam, for example, talked powerfully about her need for a sense of control over who knew about her past experiences. For Salam, both gender and age were identified as significant factors in her migration:

‘no-one not push us like, to go to the college or get education, they push you but not like this’ (Salam, Young Woman).

The extent to which young women shared stories about their childhoods was not described as a linear process, but in much more fluid terms. Some young women gave detailed accounts very early in the relationship with a practitioner:

‘she just told me about her journey, so it was only about two or three meetings in’ (Susan, Practitioner)

(at first meeting after arrival) ‘she just wanted to talk and once she started she just went for it and I had to almost stop her to be able to ask some things.. she wanted to tell me her story’ (Alice, Practitioner)

These could be highly emotional accounts. Salam, for example, focused on safety as the key reason for leaving, describing the early death of her mother and a later separation from her father. Her living arrangements after this were not remembered as a safe space:

‘I was with someone even back home.....that time even to ask something you’re just scared.. you don’t get slapped or something’ (Salam, Young Woman)

This highlights the need for practitioners to be constantly prepared to both hear, and emotionally contain, a young person when they are able to speak (Lefevre 2018). Yet, even when young women did share information, this did not lead seamlessly to a rich and unquestioned understanding by the practitioners. There are complexities of belief and disbelief here, and of trust and fear.

It was Elaine, a practitioner, who most clearly described her struggle with the lack of information about the past. This is unsurprising, given many social work models of intervention are based on the collection and analysis of historical information, in order to make sense of the present (Payne 2014). Elaine spoke of her work with Clara, a young woman she had been working with for over six months. Elaine was finding it hard to stay in a state of ‘not knowing’:

‘There’s no memories, well there is memories but only that she can tell us. She can’t show us a picture and say well this is when I was young. This is when I was a baby.. most children in the UK would have that. It worries me that, you know. In ten years’ time she’s not going to have any reminder or any memories’ (Elaine, Practitioner)

Elaine speaks of Clara’s loss, of family, of childhood and of memories, a situation which Elaine was finding it hard to emotionally *hold* (Ruch 2012). When she talks of her plan to start ‘life-story’ work with Clara it is unclear who this work is designed to benefit most. Life-story work is a well-established tool in social work with children, which aims to create a safe space in which a child can explore, and begin to resolve, their feelings about their history (Burnell and Vaughn 2008). The model is premised, however, on the idea that the practitioner is the keeper of this historical information, sharing it with the child at a pace that meets their needs. In this research it is Clara who holds information about her past and Elaine who is struggling emotionally with a lack of knowing. There are tensions between Elaine’s wish for Clara to provide this information and the young

women's accounts of how difficult it can be to trust anyone enough to speak:

'it's very hard, it's really hard, like when just come and you don't know anyone and that time. Do I have to tell them or no? It's really hard because of I trust.. my life was down..so when you trust someone more than like yourself and then that person.. if they broke your heart, you don't trust anyone' (Salam, Young Woman)

Tools do exist to support migrant children to share stories about themselves and their past, such as journey mapping , but none were mentioned by the practitioners. When a young woman chose not to speak to them directly, knowledge was sometimes gathered from Home Office interview transcripts, but this was not consistent and interviews could be delayed:

'I kind of read. I wouldn't say I know loads but I kind of read the initial assessment, and probably the screening interview notes from when she applied to the UK' (Chris, Practitioner)

There were further examples of practitioners drawing on wider knowledge about international situations, migration and refugee law but, notably, this was sourced either independently or brought in from previous roles. There was no evidence of this knowledge being provided or developed within the organisation. Practitioners then responded pragmatically, seeking out knowledge from a range of sources:

'I love working with unaccompanied minors and I'm quite knowledgeable in terms of ..what happened in different countries and how women are viewed and seen, and what's going on in particular areas at the time. I'm not an expert (*laughs*) but I like to think that when I was working with her, I wasn't going in totally naïve' (Chris, Practitioner)

'I'd studied refugee law previously' (Susan, Practitioner)

'we've all dealt with loads of young people from different countries. We've all heard loads of stories..loads of things that have happened' (Eva, Practitioner).

Some practitioners had a richer understanding of the context of migration. Eva had experienced it herself, having left her country of origin at a time of war, and she felt this was a point of connection between her and unaccompanied young people. She spoke of her work with Helen, who had left Eritrea with a man she believed would help her have a better life. At that time Helen was working to support herself but was still seeking a relationship of care with an adult:

'this was a person who she believed was trying to help her, because she met him while she was in Ethiopia. She was working in this café bar. She had lost her mother and she had nobody to look after her' (Eva, Practitioner)

Notably, Eva avoids the construction of Helen as victim here, although this construction is readily available within policy and discourse on trafficking (Hume and Sidun 2017). She locates the migration decision made by Helen in Eritrea, placing it in a specific time and place, and frames it as an act of agency. Although Eva herself views this man as dangerous, and in the process of grooming Helen for exploitation, she sees Helen as a competent young person who has found ways to manage, in the context of loss and inequality:

‘knowingly or not knowingly that this person is not an approp- ...but she has formed a relationship with someone and she was brave enough to go’ (Eva, Practitioner)

Other practitioners provided very little information about young women’s journeys to the UK, and even less was said by the young women about their own experiences. There was some understanding that gender affects the types of journeys young people make, and therefore the places where they may arrive in the UK. Journeys were seen as times of heightened risk, and here young women could be framed as more vulnerable than young men. There was also a sense of novelty in working with females:

‘I’ve never had a girl, so they’re quite a rarity especially when I worked in [other county] and we picked them up from [a motorway service station].. so it was only those that were robust enough to deal with the back of a lorry journey, which rules out a huge amount of girls, probably for the parental concerns as much as their own but you know.. they were just rare’ (Alice, Practitioner – stressed words underlined)

Susan had some information about Joy’s journey to the UK, a complex story of multiple countries, but she was struggling to make sense of what she had been told. Susan talks of her wish to support Joy, but is troubled by her feelings of disbelief. These feelings emerge when she is confronted by the doubts of others in the network, and when she tries to match media images to the young person in front of her.

Susan starts her drawing with an image of a boat, moving on to illustrate the complex journey that Joy described to her. Yet she also includes a large question mark, which she then quickly dismisses:

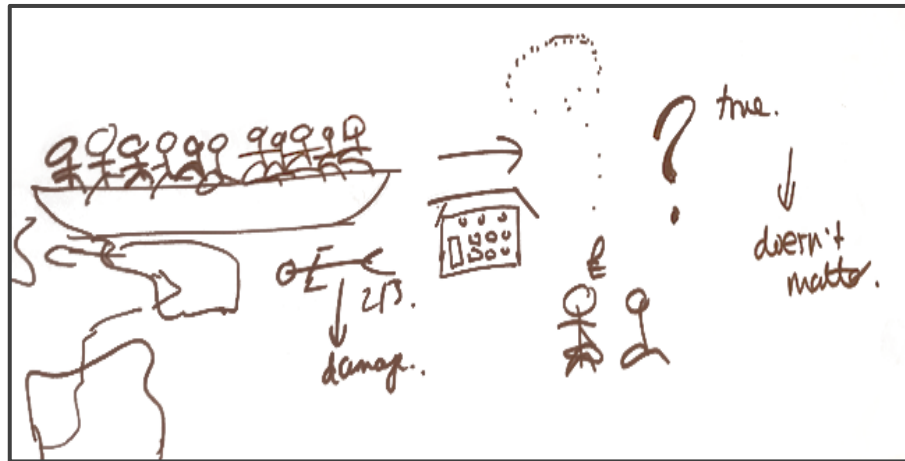


Figure 1: Susan's Boat (extract)

'I often think about that map. I think about that sometimes and all the things that she said happened to her. There are bits that I don't understand in what she told me' (Susan, Practitioner)

This tension between doubt and belief will be returned to through this thesis and not only in relation to the practitioner experience. Grace, a young woman, recalls experiencing disbelief about her own journey, as she was making it. She recalls other migrants being unwilling to believe she was from her county, because of the cultural view that young women should not be travelling alone. Yet, rather than remembering this with frustration, Grace describes a sense of pride that she had done something considered unusual for a young woman:

'I'm so proud that I'm a Sudanese girl come down here. I'm Sudanese girl and all in my whole journey.. a lot of people asking me, even the Syrian people, because they know the Sudanese traditional for girl is very hard, but I still found it is interesting how people they can know I am Sudanese girl and I can do what I want. I'm a woman and I have a lot to do' (Grace, Young Woman)

Migration is a time of reinvention for Grace, then, as she move across, and between, new spaces: spaces where gendered social relations have a different effect to those in her country of origin. She is redefining, for herself and for others, what it might mean to be a Sudanese young woman. Grace creates a series of aspirations as she move through these new places, bringing them with her into the UK. Similarly, Mia talked of migration as a time of learning and opportunity, and showed a clear awareness that she had moved into a different cultural and social space. Mia also framed her arrival as an opportunity for growth and self-development:

'it was interesting because I met different people and was exploring people and discover different culture, different people, it was a new experience for me' (Mia, Young Woman - interpreted).

These hopes for a better life were framed as sustaining. Eva describes Helen as travelling with an expectation of family care, and with hopes for better opportunities in the UK. For Salam there was no extended journey to the UK: '*I just came from that thing, from that very bad situation*' (Salam, Young Woman). Yet she still travelled in hope of being reunited with her father, who she believed would be at her destination.

We can see, then, that though the young women came with differing experiences, and from different parts of the world, they all had some aspirations for a safer or better life. These have effects which ripple forward into their lives in the UK, and into their relationships with social workers, as the following chapters will show. The young women's first experiences of the UK were at ports of entry, in border spaces, and it was here that they first encountered social workers. Massey (1994) describes the micro-level space as a '*simultaneous co-existence of others, with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell*' (p11). It is at these border spaces that these trajectories, and the individual stories of young women and social workers, can first intersect. It is this intersection that I consider in the following chapter.

Chapter 7

FINDINGS: BORDER SPACES

In the previous chapter we saw how young women may travel to the UK with a mixture of hope, fear and aspiration, and how practitioners' understandings of their previous experiences vary in depth. This chapter will consider their arrival in the UK and the first encounters with practitioners in border spaces. It will draw mainly on the rich descriptions of the border experience, given by Grace, a young woman, and by Eva, a practitioner. I introduce themes of *fear*, *agency*, *communication* and *size*, which emerged in relation to these spaces.

Crossing Borders

When young women sit in interview rooms at ports of entry, they have entered a micro-level space within a shifting set of power relations that is a national border: a complex network of social and legal relations, constructed around contested notions of nationality, gender, protection, and rights. These are highly contested spaces and the ways in which individuals navigate these places, and are affected by them, can differ starkly. Each young person who steps into a border space brings their own combination of motivations, experiences, fears and hopes but arriving at a border is not simply the beginning of a new life but rather a stage in a complex, incomplete journey. Border spaces can be the site of new long-lasting connections or more temporary ties, as people continue to move in and out of a young person's world:

‘the first time I came I was with one guy.. one boy.. he came from Afghanistan, we meet in the port and he was 15 and then they took him to somewhere’ (Salam, Young Woman)

Thinking of the UK as a ‘safe country’ does not lead automatically to feelings of safety on arrival. For Mia, arriving was not described as a feeling of reaching safety or the achievement of an aspiration. She spoke of not knowing where she was and feelings of fear and dislocation:

‘someone tell me you are in England I am crying. I say really? England is so far to my country. Why I am here? And no I don’t have an idea about England and I didn’t have a picture in my head at all’ (Mia, Young Woman)

It was only retrospectively, with a better understanding of the social work role, that Mia realised some of the adults she met had actually been social workers. The young women all had some memories of meeting social workers at borders, but the impact of these practitioners appeared variable and professional roles blurred. The whole concept of the ‘social worker’ was new:

‘I don’t remember the person collect me and brought me here but, when second time I went to the [local arrival point] for another interview, I realised he was social worker as well’ (Mia, Young Woman)

‘I never had in my mind that I’m going to have a social worker. I never. I think I’m going to live my life alone’. (Grace, Young Woman)

No details were given, by the young women, about people they may have travelled with or the point at which they were identified as potentially ‘unaccompanied’. There is little sense of a linear process happening in their accounts. It is in the practitioners’ accounts that systems and processes become more visible, but there remains a strong emotional and relational element. The border is not a social work space and the power dynamics between social workers and other agencies are formative. That is not to remove accountability from social workers but to recognise that inter-agency dynamics play a crucial role. This is a relational space which has multiple trajectories moving through it.

While all the young women remembered professionals trying to explain who, and where, they were, they also recalled difficulties taking in this information. This was linked with a number of factors including not speaking English, anxiety and fear, poor health and exhaustion. They recalled feelings of confusion:

‘in the port they ask you something and they ask me and I was like what? What? I don’t know. I don’t know any English. I think like why are they just asking me you know? I don’t have idea what I have to say or what’s going on’ (Salam, Young Woman)

‘first day I came to [port of entry] and I am so nervous and I am so ill and I can’t even talk and I’m scared from police and I can’t, because I don’t know them and my English. I do not speak any English in that time’ (Grace, Young Woman)

The lack of trust is a known barrier to communication in this context and it is a theme that runs through this thesis. Whilst good practice advises that young people are made

aware of their legal position and their rights, a lack of trust can be a barrier to the absorption of information:

‘they explain to me like what they mean but in my head I was like ‘I don’t trust you’
(Salam, Young Woman)

While there is anxiety, arrival can also be a time of relief, not just because the goal of safe arrival may be met, but because fears about what may happen at the border may be unrealised. As already noted, there is troubling evidence of young migrants being treated with violence at border points across Europe (MSF 2017), so these fears are not unfounded. Past experiences can also be a factor. Mia had fled a country where officials could be a source of danger and she described, through her interpreter, a sense of relief at being treated well by authority figures at the UK border. In the first interview her words were interpreted, sometimes being said in the first person and sometimes in the third:

‘she was so scared and she had a lot of fear but she was treated very fairly, friendly by everyone at the [border]. So she had a lot of stress and again anxiety and anxious about new country, new people but she got big relief when people OK were dealing with her...Even people in police uniform and immigration officer or social worker, everyone treat her in the best way and she didn’t expect’ (Mia, Young Woman – interpreted)

There is not always such sense of relief. For Salam, arrival was not just a time of confusion but of severe disappointment, when the meeting she has hoped for did not take place:

‘only thing I just need is my Dad so why did they ask me.. why don’t they just bring my Dad?’ (Salam, Young Woman)

It is not uncommon for young people trafficked across borders to be told they will be reunited with loved ones, or told they are they are coming for care and education (Kelly 2012). There can be different truths being given about journeys even as young people are undertaking them. This is something I have encountered in my own practice with young people:

‘I don’t know what Y was really expecting when she came - so hard to know because her story is confusing and almost surreal in places. She says she thought her parents would be here - that that’s what she was told. It’s heartbreaking if you spend time dwelling on it. For a child to think there were being reunited and then to arrive and find they are still alone. It’s such a cruel thing to say to someone, but then I suppose

it's just another step in a cruel process of exploitation. Maybe it is easier to consider it as 'surreal' - makes it more emotionally bearable to hear?' (Diary, May 2017)

Recognising and supporting young people's hopes and aspirations therefore needs to be countered with the capacity to contain and encourage them, when these hopes remain unfulfilled. The ability to engage effectively, to start to bridge that gap across the space, is critically important. Yet there was sparse evidence of effective engagement in Mia's account of her arrival. She was taken to her placement late at night and then brought back to be interviewed at the port in the next few days. Although Mia said her treatment at the port had been good, the social workers she first met were un-named, constructed more as drivers than as empathetic professionals:

'so those social workers, it wasn't about look after me and not about take action or have a duty to look after me. It seems to me those persons just were there to OK, to get me to port to get interviewed. That's it, nothing else' (Mia, Young Woman)

It is Grace's account which most powerfully shows the impact of practitioners who do work to minimise the impersonal nature of the border space. It shows how effective engagement can act as part of the route to protection, but one which requires both emotional labour and skilled interventions from practitioners and emotional work from young women. Grace recalls meeting two social workers, Kate and Paula, at the border. It was these social workers that Grace linked to her emerging sense of safety, during her first hours in the UK:

'they just make me to calm down and they talk to me and they touch my hand and they start make me to feel comfortable and not cry and 'I'm here, alright' they try to say to me 'you're all right here' and they try by different way. I didn't understand English, they can't talk my language but still they try to make me to feel better and they make, like they talk to me and they say they are listening. 'You all right here, no one can do anything to you and we will be with you' and they try. They try until the interpreter come and then they explain to me that I'm all right here and they are very nice really and I spent from 12 am until 2pm in evening like, the second day in the port and they be with me all that time. They very nice. They bring for me free chocolate and they..I'm not well and I'm cold. They try to call doctors and they ask me if I need doctor or anything. They bring for me clothes and they try to find out where I'm going to stay' (Grace, Young Woman)

Grace is recalling an encounter which took place before she had learnt to understand spoken English, yet she attributes phrases to the social workers at a point when these would not have been intelligible to her. It is possible she has remembered these phrases from a later time, when the interpreter was present and I acknowledge that descriptions of past encounters are new constructions and memories can shift. Yet I would suggest

that Grace tells us several significant things.

Lefevre (2018) describes effective engagement and communication as threefold: *being*, *doing* and *knowing* and, here, Grace gives a powerful description of the first two domains. She conveys a sense of the practitioners working to create a feeling of safety around her. They are actively being present with others at times of distress (Ruch 2010) but they are also *doing*. In the absence of a shared language, both physical touch and the bringing of food were experienced as acts of care and perhaps are being articulated here by Grace through remembered words of reassurance. What is not described, but could be inferred, is the knowledge base that informed Kate and Paula's approach to this young woman. Paula and Kate came from a specialist team for unaccompanied young people and their approach suggest an understanding of the potential experiences of these young people. This includes their practical needs on arrival, as well as the confidence to respond with embodied communication when there is no shared, spoken language.

This need for embodied care and emotional containment can be very real for young people in border spaces. Salam recalls being at the port for several hours and being spoken to by a number of people she was unable to identify. She remembers a long period of unsuccessful communication before an interpreter was provided, and several more hours before a social worker arrived:

‘finally they just called for an interpreter, like on phone interpreter and I just explain to them and then after that I was really sick. I’m really sick and then before I just ask them to sleep. After four hours or five hours someone came and asked me some questions and then the social worker’ (Salam, Young Woman)

Salam's description of vomiting, after telling her story to a disembodied voice on a telephone, is a powerful reminder of the levels of fear and stress that young people can experience at borders. There are also a number of health consequences for young people travelling alone, often without regular food, water and physical care, and these can lead to ill-health on arrival (Coyle et al 2016). Border spaces are therefore a place of complex physical and emotional dynamics for young women, which can affect their ability to be informed about their rights and to exercise their agency, and here the role

of advocacy and support becomes even more critical. This has added dimensions when a young woman is thought to have been trafficked for forms of exploitation. It is Eva's account which most powerfully shows the practice challenges of hearing young women's voices within this space.

Eva and Helen: Meeting the 'Giant'

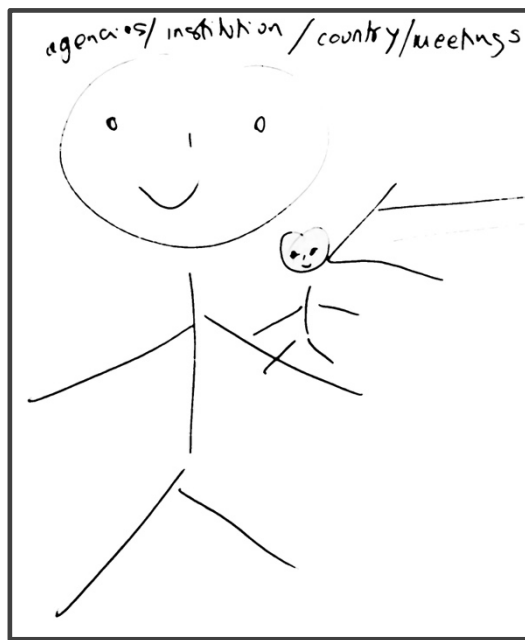
Eva spoke of her first meeting with Helen, a young woman who arrived from Ethiopia. Helen was placed overnight in foster care, and met Eva for the first time when she returned to the port for interview:

'I was on duty and I came down to meet her and have a meeting with her and just try and get a little bit of information about what happened to her..she seemed extremely closed and extremely timid. Her answers were more 'yes' and 'no' to things and you could see that she just felt completely bewildered about where she is. She was also very very scared because the person that brought her into the country said to her that she goes through the customs that somebody will meet her and will get in contact with her...and we saw her as potentially trafficked.' (Eva, Practitioner)

Eva vividly recalls the tensions between her desire to protect Helen from being trafficked from the border, and her wish to minimise any distress and anxiety for her. Importantly Eva makes connections between the extent to which a young person feels safe, (as opposed to an external measure of safety), the effectiveness of the communication that takes place with them, the space and time this occurs, and the risk of them returning to the trafficker:

'the most important thing is to keep that young person safe (*taps on the table*) and for them to feel safe and if they don't feel safe and they don't feel that they have time to breathe, before we attack them with loads of things, there's heightened risk of them going missing' (Eva, Practitioner - emphasised words underlined)

It is in her drawing, and her accompanying talk, that Eva powerfully explore the complexities of social work in this space. Notably, she uses themes of *size* and *growth* to consider the power relations that were shaping her encounter with Helen at the time they met. These were represented in Eva's drawing, a section of which is reproduced on the following page.



(Fig 2: Eva's Giant)

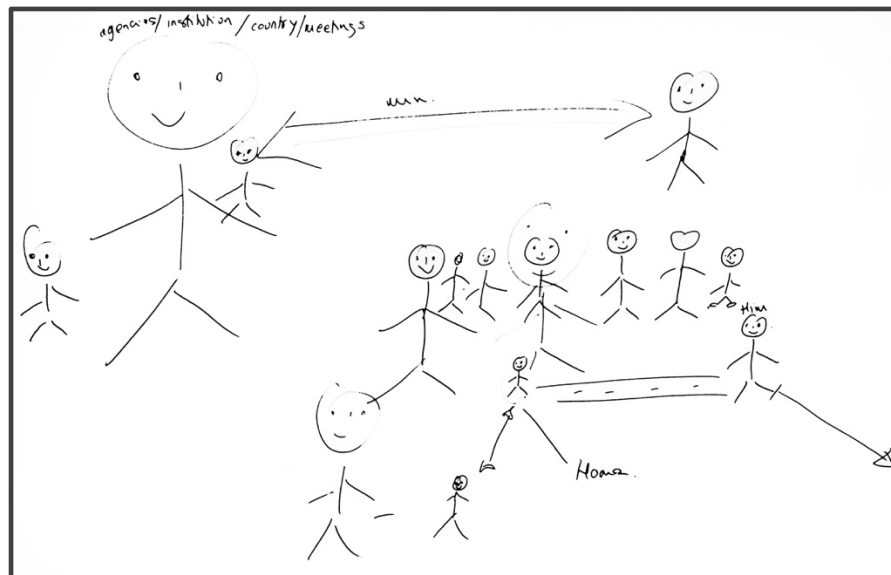
On the left of the page, Eva drew a large figure that became referred to as the 'giant' in the interview. The 'giant' was constructed of a number of complex issues, largely related to power, process and organisation:

'this was the big, big huge, joint agencies, trafficking, the whole big organisational...'
(Eva, Practitioner)

Above the 'giant' Eva wrote:

'agencies, institution, country, meetings'
(Eva, Practitioner)

This 'giant' was used, at different times in the interview, to represent the complex range of institutions, systems and processes that affect young people when they claim asylum in the UK, and when they become 'looked after'. It is when the giant is viewed in relation to Helen, and to Eva herself, that some of the relational dynamics emerge:



(Figure 3: Helen, Eva and the Giant)

Eva draws herself as a medium sized figure on the top right of the page, the opposite side of the page to the 'giant'. The other figures are drawn as she talks about Helen's life in the UK. Eva describes her role, in the border space, as minimising the impact of

this 'giant' on Helen, which she attempt to achieve through a process of support and explanation:

'(audible sigh). I am connected to this, so I am connected to this because I am part of this you know...I'm not...I don't see myself separate from this, because I am part of this but I feel that my key skill's to try to minimise the impact of this (knocks on picture of giant)' (Eva, Practitioner)

Eva is describing a key tension for social workers in this area of practice: the extent to which they are part of the institutional processes that affect children and young people who migrate and to what extent they seek to disrupt, or challenge, these institutions. This will be returned to throughout this thesis and considered in the conclusion. Eva illustrated this tension with a two directional arrow, placing figures to represent herself at each end. Through the course of the interview Eva moved herself back and forwards, towards and away from the 'giant'. She was in a constant motion, shifting between belonging and resisting:

'all of these meetings, all of these people need to be involved. Why do they have to give their finger prints or their DNA or their photos taken, their age assessments done. Do you know what I mean? It's huge thing trying to minimise the impact of that' (Eva, Practitioner)

'hang on a minute, you're employed by this, this is your job , this is who I am in a sense, this is what I studied. I want to make sure that the risk is minimised and that these young people stay in our care' (Eva, Practitioner).

The tiny figure in the centre right of the picture is Helen, as Eva conceptualised her when she arrived at the port. At first Eva drew Helen as a larger figure but, stopping to reflect on their first meeting, she changed her mind:



Eva: there's her yeah...so when she arrived...oh maybe it was...OK...I'll alter it like this *(draws much smaller figure)*

Me: she's small

Eva: in a big huge space *(gestures across paper)* yeah...

Me: yeah

Eva: very big huge space...very small yeah...OK and I was there and I was much bigger and seemed bigger to her. (Eva, Practitioner)

(Fig 4: Eva's Drawing of Helen on arrival)

As she talks of her relationship with Helen, and their work together across time, Eva redraws the figure of Helen in increasing sizes. These themes of *size* and *growth* are also found in Salam's drawings of hearts (Fig 9, p118) and Grace's trees (Fig 5, p95). Significantly, the conceptualisation of *size* in these drawings is always described relationally, rather than as an intrinsic quality of an individual. It is also strongly situated in place and time:

'it's not tiny in the sense that she doesn't have strength you know. She is bigger than that but...that first arrival the first time, there is this body language, the face, the way she looked was that thing of complete and utter bewilderment and not understanding what the hell is going on (Eva, Practitioner)

'she was big there (*points to tiny figure*) but I don't think she was aware that she was big' (Eva, Practitioner)

In this border space, then, Helen is being positioned as small in relation both to Eva, the 'giant' and the space that she is now occupying but she is not without resilience. She is also smaller than the alleged trafficker, who is drawn at a short distance from Helen but connected to her by a road. The label 'him' is written above the figure, illustrating the gender aspects of trafficking and also constructing him as a dangerous male. Of course, his intended actions may indeed have been dangerous for Helen. He is drawn as larger in this space because of the position of trust, and dependence, he has established in relation to Helen:

'why would she trust me, more than the person who brought her from her own country and saved her from this miserable life that she had?' (Eva, Practitioner)

Eva is larger than Helen because of the position of power and privilege that she occupies in this space: as a social worker, an adult, a white woman, and as someone with a legal right to be in the UK. Initially she frames these aspects of her own identity as barriers to trust: '*I am a white European female in front of her...who am I to tell her?*' (Eva, Practitioner). Interestingly, she also attributes the size imbalance to their different use of movement and voice. It is Eva who has the power to move here, not just to enter and leave the port, but to express herself bodily through gesture. Helen's voice and movement have become limited by others and by her position in power:

‘she was really shy you know, introvert person..was at that time. I just seemed like this huge, very forceful woman.... expressiveness. I think it was my body language.’ (Eva, Practitioner).

It is through these relational ways of thinking that Eva constructs herself as the ‘other’. It is Eva who is being framed as the stranger to Helen, not the other way around; Eva is strange to Helen in her movements and in her identities. Importantly, in doing so, Eva then frames herself as the one having to work to bridge the gap in trust and understanding. Yet, although she acknowledges Helen’s agency, in order to act protectively Eva believes she has to disrupt the ways Helen was expecting to navigate in the UK. Together with Helen, Eva is attempting to co-construct a new map for Helen, one that will safeguard her in this new space:

‘the only thing that’s connected to the Eritrean ability to navigate is taken away from her by me saying to her no no no no no....you know this is not what this person wanted to do (*points to figure of potential trafficker*)’ (Eva, Practitioner)

Similarly to Salam, then, Helen’s understanding of what would happen in the UK becomes radically reframed when she encounters professionals at the border. In Massey’s (1994) terms, their expected trajectories are altered. Whilst Salam goes on to describe an extended period of adjustment to this new, and unexpected, life, Helen is being asked to start making this adjustment in a matter of hours. From Eva’s perspective, the trafficker remains connected to Helen and the risk of her going with him creates a pressure of time.

It is here that the impact of the ‘giant’ re-emerges in Eva’s account, as the space Eva and Helen have together, with an interpreter, is ended. An inter-agency meeting takes place:

‘there were about four different professionals afterwards asking her lots of questions, trying to get intelligence about this ..supposed trafficker’ (Eva, Practitioner).

The *I-Poem* below shows Eva’s frustration, watching the connection she felt she had started to form with Helen unravel in front of her eyes:

I felt that this big meeting kind of destroyed a bit of that initial kind of starting to get to know each other.

I wanted to say 'oh don't say that' or 'can you say it a bit differently'.

I wanted everybody to go quiet and leave her to speak.

I couldn't wait to go and see her by herself.

(Eva, Practitioner)

There is sense of powerless in Eva's words, which highlight the importance of place and time in these encounters. Her comments are about what she felt, and what she wanted to say, but these feelings were not voiced to the other professionals. Instead her voice was used to talk to Helen:

'I kind of reiterated information that she said to me within the first hour and just kept confirming with her 'is that what you meant? is that what you said?' (Eva, Practitioner)

We have moved, then, from a description of Eva as powerful and expressive to an account of her having a minimal voice in the face of practice she disliked. Her communicative capacity alters when the purpose of the space shifts and the people within it change. The power relations that construct the micro-space of the meeting with Helen, Eva and the interpreter, differ from those that form the micro-space of the inter-agency meeting, even if they occupy the same physical space. For Eva, this move to a meeting environment has shifted the scale of this encounter and it is now a '*big meeting*'. It is noticeable that Eva's solution is to visit Helen in placement, a space that is familiar to her and where she felt more able to use her skills and knowledge. She also feels a need to quickly re-establish a connection with Helen, showing an instinctual awareness of the situated and temporal nature of communication.

Eva does talk of her regrets at not intervening and identifies this meeting with Helen as a changing point in her practice. Practitioners are on their own professional trajectory:

'it did change my approach towards that first [meeting]..the more confident I became as a worker the more I was able to say 'no I don't want it done like that'.

You know, this young person needs space (*taps on table*) and they need time (*taps on table*)' (Eva, Practitioner)

Eva's account illustrates the extent to which social workers are trying to navigate these complex border spaces themselves, although their position in power allows them many advantages. Eva can move across and between these spaces when Helen cannot. In many ways Eva is describing the key tension for social workers in this area of practice, the extent to which they are part of the institutional processes that affect children and young people who migrate and to what extent they seek to disrupt or challenge these institutions.

These tensions continued as young women moved into different forms of local authority accommodation. In the following chapter I present, and explore, the data on how young women and practitioners developed their understandings within these new living spaces.

Chapter 8

FINDINGS: LIVING SPACES

Once the young women had passed through the border spaces and into local authority accommodation, they entered another complex network of social relations. I describe these as ‘living spaces’, recognising that notions of home are complex for young migrants (Sirreyeh 2013a), and placements is a bureaucratic term not used by the young women. The majority of encounters between young women and practitioners occurred in these living spaces, often framed by notions of the ‘social work visit’ (Ferguson 2010). Importantly, individual experiences in placements were impacting the ways young women and social workers interacted and constructed each other. Themes of *belief*, *fear* and *safety* will be explored here, in a complex interplay of hearing and not hearing, and of trusting and fearing.

New Living Spaces

At the time of the research Salam and Grace were living independently as care leavers and Mia moved to supported lodgings during the project. Although they talked about the places they had lived they did not distinguish between supported lodging placements or foster care, sometimes struggling to find words to describe where they were living. They also used a variety of terms to describe the adults in these spaces, such as staff, carers or ‘Mum’. Their first living spaces differed: Grace went into a supported lodgings provider; Mia into a private residential service; Salam into a foster placement. All moved at least once after their arrival. The practitioners described visiting the other young women in a similar range of living spaces but they more clearly distinguished the types of care and the responsibilities expected of the adults within those spaces.

All participants framed these living spaces as temporary, spaces the young women were moving through to achieve future goals but where they were also in search of support and care. The DfE guidance describes local authority accommodation as a ‘place of

safety’ (DfE 2017a), but the findings suggests notions of safety are particularly thorny at the junction of social work and immigration systems. For Mia, arriving in the UK at 16, the sense of relief she felt at the port began to evaporate on the journey to her placement:

‘it wasn’t comfortable, it wasn’t good because it was long distance, late in the evening or afternoon. It was dark. I couldn’t speak the language English. I couldn’t actually ask any questions. I wasn’t able, so no one explained to me where we going and my destination and where we’d be settled down. So no one explained to me about this, so it wasn’t easy journey from the port to here. I didn’t have any idea where I am going’ (Mia, Young Woman)

It is not difficult to imagine the anxiety of being driven through the night to an unknown destination, hours after arriving in a new country and with adult strangers who do not speak your language. For a young woman who has come from a country with a known history of state brutality, such a journey has added meanings. Mia powerfully describes her sense of relief when she arrived at accommodation, to be met by carers who took her to her room and gave her a key. All the participants described their arrival, and the weeks and months that followed, as the most difficult period, a time of particularly rapid adjustment and disorientation:

‘four months or five months I didn’t go anywhere. I just go college and then from the college just home. I just sit in and watching tv. I was not interested in anything. I want to stay at home’ (Salam, Young Woman)

‘it’s like plonking someone on Mars and asking them to get on with it’ (Eva, Practitioner).

Places can themselves feel strange on arrival; each living space has a particular combination of smells, sounds and tastes. The importance of sensory experiences in forming secure relationships is well-known, and contributes to the feelings of safety and security (Winnicott 1990). Such sensory connections were acknowledged as significant by some practitioners, linked to growth and re-establishing a sense of self:

‘the smell of food that their Mums used to cook for them or their families, could be enough to make them feel safe for a bit and make them a little bit bigger than they feel and it’s these little, little things that make a huge difference in their lives (Eva, Practitioner)’

Yet, although the physical environment and the location were seen as important, the descriptions of their living spaces were always linked to the social relations within them. It was here that the contested nature of these spaces became more apparent.

Contested Spaces

Massey (1994) describes places as '*open and porous*' (p5), with a multiplicity of contested boundaries even at the micro-level. An example was given by Mia, who talked animatedly about the night-time 'checking' procedure in the shared house. In her interview her words were interpreted and sometimes spoken in the third person:

'every night someone used to come knock the door and check everything ..one night when she was completely asleep and she was sleeping .. wake up suddenly because of noise. She could see someone standing in her room, beside the bed, without her permission. So she was so scared' (Mia, Young Woman)

Mia and the staff occupy different positions within the social relations in this living space. The boundaries of Mia's room, if we can think of it in those terms, are not agreed. Whilst staff may intend this knock to be experienced as an act of concern, it is not interpreted this way by Mia. When staff knock on the door, or enter the room while she is sleeping, she experiences it as violation and intrusion. She is afraid.

We can see, then, how power differences can affect movement across the micro-spaces within the placement and the affective dimensions of this. Mia identified her meeting with Rosa as a turning point; she was unhappy with the ways some of the residential staff were interacting with her and, for the first time, she felt somebody had listened to her and was actively working in her interests:

'I am telling you my social worker had significant impact on my life here..so everything..every problem I explain to her she took action and she sorted my problem' (Mia, Young Woman)

Mia describes Rosa as somebody with power, able to act for her when she is not able to act for herself. This a description of practice given by all the participants, although their feelings and relations to this power were complex. Mia described Rosa as a potential ally, someone who can help her navigate the contested boundaries of this new space. Salam gave a similar account of seeking social worker support to manage a contested, internal boundary and, here, power-gender dynamics become more visible, although the affective dimensions remain. Unlike Mia, Salam is on the outside of the door:

'one little girl she just came from I don't know..and then she just hurt herself you know. She just closed the door and then she just bang her head. I just call to her social worker and say something is wrong in my house. If it was Mum [foster carer] I would tell her 'Mum please just open the door' but the guy I ask him 'can you open the door' he said 'no' (Salam, Young Woman)

It is interesting to note this newly arrived young woman is described as a 'little girl', reflecting the theme of *growth* in the data. When Salam is concerned for the young woman's safety she acts, possibly drawing on her own experiences, and recognising that emotion is sometimes expressed through acts of harm to the body (Treisman 2017). Through her own experience, she has come to see her social worker as route to therapeutic support:

'I had lot of problems.. one time I shaved my hair like to nothing and then she [Teresa] just called to counsellor' (Salam, Young Woman)

Salam's sense of safety is in her relationships with the female foster carer and female social worker, and neither are present in this space at this time. When the male carer does not act in a way she feels is containing Salam acts herself, challenging the gendered power dynamics. This is initially resisted by the male carer:

'straight away they just called him like 'well open the door' and then he say 'who tell? Who tell? Did you call?' and I say 'yes I called because you don't open the door, so I don't want to sit in here until she died. You should have to open the door, whatever is happened you should have to'.. If it was my social worker, even if I closed she's going to broke the damn door and she's getting in' (Salam, Young Woman)

Here Salam's social worker is someone who will break down a door to keep her safe. This is a highly protective act of power, overriding the concerns about privacy and rights raised by Mia in her account. There is anger and fear here as well. Fear of death, which Salam has already experienced through the death of her mother, and that she may have witnessed as a survivor of community violence. Being able to hear another young person's self-harm may have provoked feelings of powerlessness and concern, which Salam has acted to minimise. Salam also links this young woman's lack of voice to her own inability to speak after arrival. When the other young woman does not have a voice, Salam speaks for her:

'It's just like me.. she does it..that time I just speak a little bit but she doesn't speak at all... it's like same like me, the first time when I came' (Salam, Young Woman)

Salam's feelings of reassurance, that her social worker would get into her room, contrast with Mia's discomfort that staff have a key, to what she thought was a private space. This may relate to the levels of trust the young women had established with their carers and Mia was newly arrived at the time of the events described. For both, however, their construction of the social worker is framed within the relational understandings developing in the living space. When social workers visit, they enter these relational, temporal and affective spaces. Carers could act as *influencers* in the relationships forming between young women and practitioners, offering particular perspectives, sometimes before the first encounters took place. The participants were not the sole sources of information about themselves.

'I knew that she'd already started making quite a lot of onerous demands on the accommodation provider.. she wasn't doing a very good job of looking after herself in terms of cooking' (Alice, Practitioner)

'she kind of felt reassured by everything the house parent said [about social workers]' (Chris, Practitioner).

Although all the participants framed carers as essential sources of support for the young women, living spaces could also be sites of significant disconnection. Culture, language and religion were all identified as sources of miscommunication and misunderstandings:

'it's like playing football with the ball being chased from one end and the other, and nobody understanding what's happening in between' (Eva, Practitioner)

These are therefore complex relational sites, described and experienced very differently by the participants. Some were described as highly nurturing and some as sites that participants needed courage themselves to enter:

'I want to say thank you to her, my foster family like she's .. my Mum was passed away.. I don't know everything but she make me to have another Mum' (Salam, Young Woman)

'I was approaching this house with like.. right I need to..*(audible breath in)*..I'm going to be quite resourceful now because I'm here for the young person, not to kind of be ambushed by the supported lodgings provider' (Susan, Practitioner)

Grace described her first two living spaces in largely negative terms, and her account shows that the boundaries of local authority placements can themselves be contested sites. Grace is a Muslim young woman, who went into a supported lodgings placement in a neighbouring authority after arrival and remained there for six months. Initially she

felt welcomed, but this quickly changed:

‘they just being shouting, they told me ‘Muslim people kill people, you kill people’ they say that to me. I say ‘I kill people?’ ‘I don’t know that, I never kill anyone’. They say ‘not you but the Muslim people and you’re Muslim’ so I say ‘OK you say I not kill anyone but you say I’m Muslim people, in the end you hurt me. I didn’t done anything wrong to you, why you say that to me?’ and her girls are just shouting. They say ‘in our school they told us about Muslim people’ ... I want to start my education and stuff they upset me, they say ‘Oh English school not accept Muslim people, they don’t like them because they think children like you are coming here and they take the place of English people’. (Grace, Young Woman - stressed words underlined)

Here we see the fallacy of framing these living spaces as protected bubbles, hermetically sealed from the outside world. As Sirreyeh (2013b) notes, carers are ‘*at the forefront of the nation’s threshold*’ (p5) and the wider discourses about migration were present through the data. After several months Grace was moved to another supported lodgings provider, in a different local authority. Yet here she went from being constructed as a dangerous Muslim to being seen as an undeserving migrant. In constructing these as living spaces only for ‘indigenous’ non-Muslim citizens, framing Grace as the unwanted ‘other’, both sets of carers were attempting to fix the meaning of not just these living spaces, but also of the UK as a macro-level space.

‘this lady, she have a son and her son is forty-three years old and she try to compare between me and her son, she say I get all the help from the government and why her son is not have that help like me? And she compare between me and come from outside the country and get help. ‘Even the children in the UK they didn’t get that help’ (Grace, Young Woman)

Significantly, these excluding discourses were also described as present in the wider organisation, acknowledged but rejected by the participants:

‘they think their placements are getting stolen by our kids [UASC], because we get so many in. Some people say that there aren’t foster placements, cos our kids are getting them and you think.. ‘no they’re your kids as well’ (Alice, Practitioner)

‘I love difference. I love being in places where there’s a mixture. How can anyone not embrace this real cultural mix of people? I really struggle with people who are frightened and want to keep it all out’ (Chris, Practitioner)

In my position as insider-researcher, it was difficult to hear Grace talk about her experiences of discrimination. Grace had acted to find solutions, and was reflecting from a safer place, but I have no wish to minimise the impact on her. These are clearly described in the following *I-Poem*:

I want to live in peace and I didn't see anything in this life as these people.

I shocked. I mean I can't eat. I'm being ill.

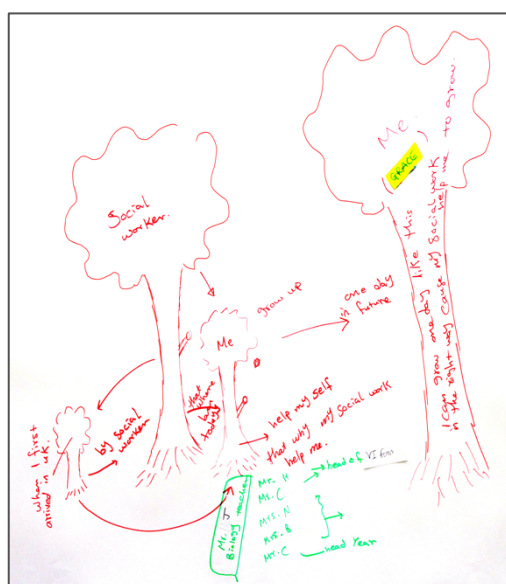
I can't go out because I'm thinking, maybe people they're not going to like me anymore.

I spent twenty-four hour in my room.

I can't go out, it's so bad, you feel like you're in prison and you know the day that I get out of that home I feel like I just 'oh my god that is my freedom now'.

(Grace, Young Woman)

It is sobering to reflect that Grace is not talking about leaving a place of detention, but a supported lodgings placement in rural England, somewhere which is supposed to be offering her safety and care. What is notable, as well, is the apparent disconnection between the experiences Grace describes and the construction of her social worker in her drawing:



(Fig. 5: Grace's Trees)

She is bigger tree because she always look after me

She protect me, so always I know I'm safe with my social worker

She help me to grow in the right way so one day I can be like a big tree

She know Grace one day she wanna be a doctor. She know my plan.

(Grace, Young Woman)

This depiction of the social worker as the temporary *sheltering tree*, a source of safety, initially seemed at odds with Grace's account of her experiences in local authority care.

Mia offers a perspective when she notes that:

'we here, doesn't have family and doesn't have someone bigger than me, for example mother, father or uncle, cousin.. and if social worker doesn't help me, really I can't do nothing. What can I do? Nothing' (Mia, Young Woman)

One way of understanding Grace's drawing is to consider it as 'splitting', a concept developed by Klein, and considered to be the '*most fundamental of the defences*' (Froggett 2002 p36). From this perspective, Grace is defending her internal self by making the social worker the idealised 'good object', the '*bearer of hope for change*' (ibid p37), while the carers are the 'bad object', the holders of the feelings that are unbearable. This is a relationship that Grace needs to invest in, and perhaps it is too painful for her to reflect on any negative feelings. It is also possible that she has less knowledge of the responsibilities of her social workers, and the local authority, to provide safe accommodation, an awareness that led to my own shame and discomfort hearing her account. Grace does tell her social workers about her experiences but, like Mia, her ability to leave is constrained:

'I can't look for places because in that time I can't do any. I do not know a lot of places here. I do not know people. I can't talk to people properly and English conversation.. I wait for the social worker to move me' (Grace, Young Woman)

Just as young women's movement at, and across, national borders is restricted, so their movement across spaces in the UK is also limited, and the power of the social worker to enable this mobility becomes highly significant. While there were examples of this mobility being supported, concerns about trafficking were linked to the decisions of social workers to restrict this movement:

'I said no you can't take her to London because of the fact she's on safety plan' (Eva, Practitioner)

Eva's anxiety about Helen going missing decreased as she saw her relational network in the UK grow and her ability to navigate this new space increase. Eva described how Helen moved onto independent living in the city of her choice, with the support of Eva and the foster carers. Helen had indefinite leave to remain, but my own practice experience includes young women whose asylum claims were denied, and who did not experience such a stable network of care. My diary reflects some of the complex feelings that can emerge:

'It just feels wrong to care for a person and then throw them to the wolves.. that's how it feels with X. And yes that's emotive talk but I can't help but ask myself what sort of parents are we being for her? That's what s20 is supposed to be about isn't it? Is that what reasonable parents would do at 18 - say 'sorry you're on your own, you can have a bare minimum. We could give you security but we're not going to'. I feel powerless and frustrated and angry that I can't do anything to stop this process

- it seems unjust when you meet someone face to face, although there must be so many people denied entry that I never meet and never lose a night's sleep over' (Diary Sept 2017)

This young woman went missing within weeks of this diary entry and her whereabouts remain unknown. Again, we see how the experience of face-to-face encounters can produce different understandings to a distanced or procedural perspective (Broadhurst and Mason 2014). I cannot distance myself from this young woman, as I can from the deported stranger, the '*absolute, unknown, anonymous other*' (Derrida 2000b, p25 quoted in Sirreyeh 2013). Reading this now I seem almost apologetic for my use of 'emotive talk', taking an angry and defiant stance, and I am aware I have not shared these feelings within my workplace. The emotional impact of living and working with legal insecurity, and the contrasting relief of being given legal status, were also spoken of in the interviews:

'I think if you only work with them up to 18 you dodge it. I think it's an emotional load.. you're just dealing with appeal rights exhausted, you're dealing with end of the line, you're dealing with the point where [the local authority] goes 'we're not going to pay for this anymore' and that's a very hard message to be the person that delivers it.. and then that's when [you get] the traumas, in terms of 'I can't go home because I'll be killed' which you routinely hear. 'I can't go home I'll be killed' but you are going home and now is the time when we're talking about you going home..that is very hard' (Alice, Practitioner - stressed words underlined)

'I was like, oh my God. I cried 'oh my God, oh man is that right? Is it me? They give me papers?' Actually they give it me in 21 days, in short time. To get the paper is like thank you to God' (Salam, Young Woman)

The emotional contrast here is striking, and the temporary nature of these living spaces is made starkly clear. Legal status is a key factor here. Salam and Grace saw their refugee status as essential in their ability to forge new lives in the UK; it formed the roots of Grace's growing tree in her drawing. The practitioners also identified this as fundamental to what they saw as the largely successful lives of Helen, Sophia, Ada, Hester, Joy and Onika. At the time of writing, Mia and Tao are still waiting for a decision.

Yet, even when refugee status is granted, the move from one living space to another can still be problematic. Salam arrived in the UK in her late teenage years, so the length of time between arrival and an expected move to forms of 'independence' felt too short:

'I stay six months because I don't how to cook. I don't know how just to communicate. I just begged my social worker, 'please I just want to stay in here' and I asked my Mum, 'please Mum'. No ready. Wasn't ready' (Salam, Young Woman).

There are concerns about the support available to all UK care leavers (Power and Raphael 2017) and this emerged in the data:

'I think that we absolve ourselves of responsibility too easily...I don't think we house people properly. I think we leave people in inadequate accommodation and I think that's really poor..as corporate parents I think we do a really bad job of that.. I think we do a bad job helping people in terms of their emotional trauma in terms of adult services...I think we absolve ourselves of providing people with the right emotional support they need' (Chris, Practitioner)

Salam was able to stay with her carer for another six months, with the support of her social worker who advocated for her, but the move out of a local authority living space, away from the trusting relationships she had built there, was still a mixed experience:

'I have friends in here and they aren't like me because they get straight away the housing. I struggle for a lot of things. Even though I am under social worker. (Salam, Young Woman)

There were other accounts of young women developing rich relational networks as they moved on from local authority accommodation. Eva described how power-relations, between Helen and herself, shifted in this new living space, showing how time and space work together in these encounters. In this new living space, it was Helen who became the host:

'she would cook me this amazing lunch and we would just sit and chat and there was nothing for me to do, because she did it all for herself' (Eva, Practitioner)

Understanding young women in these living spaces was sometimes framed as a linear process, of the young woman 'telling' and the practitioner 'knowing' and this is a description found in policy documents. Yet a more complex set of practices also emerged through the accounts and it is these that I will now explore.

Encounters In The Living Spaces: Telling And Knowing

In her interview, Alice drew a picture of herself meeting with Hester, a young woman who had recently arrived in the UK. They are drawn sitting around a table, in the 'staff office' of a residential service. This is a place of work for Alice and her pen and notebook are on the table in front of her. When she meets Hester, Alice is troubled by her

conflicting feelings; she talks of wanting Hester to speak but also of her own anxiety about not meeting the organisational requirements:



She just wanted to talk.. and once she started she just went for it

She went straight into worries

I put the table there with my big books that I'm just sitting there writing down

I'm scared not to capture everything.

(Alice, Practitioner)

(Figure 6: Alice's Book, Wand and Table (extract))

Alice is 'scared', expressing some fear about the consequences of not producing this narrative. Her conflicted feelings about the formal 'table' parallel Eva's ambivalence about the organisational 'giant', discussed in Chapter 7. It provides the source of her power to act, her 'magic wand' but it also constrains, dictating the encounter as the gathering of information and fixing it in this living space. Yet, not all the young women felt able to verbally communicate their needs, or to provide this 'information', in such straightforward ways. Language was a factor here, but these were also highly affective spaces:

'she felt that her Mum would not approve of her going to the Catholic church but she wouldn't say anything, she didn't want me to say anything. She prepared this speech of what she's going to say to them [carers]. She said no she's going to do it by herself but she's going to phone me beforehand. She's going to phone me afterwards. She felt so anxious over it' (Eva, Practitioner)

'If I want something I was scared to ask them. They say Salam do you want something? Why you not ask? I say I feel something like shame you know. How I just ask for them?' (Salam, Young Woman)

There were also suggestions of a gendered dimension to this telling:

'she's been probably the only one that's actually told me about their journey and their story to get here. I've haven't had that conversation with the rest of the young men. I haven't got that relationship' (Susan, Practitioner)

'I'm a woman and she a woman, she can understand me more.. I think so' (Grace, Young Woman)

This tension between the need to know, and the difficulty of telling, came through strongly in the data but is also linked to the relational positions occupied by the young women and practitioner. Compare Elaine's feelings about Clara, with Salam's account of telling her story to her social worker, Teresa:

I talk to Teresa I feel like just ok. I feel comfortable.

Sometimes I said 'ok I should have to tell them' but I said no (*breathes out*),

I just tell her you know, not like one day everything.

Sometimes like I was like, just my head was like phwoh (*gestures expanding head*)

Sometimes I get off and then cry.

(Salam, Young Woman)

I'm not really getting anything back from her.

If I go out with one of my children that can speak English, we've just got so much more in common.

I find it really difficult with these children because you can't communicate.

I just think the more that can be put in to teach them intensive lessons of English, would move them on a lot quicker

(Elaine, Practitioner)

Here Salam describes a process of testing out, of making several attempts to tell Teresa about her past experiences before she felt able to speak. Salam talks of Teresa allowing her time to talk, and saying that she didn't have to speak until she felt ready. Her eventual 'telling' took place across a number of encounters and involved moving toward, and away from, feelings she expressed in gesture and unformed words during the interview. It is here that the audio, and the embodied encounter of the interview space, convey more of this affective practice than can be held in the text on this page.

In Elaine's account, her 'not-knowing' about Clara was described as a problem with communication, created by lack of a shared language or common cultural experiences. It is a concept of 'knowing' very grounded in information gathering (Froggett 2002). Elaine is white and British. As the person from abroad, who doesn't speak English and is

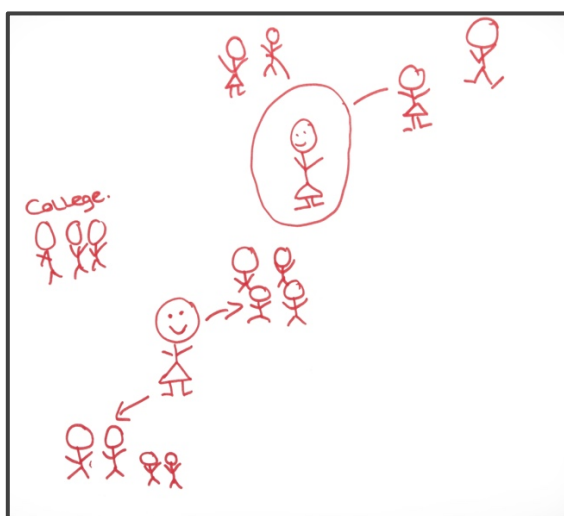
unfamiliar with aspects of English youth culture, Clara became the embodiment of this communication 'problem'. This expectation of absorbing 'Englishness' is something Grace also experienced but something she was resisting:

'I don't need to be English because I live here.. I like in UK and I respect English people and so they need to respect me back because I'm never going to do something wrong to these people..but you don't need to compare between me and English people. I'm from different traditional... from different lot of thing' (Grace, Young Woman)

I have no desire to construct Elaine as the 'bad' social worker here, through my own affective practice. Elaine was willing to discuss the tensions and vulnerabilities in her professional role, and she describes Clara as 'lovely'. In my diary I find a similar moment of frustration at having no shared language with a young woman. I, too, am moving between empathy and blame:

'I feel it isolates her - from us as well, from me in the meeting and when we talk. Like trying to talk through a plastic bubble. Yet in other ways she is so expressive- her facial expressions, her laughter, her body language. I wonder if the SW is trying to be encouraging when she tells her about her [good] English, because I'm sitting there thinking that she's taking a long time to be able to speak it! Yet that feels so unfair - it's not like I'd be fluent in a language after 18 months' (Diary, June 2017)

It was the space and time to reflect, provided by this doctoral process, that enabled me to resist seeing this young woman as a communicative 'problem'. Yet in Elaine's drawing she positions herself in her own bubble, disconnected from Clara and the wider network, including her colleagues:



(Fig 7: Elaine's drawing of Clara's Network)

She probably looks at me as I'm just somebody that comes to see her every six weeks.

She hasn't really got to know me that well.

She'll just give yes or no answer.

She smiles a lot..so I know she's still with me.

(Elaine, Practitioner)

Elaine's 'bubble' suggests isolation. She had only recently started working with unaccompanied young people and, although she described her manager and peers as supportive, there was no mention of training, an induction period or regular reflexive spaces. Her own communication with the organisation seemed based on the transfer of information.

Chris' account shows how a different form of communication may emerge, when the encounter is not framed by the organisational construction of the social work visit and when the worker is more experienced and comfortable in the space. He recalled meeting Sophia when he was visiting another young person. It may also be significant that Chris identifies as black British, recalling his own experiences of racism and of being framed as the 'other' in UK spaces. Rather than being fearful of Sophia's differences, he finds a point of connection:

'I remember meeting her first and then talking to her about the art work, so that was the first time I met her and then the second time I met her was when I'd been allocated to her as her social worker' (Chris, Practitioner)

Chris feels this brief meeting was helpful in his work with Sophia, making an initial connection that he could then build on and it's important to note that Sophia, in her response to his overtures, was engaging here too. In the other accounts we can see how some communication, particularly if it is not linked to professional tasks, can be framed as something that needs to be filtered out:

'I'd have to patiently listen to her, discuss things in absurd amount of details to get to the point.' (Alice, Practitioner – stressed words underlined)

There is no shared agreement, then, about what information, or knowledge, is of value and this was continually negotiated within the encounters. Power is working here, to shape what is attended to and what is not. The young women all described their anxiety about being asked to 'tell' again, when practitioners changed and this, too, had to be navigated relationally. It was very important for the young women to know who had been told about their past:

'When she change me to another person I say 'Teresa tell her about me. I can't tell her because I trust you. I tell you, so have to tell another person is hard'. (Salam, Young Woman)

'she wanna tell someone she explain to me before.. she told me sorry Grace I know that between me and you.. I'm private but I'm going to told my manager because I need help' (Grace, Young Woman)

The emotional impact of hearing young people tell stories of loss and trauma was acknowledged by the practitioners and, for the more experienced, there was some sense that hearing these accounts had become normalised:

'I think particularly working with unaccompanied minors where some of the stories are quite extreme you know .. when you're dealing with kids who've experienced their parents being killed and maimed and tortured, or been in war zones and just people disappearing ..where they've been like sexually abused and sort of beaten and stuff like that.. these stories are quite powerful really' (Chris, Practitioner)

'I forgot how it can have an impact on someone who hears it for the first time.... some social workers that I worked with had for the first time had to deal with unaccompanied minors.. the support I had to give was over how to deal with the stories that they had to hear.. emotionally' (Eva, Practitioner)

It is important to recall there was often an interpreter present in this space, a third person who is also part of the affective and power dynamics within these encounters. Interpreters were framed as both essential for communication to take place but their presence could also be seen as a barrier. Having a consistent interpreter was recommended by all the participants but not always achieved. There are complexities in working with interpreters that cannot be fully explored here, but issues of trust and power did emerge in the interviews and in my own diary:

'I feel that the interpreter does make a difference.. it must be really difficult for them to talk about all of that kind of stuff ... it's hard to communicate anyway, without having a perfect stranger there each time (Elaine, Practitioner)

'my solicitor interpreter was so nice.. if I meet them now I wish they don't know me because now I am different person..one of interpreter talk about me like with her friend maybe?. I don't want anyone to know about my back home life so that's why I say sometimes good.. sometimes not good (Salam, Young Woman)

'X tells me that there are videos on the internet where people from [country of origin] are giving out information about why someone is claiming asylum. Says they are telling everyone if it's about sexuality. The carer is saying this is true. Now X is convinced this comes from the interpreters and is now too scared to talk to Solicitor about the claim. It's not like I can sit here and say that will never happen. So that's another barrier to making this young person feel safe' (Diary, Sept 2017)

There are further difficulties with the linear, information gathering notion of telling and knowing. Living spaces were the sites of most of the practice encounters and the emerging understandings were framed within these relational, affective and contested

spaces. Knowledge is a contested notion here, created through process of power. It relates to what is attended to and what is not, what can be borne and what is defended against and avoided. These spaces are, however, micro-level spaces within a wider relational network, spreading out to the meta and macro, and a complex array of other micro-level spaces. Feelings of belief and doubt emerged as strong themes, and it is these affective, relational connections that will be considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 9

FINDINGS: INTERSECTING SPACES

In this chapter I consider the wider relational network and its role in the formation of experience and understanding. I explore how the participants talked about these intersecting places and spaces, looking out to the wider meta and macro-levels, reflecting on both the boundaries of the social work role and the limits of the 'looked after' experiences. These remain affective spaces, and so I will consider the interplay of doubt and belief, of love and fear. As with the spaces already discussed, power and gender were working to shape experiences in these intersecting spaces.

Relational Networks

Each participant had an individual network of key relationships, and intersecting spaces, linking to their encounters with social workers or young women. In the previous chapter, I noted how carers may act as *influencers* in the relationships between the practitioners and the young women, and other *influencers* were similarly found across the relational networks.

The geographical locations of the local authorities were significant for all the young women, because of the networks that could, or could not, be established there. All the young women had moved from the location of their first living spaces, some into cities and one to another European country. Mia described her difficulties in moving from a city-based life in her country of origin to a rural location in England:

‘it’s hard to be honest with you for young lady, person who came to this country from a big city among many people, young people and suddenly feel empty, from huge different place, big and overcrowded place, city, coming to a small town, this was hard’ (Mia, Young Woman)

Migration disrupts everyday practices, and notions of what it is to be a teenager, a young woman or a person of faith in social spaces. When the young women arrived in the UK they had to navigate these new spaces concurrently, without the support of parents or

trusted adults. As seen in preceding chapters, they also met a range of unfamiliar professionals. Here the positions of young women and social workers differ sharply. Practitioners have their own place in these relational networks but, for them, the social relations can become normalised:

‘I’m there to get her into education, get a solicitor sorted out and make sure there’s no issues in placement’ (Alice, Practitioner)

‘when I arrive here, and my social worker ok tell me ‘you must have lawyer’ I scared. I tell why? ..why must have lawyer?.. because in normal life never don’t talk to lawyer or police or staff in Home Office’ (Mia, Young Woman)

As they moved through these new spaces the young women were trying to maintain aspects of their past lives, while distancing themselves from others. It was educational spaces which were most consistently framed as positive by the participants, connecting back to the aspirations discussed in Chapter 6. Grace described her school relationships in highly affective terms:

‘I wish if I have a room inside the school because I spent all my time there and all of my teacher I love them... they love me’ (Grace, Young Woman)

There were suggestions that the practitioners were constructing the young women as the ‘good’ student, seeing them differently from ‘indigenous’ looked after young people in this respect. When a young women didn’t meet this expectation, this could be surprising:

‘she’s educated and bright and she wants to get ahead, although actually out of all my cases she got the most appalling attendance.. when I went to her PEP [Personal Education Plan meeting] I was like..60?.. what?’ (Alice, Practitioner – stressed words underlined)

Religious spaces were also seen as significant for some young women, and Grace and Salam made links between their faith and their shifting subjectivities. At the time of the interview, Grace was in search of positive constructions of the young Muslim woman, perhaps as a response to the negative constructions she had already encountered. When I arrived for the interview Grace was watching the television programme ‘Muslims Like Us’:

‘I like that programme because I know it’s going to change my mind or something.. these people like from here they born here but they are Muslim. I know that is going to be [giving] back to me positive, to know where I am’ (Grace, Young Woman)

Grace described a process of trying to discover what sort of Muslim young woman she wanted to be, and that it was possible for her to be, in the UK at that time. She was looking within her relational network but also out to wider social discourses and media representations. Yet she resisted being framed only in terms of her religion, an approach echoed by Susan:

‘you need to talk to me like who I am, not about my religion’ (Grace Young Woman – stressed words underlined)

‘I can’t see how it affects my relationship with her. I mean obviously it’s something I’m trying to learn more about, about what that means to her and to all the young people I work with, ‘cos I work with a lot of Muslim young people’ (Susan, Practitioner)

None of the practitioners discussed their own religious faith, instead identifying notions of social justice, rights or politics as foundations for their work. The young women’s religious practice was sometimes framed as highly significant, but could also be seen as a form of teenage experimentation:

‘she’d got involved in the local church very quickly... I get a call from Father [name] a few months down the line ..‘she’s no longer coming to church’... she’s a teenager, she can’t be the first that’s kind of wafted in and wafted back out’ (Alice, Practitioner).

Religious faith has been described as a coping mechanism for asylum-seekers (Ni Raghallaigh 2011; Voe 2002) and it can maintain cultural connections. There were mixed views, however, about the significance and meaning of these connections. While the practitioners tended to take a generally positive view, the young women had more complex responses:

‘you’ve come from that community and you want to be different, you’re not going to go back to that community, you are going to build yourself to know a new thing because you move from that.. but some people from my country, they live in the communities they come from. I’m never interested to do that, is not add to me anything because I think I am from that and I don’t wanna add any more. I want to add something new to me’ (Grace, Young Woman - stressed words underlined)

‘I understand the bible like in my language, that’s why I go, because of the church I just want to have contact with these people. After that no, I don’t want contact with them. I don’t trust people from my country, no, I don’t want that in my life no’. (Salam, Young Woman - stressed words underlined)

There were gendered aspects to these tensions, as young women resisted the ways they had been framed in previous religious and cultural spaces. Clothing, for example, was linked to new, emerging subjectivities in the UK:

‘the main religion in our country is Islam and Islam you should wear a hijab all the time, but in here no one can ask me why I wear a hijab or not, so it is my choice and is more freedom..in my country I do not have that freedom’ (Grace, Young Woman)

‘within a few weeks she was looking like Madonna on tour.. (*laughs*) , you know the shortest shorts. I was like whoa, yeah fair enough, go for it ..I think she was relishing the chance to express herself’ (Alice, Practitioner – stressed words underlined)

This suggests that any static understanding of the young women is unhelpful, and may not be possible, as they engage in this process of growth and change. The affective dimensions of the decisions young women were making were also apparent. Although they often looked to the future, some spaces offered connections to the past and to family members they were separated from:

‘she wanted to live by herself in [a particular city]. She wanted to be closer to the church, the church was where she felt her mother, and where she felt that she belonged’ (Eva, Practitioner)

‘When I got to church, I’ll never ever forget it. I was crying because back home get the bible was really hard for me, and then my Dad was just tell me to read all the time the Bible. I wasn’t having opportunity’ (Salam, Young Woman)

Most of the young women were described as having no contact with family members since being in the UK. Memories of family relationships were seen as significant although, as with many looked after young people, this could create feelings of disloyalty when new attachments were formed or life choices were made. There were some examples of transnational family relationships in the data:

‘the thing that sticks out the most for me is the fact that she doesn’t seem to want, obviously she wants contact with her family, she’s able to contact them every two weeks but she wasn’t doing this, and when I discussed that with her she said this was due to her Mum having some problems with her brother, who still lives in [country of origin] with her’ (Elaine, Practitioner - stressed words underlined)

‘because of the things that were coming up from the past for her, about abandonment and her mother..initially she didn’t want any contact with her older brother, who she felt abandoned her’ (Eva, Practitioner)

‘I have a lot of stress, my friend or my family in [country of origin] call me and tell me bad news .. about my story.. and really I feel depression’ (Mia, Young Woman)

For many young women family contact may not be safe or possible, but even when connections were maintained there was little evidence that practitioners saw young women as developing their subjectivities across transnational spaces (Nunn et al 2015). Elaine, for example, struggled to place Clara's family in her drawing, amongst the network of figures she drew from the UK, only considering this when I asked about them (Fig 7). There were some contradictions in her account; Elaine said Clara could call her mother but that she herself was unable to consult with her about decisions. Clara's mother was acknowledged as still present in Clara's life, but not seen as part of the adult network around her:

Me: have you ever had any contact with parents of any of the young women?... actually have any direct contact with them yourself?

Elaine: no..

Me: or with any of the young people who have come from abroad?

Elaine: ..no.. only when I've been on duty [at the entry port]..we had a baby in and I had to speak to the Mum....the Mum's friend had brought the baby over here...immigration had stopped them so I spoke to Mum. I can't remember what country it was in now but she could speak English, so that was alright. It's really difficult when they can't speak English but not impossible. I mean we can get interpreters in...it would be really good...I wouldn't say it would be something that I would never do...I would always ...it would be really good I think to speak to parents of the young people'

Relational networks are not static, then, and the young women were continually making and re-making these connections. Practitioners were therefore engaged in a process of trying to understand young women's experiences at a time of significant and rapid change in their lives. For Eva, it was time spent with Helen outside of her living space that she thought provided her with a richer understanding of this young woman. It was noticeable that Eva more frequently used 'us' and 'we' statements in her interview, and that these occurred mostly when she talked about encounters outside of local authority spaces:

'we went to her church and it was amazing, the feeling..you could see that she belonged there and how peaceful she looked there...her body language and the way she was ... then we went to [a city] and we went to a [national] restaurant and we ate some of the food that she loves and it was a whole day of getting to know who she is and part of her culture, a different side to her and then she told me afterwards...she told me she wanted to go and live there, that she still loves the foster carers very much and that she wants to stay in touch with them, but that she feels that she is ready to move on' (Eva, Practitioner)

Eva linked Helen's ability to articulate her wishes to their time spent in those spaces, at that particular time. Things could be said here that were difficult to verbalise in Helen's living spaces; Helen may have adjusted her speech to allow for the affective dimensions of the space she was in. Eva framed this day as outside her normal practice but still within her construction of the social work role, although it was a construction resisted within the organisation: *'it took me a while to convince my manager'* (Eva, Practitioner).

For all the practitioners, it was the intersecting spaces within the local authority which had the most significant impact on their work with young women, but these were highly contested. The connections out to wider social spaces and the links to shifting constructions of refugees, and of social workers, became more apparent here, particularly when themes of doubt and belief emerged.

Believing and Doubting

Belief, trust and action were closely connected in the accounts, and the young women's sense of support came from the interplay of all these aspects of practice. Mia's *S(He)-Poems* illustrate this, as she reflects on her contrasting experiences of two social workers:

Mia about Rosa:

she understand my story
she's punctual and organised
she very fast.
she every time helped me
she believed me

Mia about Monifa:

she don't follow your story
she come late
she's not organised
she not very..heartfelt
she don't hearing my problem

The contrast is stark. Mia experiences this combination of lateness, inaction, and disengagement as a lack of care. She is unsettled by this, having previously felt believed and supported by Rosa. The young women all described trust and belief as essential

requirements in their social workers, which needed to be in place from the start. Significantly, it was also described as a two-way relational process, of showing trust in each other:

‘they trust me..even from more than I just expect.. you just expect somethings but more than that, they just done everything for me’ (Salam, Young Woman)

‘because she trusts me we establish good relationship. I am able to actually pass my feelings to her and she can understand me better, and therefore she can help me better’ (Mia, Young Woman)

Feelings of belief and doubt, of fear and trust, were linked to the discourses available in the wider relational networks, and they had a strong affective dimension. Salam, for example, directly linked practitioner’s knowledge about global politics to their capacity to believe:

‘so if they know about [country of origin], what’s going on, they just trust you, what you say.... if he doesn’t know it’s really hard. I think it’s more when someone know about that person, about his country, I think it’s easier and then good for both of them, for that person, for me and for that social worker’ (Salam, Young Woman)

For Salam, this knowledge was a way of practitioners avoiding a defended, unhearing response and, importantly, it avoided young women being the bearers of new, painful stories for practitioners. Yet, while the young women said they wanted to be believed, they also wanted their practitioners to be critical thinkers and to form their own views. Grace and Salam described times when practitioners had helped them by acting from a differently positioned view:

‘I was not interested in anything. I want to stay at home but Teresa she make me like just..I should have to outside ..and for church and then I made a friends and then ok’ (Salam, Young Woman)

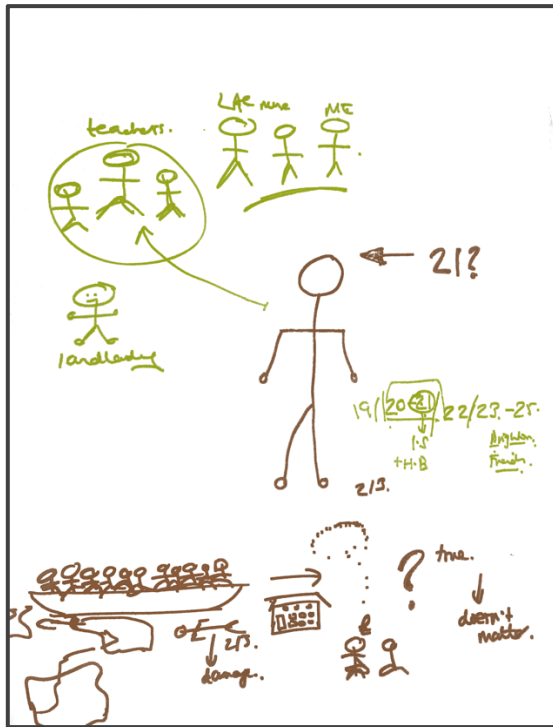
‘it’s not about she didn’t believe you or something but she need to think about it, because that’s her job as well’ (Grace, Young Woman)

Eva and Chris talked less about their feelings of doubting and believing. Instead they foregrounded their personal experiences of being positioned as the ‘other’ in the UK, linking this to their positions in relation to young women:

‘with discrimination in the county, growing up myself and experience myself as a child... just how living in a society which is kind of racist.. I will challenge it you know if I hear it’ (Chris, Practitioner)

'I speak with an accent so they immediately know that I'm not English...that I'm not from this country' (Eva, Practitioner)

For the other practitioners, however, the highly contested discourses about migration created a number of difficulties. In Susan's account, for example, we see that 'knowing' about some aspects of migration did not then lead to an unquestioned acceptance of Joy's story:



(Fig. 8: Susan's drawing of Joy)

Is she who she says she is?...is she?

I think about those images that I've seen on the news with the overcrowded boats.

I'm going to be absolutely honest, there's a small part of me that's kind of put a question mark there

Where do I put those questions?

Most of the time I just need to put that out of my mind, because it's just not helpful.

(Susan, Practitioner)

Susan doesn't doubt that there are boats filled with people crossing the Mediterranean, but she finds it hard to equate the media images to the person in front of her. Knowing and believing are not interchangeable here. Belief was not presented as a constant position in the data, or described by the practitioners in binary ways, as either believing or not believing. Instead belief and doubt could be experienced simultaneously. Susan is trying to believe but is troubled with feelings of doubt, and with questions she cannot 'put' anywhere. The responses to feelings of doubt, and to a state of uncertainty, differed across the accounts and there were different ideas about where the 'truth' lay. This is something I reflected on in my own diary:

'I sat there looking at these faces thinking that I have three versions of the truth here and they are all valid - it's the meanings that are different and the measures that are

being used. If you get more than B, does that make you better supported? Even if you don't feel supported? Is support a measure of how many extra days you have or is it a measure of how supported you actually feel - the experience of it? I think she was asking for someone to be on her side and be in the mess with her ..or at least connected to her more' (Diary, Feb 2017)

Reflecting on this now, I see myself struggling with an approach that links truth to what is visible and measurable, rather than by what is felt. Multiple truths were also available for the participants, about themselves and others, but not taken up without similar tensions. Chris framed the young people's stories as 'truth', but this left him struggling with the disconnection between his micro-level experience and the wider social constructions:

'it makes me so angry when you hear things on the news and you hear things.. you know I what people say.. cos I've experienced and listened .. I know people's stories'
(Chris, Practitioner)

Susan and Alice were similarly troubled by the disconnection between their constructions of the 'refugee child', and their experiences of the young women sitting with them. Acts of agency and assertiveness challenged Susan's expectations of young people. When Hester brings physical 'evidence' of her stress to their first meeting, Alice also finds this unsettling and questions what she is being told:

I just thought how organised is that

I'm thinking is she playing me?

I guess I wondered whether she was setting up a scene for my benefit

What would I want her to be, in order to look like a worthy asylum seeker?

(Alice, Practitioner)

I've been on a really sort of moral journey with this whole thing as well.

I was expecting a lot more almost traumatised, shell-shocked young people

I wasn't expecting them to be as assertive.

Why am I expecting something different because they're a refugee?

(Susan, Practitioner)

Both practitioners are looking to wider social constructions to guide how to think about these young people. When they experience a disconnection, they are troubled by the lack of alternative ways of thinking and both feel doubt about what they are being told. Susan reflects on ideas of morality to consider what her response should be, while Alice considers the notion of the 'worthy' migrant, and so implicitly the 'unworthy', albeit with an ironic tone. She frames the asylum process as a system difficult to navigate, and has some information about Hester's country of origin. This knowledge doesn't lead automatically to belief, however, but instead is utilised to avoid blaming Hester and to resist constructing her as 'unworthy':

'if I take what the Daily Mail would consider the worst case scenario, that this is a rich girl.. she's told me she's rich...who's come over here to study and maybe her [parent isn't missing], nevertheless I've got to look after her and actually [her country of origin] is a totally repressive country and it's probably really hard living there, and if I was in that situation I might well be in her position' (Alice, Practitioner)

Although this 'Daily Mail' scenario is resisted, Alice is still using this as a potential conceptual map to understand Hester's situation. She is measuring Hester against this construction, before rejecting it as unimportant. Alice's construction of Hester as a child allows her to put aside these considerations of 'worth' and focus on her duty of care to her. Importantly, while the practitioners were using the constructions to develop their understanding, the young women were navigating them in their daily lives. They described multiple spaces in which others occupied the '*privileged position of vision*' (Froggett 2002, p172), framing them in different ways. This involved them in a complex pattern of resisting, absorbing and avoiding different constructions:

'they [young people in a youth group] didn't think I was asylum-seeker.. so they start say 'oh these people they are'.. 'we hear from the social media stuff'.. 'the tv say that'... and they say 'these people are not good'.. I say 'listen I'm asylum-seeker' and they be shocked and they say 'no you're not' and I say 'I am'.. I think that is going to change their mind, because if they think I'm nice to them so maybe it means a lot of people like me, asylum-seeker, are very nice' (Grace, Young Woman)

'I say I'm from somewhere, sometimes I say from Brazil (*laughs*), sometimes I say from other countries close to me ' (Salam, Young Woman)

Although Grace challenges the youth group's construction, she is aware of the need to position herself as 'nice' in this space; she is being the unthreatening migrant who they do not need to fear. To respond with anger is to potentially reinforce the construction of the 'dangerous' asylum-seeker. Salam is similarly selective in who she tells about her

status, sometimes describing a non-refugee identity that avoids the need for explanation. These are difficult constructions to navigate for all the participants. Susan's response to her own doubts is to try to put these questions aside, and to focus on the social work tasks. In doing so, she narrows her vision to the present day, to what is known now, and to the micro-space of the local authority. However, by narrowing the gaze in this way, a form of mutual denial can develop:

'At 17 she doesn't yet have legal status in UK and the worker was attempting to talk about triple planning. This was silenced by others in the meeting - they didn't want to hear it, just said 'oh she'll get there, she's so bright, she's so able'. So they all sat around and talked about the university plan as if it was a given, as if it was cruel not to allow her to have this' (Diary, Sept 2017)

Truth and belief have a clear affective dimension here. When a young person's precarious future is emotionally unbearable a narrative of hope may dominate, in a defended response against the anxiety of the unknown. There are other affective responses and constructions which may emerge as young women become understood as complex, human beings. Alice, for example, reflected on Hester's explanations for her poor college attendance and her relationship to another young person in her living space:

'then she said to the school, the reason that she'd not been able to come in because she was scared of this other person and I thought .. you lying madam was what I thought, you've been good friends.. you've not been coming in and then suddenly she's setting up the props for her position but then equally I think maybe he has.. maybe you know.. maybe it has gone bad?' (Alice, Practitioner)

'you're being a bitch .. was what I thought and I had to work out how to discuss that, in way that didn't use that word' (Alice, Practitioner – stressed words underlined)

The phrases 'lying madam' and 'being a bitch' troubled me during the interview, and have continued to do so. Describing any service user is an act of power and I recognise the dangers of language which can disrespect and marginalise. These terms also have a gendered element, and I wondered whether assertiveness in a young man would be seen in such terms. I shared these data extracts in reflexive spaces at the academy and in practice. No consensus emerged; some people found the terms offensive, while others saw it as acceptable language regularly used by young women about each other.

These phrases also had a context. Alice is an experienced social worker with a relaxed and containing manner, who presents as confident in her work. In this interview space, with a practitioner-researcher, she used highly situated language, commenting that she would not use these words directly with Hester. Alice gave a rich description of Hester, framing her as an intelligent, agentic young woman who had acted to improve her life. She talked of her sadness at not being Hester's worker anymore and the affective aspects of their encounters was clearly acknowledged:

'everyone's in need of (*sighs*)..respect and love, not a word we use in the care plan, but on another level that is what it is, isn't it you know? As a human to human you're listening to someone and you're trying to help them' (Alice, Practitioner)

Here Alice acknowledges a felt closeness with Hester, framed as a human need but one which could not easily be described in her organisational discourse. This is a complex relationship, which cannot be summarised by one phrase from her account. What Alice's interview does, I would argue, is return us to the link between space/time and discourse, to what can be said and not said in certain places and at certain times. She also brings into view the felt responses, the raw reactions and internal dialogues, which practitioners may experience as they encounter fellow human beings. Some of these responses are uncomfortable to hear and uncomfortable to feel:

'sometimes I hear things and I find them very distressing but I'm able to..in a professional way..to hold that still for someone, cos it's important for them that that's held' (Chris, Practitioner)

'I got very angry .. and also it's really hard because, how to respond you know?' (Susan, Practitioner)

'I was scared because I thought oh my god, how is she going to cope? (*voice rises*) (Eva, Practitioner)

What was less apparent in the data was where these complex responses could be shared and reflected on in the professional relational networks. This takes us back to Susan's comment about where she can 'put' her questions and what reflexive space are available for practitioners to explore their feelings and responses. The practitioners in this research struggled to identify consistent spaces where their complex feelings and thoughts, and the implications for their work, could be safely explored. Overall there was a disjointed picture of peer support, supervision and individual reflection. The affective dimensions of the work were made even more complex by the familial and

emotional ways that young women could frame their relationships with practitioners:

‘she’s like not just like my social worker ok.. she’s like my sister’ (Salam, Young Woman)

‘seems to me social worker like my mother or father, so look after me, care for me and support me’ (Mia, Young Woman)

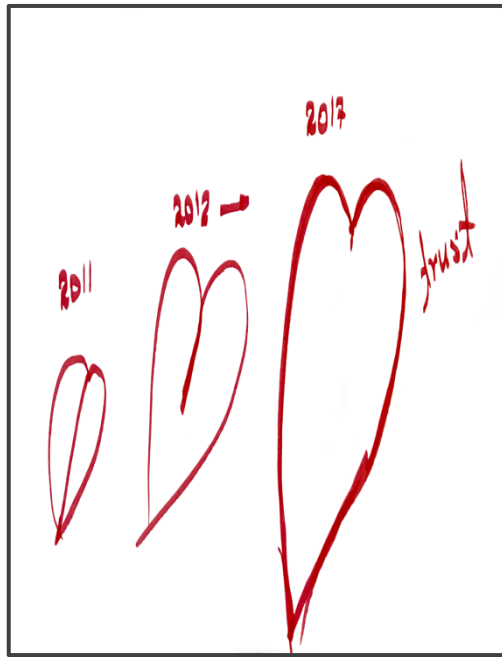
‘she uses the language of love so she’ll say ‘the supported lodgings lady she didn’t love me but you know my social worker she has love for me’.. ‘you have love for me’.. I would never use that language with my young people that I work with, ‘cos it’s emotive’ (Susan, Practitioner)

There are questions about the limits of language when used to describe a sensed emotion, particularly when working with migrant young people who are not using their first language. It cannot be assumed that ‘love’ describes a universally sensed experience without a cultural or social context (Wetherell 2012). Yet it speaks of a relationship that is not experienced as procedural or formal. As Alice notes, the ‘language of love’ is not easily available to practitioners within professional discourses and there is a need for boundaries in this relationship that safeguard young people from abuse or exploitation. While the practitioners recognised the familial ways that young women used to describe their relationships, they responded in different ways:

‘I am your social worker. I will empathise with you but I will not sympathise with you. I am not your Mum. I am not your Dad. I am not your sister.., they are not going to understand that. A lot of the young people I worked with don’t understand that, they see you as their family’ (Eva, Practitioner)

‘when she got married she invited me to the wedding, because obviously her father wasn’t there and I did a speech for her.. just saying how brilliant she was and how proud I was of her and how amazing she was’ (Chris, Practitioner)

Here the boundary of social work practice itself is shown as fluid and contested; Eva states she is not a surrogate parent while Chris describes acting as father-of-the-bride at Ada’s wedding. The extent to which the social work encounter was acknowledged to have an affective dimension at all was also contested within the participants’ relational networks. Perhaps the most striking disconnection was found between Alice’s reflection, on a model of social work offered to her within the local authority, and Salam’s interview. Salam’s account, and her drawing, are saturated with her emotional responses to the practitioners she has encountered since arriving in the UK:



(Fig. 9: Salam's Hearts)

First time when I came my heart was broke.. broke heart in half..

With my social worker I feel like, I just draw half-way, they gave me hope

In my life trusting is hard to me, so the way how they trust me, the way how they treat me, they make me like to have a big heart, because they give me value.

Now I have a big heart and I have hope...I have aim

For my social workers.. this is just for them

(Salam, Young Woman)

The contrast between this and Alice's comment is stark:

'my manager early on she goes 'Alice social workers should be like cogs in wheel.. you should be able to put one in and pull one out' (Alice, Practitioner)

I recall almost flinching when Alice spoke of social workers being 'cogs', not just because of my own, very different, construction of the social work role but because of my position as an insider-researcher. If Alice was being framed as a 'cog' then so was I, and this was something we both strongly rejected:

'I thought no, they are relations.... they are human relations and you can't actually just suddenly slip someone else in' (Alice, Practitioner – stressed words underlined)

'I felt despair of a sort - I am not a cog. My colleagues are not cogs and the people we work with are not cogs. If we are cogs then families are what? - parcels on a conveyer belt? Widgets? Objects certainly, not living, breathing, feeling, human beings. The phrase has been going round in my head for days and I get angrier every time I think about it. Makes me want to scream. Or cry. Or go and bang on someone's door and have a bit of a rant. I've been a manager. I know the defended response is to see children as figures on a spreadsheet. Aren't we supposed to understand that ourselves though? To listen to the social workers and to work against it? To be self-aware? To talk about people as cogs is dehumanising in so many ways.. how do we work against this 'cog' philosophy? (Diary, Jan 2017)

It may be helpful to return here to Grace's drawing of the 'sheltering tree', rooted in the ground, stable and secure (Fig. 5). My own response to being framed as a 'cog' may, in part, reflect a fear that my own 'sheltering tree', the social work organisation, will not

'hold' me as I do this complex work and, more alarmingly, may not recognise the need to do so. The young women's need for this consistent and containing presence was recognised by the practitioners, but the emotional labour involved was also described and could vary across space/time:

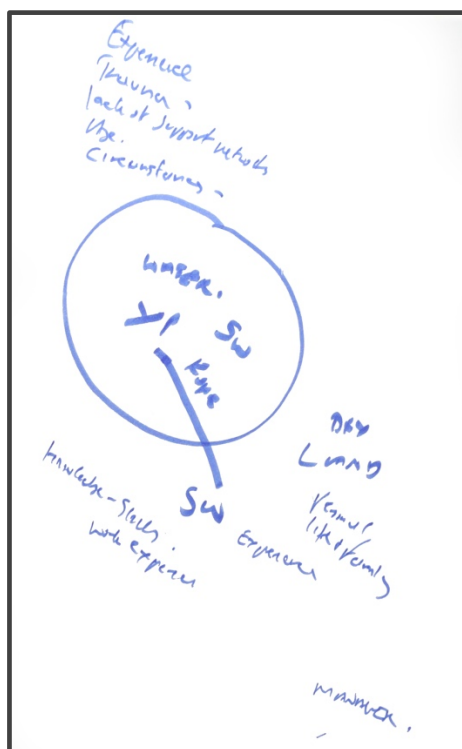
'I'm aware there might be some situations that will press buttons for me..I'll think why is it making me feel like this?' (Chris, Practitioner)

'Information and knowledge isn't enough is it? Knowing that I should speak with her alone and believing that she has the right to this - it isn't enough for me to do it today. The process allows this as well - I can avoid it. I do speak with her - but with everyone there. She is given the choice to speak without the workers there but she says no - but it's the worker who offers this not me insisting. And I think for a moment that maybe I should insist anyway - this is the gap for me to do that but I don't. And I'm aware that I'm not doing it at the time. I'm not ignorant about it. I reflect on it in the meeting as it's happening. But I don't want to. I just want to go home and finish the admin and sign off. I'm exhausted. I can barely keep my eyes open and I am trying to get through the day' (Diary, Dec 2017)

I recognise that practitioners are accountable for their work, and that this includes their interactions with service users. Yet the data shows that this engagement takes emotional resources that are not always available in the moment and that practitioners act within relational, affective networks which can support or disrupt their practice. The contested nature of organisational spaces, and of the practice within, could also be seen in the differing perspectives of young people and practitioners:

'the young people don't see it.. when you have a young person going 'you do nothing for me' and I think, yeah you're saying that from inside accommodation we're providing, with money in the bank that we're giving you for your food, with the travel warrants that we're giving you to get to college, with the education.. so there is that and I guess it provides time for me to be able to go and see what's going on for her, and to try and help her. I think it's a great thing social services I really do. I just think that, as you are aware, the challenges in terms of financial constraints, in terms of staffing levels... in a time of economic uncertainty and massive debt, we have to concentrate on keeping people safe, fed, educated, housed' (Alice, Practitioner)

It is Chris's drawing, and his description of the 'pond' (Fig 10) which particularly shows the contested nature of the organisational spaces and the understandings of young women that were emerging there. Chris focussed on the felt experience of his work, for himself and for young people, but placed this within a clear organisational, social and political context:



(Fig 10: Chris' Pond)

they feel like they're in water and everything's really confusing

I am on the dry land and I see it as having a rope

I can help someone on dry land, even if I'm having to share what pain or experience they have

it is a balance between learning how to be on dry land but not detaching yourself emotionally ..so there's no connection

if I'm in the water with them, I'm no good..we'll both go down

(Chris, Practitioner)

Chris saw his role as the holder of the 'rope', a felt connection which prevented young people from falling further into the 'pond' and which they could use to climb out. Young women were in the 'pond' for multiple and interacting reasons: separation from family, possible trauma, lack of support networks, age, lack of life experience, and social and legal positions. Chris identified his skills, knowledge, experience and personal relationships as things that helped keep him on 'dry land'. He looked to other intersecting spaces, rather than the local authority, for much of his knowledge, support and motivation. Organisational support, the 'management', was included but placed further away. Of more significance for Chris was his own value-base, something which he did not feel was shared across the organisation:

'to affect change with people ...to have someone who actually cares about them you know..and actually genuinely feels that. I think that's what the job's about really.. for me it is anyway' (Chris, Practitioner)

Given the shifting ways that practitioners talked about their role in the research, it is unsurprising that young women find it hard to understand what the practitioner role is. No consensus emerged from the practitioners, and it was the young women who sometimes seemed clearer about what they wanted and needed from practitioners.

Summary

The data presented across these chapters illustrates the complexity of developing understandings across difference, and the emotional energy involved in these processes of communication, for both young women and practitioners. It also highlights the way understandings may develop in the context of contested discourses about immigration. In the following chapter I reflect on the findings and take a theoretical lens to the data.

Chapter 10

THINKING WITH THEORY

In this chapter I summarise the findings and answer the research sub-question: How could these relational and subjective experiences be understood theoretically? I consider the data through the theoretical lenses of Massey (1994; 2004; 2005; 2013) and Wetherell (1998; 2012; 2015a; 2015b). To do this I draw on Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) idea of using theory to think *with* data, to explore the connectivities that can emerge '*in between data and theory*' (p2). In the conclusion that follows I consider the remaining research questions and discuss the implications for social work practice and future research.

The Findings: A Theoretical Lens

The young women described their interactions with practitioners as purposeful encounters within a particular set of power relations, but where the purpose was continually contested and negotiated. This research raises questions, not just about how the participants were *seen* and trying to be *seen as*, but who it was possible for them to *become* in these micro-spaces (Davies 2014; Lefevre et al 2017). The young women recognised that the ways practitioners thought and felt about them were significant, and could affect the support they received. They were not described as passive recipients of services, by themselves or practitioners, and this research therefore troubles the policy narrative that social workers are the only '*agents of change*' (Jeffrey 2011) in social work encounters. Instead the young women were actively working to engage practitioners, to achieve their own aspirational goals and to influence their understandings of them as individual young women.

Each encounter was a unique relational experience. Some social workers were described as highly supportive, with some seen as surrogate family members, but others were framed as uninterested, unhelpful and unreliable. Wetherell (2012) argues that these

relational practices build '*small worlds*' (p81), the everyday worlds we inhabit, similarly to Massey (1994) who argues that social relations create the micro-level space. Rather than seeing possible constructions as coming into these spaces, and 'sticking' to certain bodies as Ahmed (2000) describes, Wetherell (ibid.) argues we come to understand each other through forms of joint *affective-discursive practices*:

'we...need to locate affects, not in the ether, or in endless and mysterious circulations, but in actual bodies and social actors, negotiating, making decisions, evaluating, communicating, inferring and relating' (ibid. p159)

Following Wetherell's (2012) model, the ways we speak and our embodied responses are implicated in how we understand each other in social spaces. If we apply this to practice encounters, we can think of these *affective practices* taking place in a micro-level space Massey (2005) describes as:

'the contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories; a simultaneity of stories-so-far. Thus the minimum difference occasioned by being positioned raises already the fact of uniqueness' (ibid. p12)

As they move through the interconnected spaces of their lives, young women can be seen as moving along unique trajectories. These intersect with the trajectories of the practitioners they meet in practice encounters. While they may occupy the same physical space, however, young women and practitioners are positioned differently in the power-relations that shape this space. Social work practice is an explicit attempt to create, prevent or support change (Adams et al 2005), carried out through a series of micro-interventions in young women's lives. The young women saw their social workers as sources of power and knowledge they wished to access, but the process of change they were engaged in was constantly negotiated. While some changes were welcomed, others were resisted. Some young women arrived with aspirations for a physical safety or education which they felt had been swiftly met. For young women who arrived with an alleged trafficker, or had expected family members to meet them, there could be a further period of loss and adjustment when the trajectory they had envisaged evaporated on arrival.

Kidane (2007) describes her experience of separation as a rupture in her 'childhood trajectory' and the young women in this project were also reconfiguring their identities

within new spaces. These identities were intertwined in the data but the young women did identify gender as an influencing factor in their lived experiences. Unpicking gender from other intersectional discourses is highly problematic, however, particularly from a small data set and in the context of xenophobic discourses about migration (Masocha and Simpson 2011). Bhatti-Sinclair (2011) says that a person's foundational identity comes from their ethnicity but this research found that, while ethnicity was important, it was not foregrounded over gender, religion, sexuality, social position or age. Instead these identities worked together, shifting in focus as different constructions emerged and different spaces were discussed. Constructions of gender were therefore fluid and intersectional, creating tensions and opportunities the young women could articulate but which took emotional energy to navigate. The young women were continually adjusting to the social relations in particular spaces, and always in an intersectional framework.

The young women wanted practitioners to keep pace with the shifting ways they thought and felt about themselves and their changing aspirations, and to provide practical and emotional support to achieve these goals. They valued social workers who could conceive of their trajectories as unique, and who approached each encounter with a sense of their uniqueness. The practitioner's uniqueness was also a factor here. While some practitioners were unsure if gender was an influencing factor, the young women were very aware of the different dynamics, particularly if the worker was a male. The male practitioner was also aware of how he could be constructed as a male, and as a black man, in the encounter space. Given that social work is a predominantly female occupation at the practitioner level, this could suggest that female bodies, and possibly white female bodies, are being normalised as safe carers in this context.

Rather than social work encounters being the site where policy and procedure are simply acted out, then, the data suggests they are interpretations within unique events: *'a locus of the generation of new trajectories and new configurations'* (Massey 2005 p141), not just for the young women but for the practitioners themselves. The process of change was an internal one, as much as a social one. All the participants spoke of the micro-adjustments they were making within each encounter, returning us to the

Deleuzian (2003) notion of '*molecular becoming*' and the continual, relational production of self (Weigert 2010). Through the development of these new configurations, the practice space becomes the site of possibility:

‘the spatial in its role of bringing distinct temporalities into new configurations sets off new social processes... this emphasises the nature of narratives, of time itself, as not being about the unfolding of some internalised story (some already established identities)..but about interaction and *the process of the constitution of identities*’ (Massey 2005 p71 – italics in text)

The young women were continually constituting their identities in new relational spaces, continually writing and re-writing their ‘story-so-far’. Their understandings of what was possible changed as their lives in the UK unfolded. It may be unhelpful, then, to think of a young woman presenting herself, almost as a *fait accompli*, to a practitioner who then begins to understand her. The participants described a series of much more situated and relational encounters, which drew on their emotional and intellectual resources and where understandings altered over time. Understanding was an affective process, as much as it was an analytical one, and it could involve multiple ways of knowing and feeling. Notably, all the participants described face-to-face encounters as the key space where understandings emerged and the young women made a particular link between consistent physical presence, engagement and understanding. They described a sense of not being *known* if their social worker was physically or emotionally absent, as in Mia’s experience of Monifa.

The situated nature of this process of *molecular becoming* (Deleuze 2003) was apparent throughout the data and the young women described the different, but unpredictable, ways they were expected to be in different spaces. Some were welcomed but others rejected, so *becoming* could entail a parallel process of *unbecoming*, of moving away from particular identities. Witteborn (2015) links this with ideas of *perceptibility*, describing how his participants moved away from negative constructions of the asylum-seeker to become *imperceptible* in some spaces. Such movement was found in this research. Salam, for example, sometimes told people she was from Brazil to avoid being seen as a refugee but in the interview space she spoke of feeling pride in her refugee status and the strengths she had shown to survive. Some practitioners were also aware that young women were different in different environments. Opportunities to meet

away from the living space, where encounters were framed by the social work 'visit', could reposition young women and practitioners and allow richer understandings to develop.

Importantly, though, this process of situated *becoming* does not mean that past experiences are left behind as participants move from space to space, or that young women and practitioners come into encounters as blank slates. For the young women, making yourself *knowable* in practice encounters meant providing a narrative to a social worker, involving a difficult process of judging what to say and when. Understanding in this context was sometimes framed as information, a biographical account or collection of 'facts' which could be written down and passed on to others, a model favoured in neoliberal models of knowledge (Froggett 2002). The young women described a sense of professionals wanting the 'right answer' from them, particularly on arrival, but they could feel uncertain about what that 'right answer' may be. However, understanding could also be an embodied experience, a felt connection or a sense of being believed. When these sensed understandings were absent, encounters were more likely to be described in terms of miscommunication or misunderstanding. Yet when biographical information was absent, as is often the case with unaccompanied young people on arrival (Kohli 2007), practitioners could also find this anxiety-provoking. Policy expects practitioners to provide a written account of a young person within days of them becoming 'looked after', creating a pressure that Alice represented in her drawing of the book. Holding the anxiety of uncertainty in this context is central to the social work role (Adams et al 2005) but the data shows that practitioners manage this differently. With little information available, and without an engaged connection, there is a danger that categorical thinking may dominate understandings.

While social work processes may expect practitioners to gather information about a child's history, the young women said they did not expect practitioners to have an understanding of their lived experiences outside of the UK. They wanted practitioners to understand their individual stories over time, rather than bringing a generic understanding of their cultural background, knowledge they could provide as their own cultural experts (Boddy 2014). A lack of knowledge could even be experienced as safety,

differentiating UK practitioners from adults they had experienced as unsafe and untrustworthy; the different cultural identities of practitioners could position them differently in this new relational space. When young women did welcome practitioners having some knowledge of their countries of origin, they associated this with increasing the chance of them being believed. Yet there was a key tension between the young women's wish for practitioners to understand their unique history and the difficulty they experienced in telling the stories of their past. There were also multiple examples of past experiences affecting young women's understandings and responses in the UK.

Wetherell (2012) explains these persistent emotional responses in terms of affective patterning, describing how some affective practices '*stabilise, solidify and become habit*' (p14) within particular relations and spaces. For young women fleeing war and violence, some of these patternings could be understood as relational trauma, where belief systems can become rigid:

'like powerful songs replaying over and over again, or a camera being stuck on a zoomed-in shot' (Treisman 2017 p15)

Affective patterning can emerge from a range of experiences, however, not just those involving trauma. Concepts of childhood and adolescence vary across cultures (Hopkins 2010). Having spent their early lives in spaces where being female was constructed in particular ways, the young women were now occupying spaces where their bodies could be seen differently and where their own notions of self were altering through adolescent identity formation (Treisman 2017). In these contexts we could think of *molecular becoming* (Deleuze 2003) as *re-becoming*, of reshaping in a new social space and unpicking the affective patterns associated with the past. This could involve negotiating an emotional connection to past relationships, which could influence whether young women moved toward or away from constructions in UK spaces. For Salam, Christianity was a connection to a missing parent they wanted to maintain and Eva understood Helen's connection to religion in the same way. This meant trying to embody the constructions of modest young womanhood promoted in their Christian churches, but then having to negotiate the tension between these constructions and those within other social spaces, such as social work encounters or activities with peers.

Treisman (2017) describes the relational ‘me, you and we’ maps that children form in early relationships, and which provide the interpretative, relational lenses through which they understand themselves and others. These early relational understandings can solidify into repeating ‘*affective patterns*’ (Wetherell 2012) and shifting these patterns is also relational work. Chris’ awareness that Sophia may have experienced relational trauma led him to actively work to position himself as a ‘safe male’ in his emerging relationship with her. One aspect of this was naming the potential fear implicated in that practice encounter, both Sophia’s potential fear of men and his own anxiety about provoking her fear. The naming of feelings provides emotional scaffolding for young people, supporting them to communicate and manage their felt responses in a process of *co-regulation* (Treisman 2017). Salam describes a similar process of *co-regulation* in her encounters with Theresa, and linked telling Theresa about her past with her ability to develop some trust in her male social worker Jack. Although affective patterning was still present in her account, Salam had begun to disentangle this over time and was continuing to write and re-write her ‘*story-so-far*’ (Massey 2005). These encounters therefore offered the young women:

‘a moment of hesitation in emotion, when it is possible to launch body in mind new alternative trajectories and choose other forms of becoming’ (Wetherell 2012 p9)

However, Wetherell’s (2012) idea of ‘choosing’ new *becomings* in these moments suggests a more straightforward process than the findings describe. Although the participants had aspirations about who they were working to become, the ‘skilled practitioner’ or the ‘confident young woman’, their emotional responses could undermine this. It was not a matter of choosing a new form of *becoming* and inhabiting it, but a series of moments in which they were continually working to shift their relational responses and adjust their internal maps. Having continuity of relationship was therefore vitally important for the young women, because ruptures in this relationship could disrupt this process of change for them. Practitioners were not interchangeable for the young women and, when their social worker changed, the experience of the encounters changed. Even when the relationship was described as problematic, the young women wanted to avoid having a new practitioner, troubling the organisational discourse of practitioners as interchangeable ‘cogs’ in a machine.

Framing the social work organisation as an interconnected set of social relations, instead of a machine, does not reduce the importance of power however, because social relations are the '*bearers of power*' (Massey 2005 p22). The young women described a keen awareness of the power differentials within each encounter, and shifting feelings of dependence and gratitude toward their practitioners. Practitioners provided them with shelter when there was no other available, yet none of the young women talked of knowingly entering into local authority care. All the participants were aware of the particular power dynamics present in social worker encounters, a power-relation they were continually moving toward and away from. It provided them with resources and authority to act, but it could also constrain; recall Eva moving herself back and forward from the 'giant'. The young women could similarly move toward, and away from, the power embodied in the practitioner. This distancing could be physical, avoiding meetings for example, or it could be a disengagement within encounters. Age may be a factor here. There could be a tension between young women's need for social work support and their need for independence, a common relational positioning between young people and parental figures, linked to the youth projects they are engaged in (Bloch et al 2011; Nayak and Kelly 2008).

Organisational timescales, linked to statutory requirements, were also felt to limit mutual *moments of hesitation* between young women and practitioners. Practitioners' own *affective patterning* could also be a barrier here; Monifa's consistent lateness undermined the development of a relational connection with Mia. The absence of a shared language made communication slower and both practitioners and young women could find this a frustrating process. Although the role of the interpreter is not closely examined in this project, it is important to acknowledge that interpreters are often present and influencing the communication processes (Keselman et al 2010). The data suggests this affected what could be said and heard, and more could be known about interpreted encounters with young women.

Task-centred processes could also dominate the encounters, particularly after arrival when support services were being set up. Although practical support was appreciated,

this role of '*humanitarian provider*' (Kohli 2007) was not sufficient for the young women and they wanted practitioners to engage with them and their emotional trajectories. Telling the stories of their past could be part of a process of moving forward, a staging post in the process of change, but it was emotionally painful and they feared not being believed. Stories could be spoken in one swift account or in disjointed pieces over a series of encounters. Once told, the practitioners could become the keepers of the stories, the shared holders of past events but feelings of shame and fear were sometimes involved and the young women wanted control over what information was shared. Although they may have developed trust in individual practitioners, this had not extended to the organisations they represented.

The participants all spoke of the adults the young women were aspiring to become, most frequently described as independent, educated and employed. Not all young women had arrived with this aspiration and UK gender relations were reshaping who it was possible for the young women to be. When unwanted constructions were bestowed (Weigert 2010) the young women challenged these, or acted to move themselves away from micro-spaces if they were able. Hester, for example, sought out spaces where she could explore new ways of presenting herself as a young woman through her clothing and hairstyle, re-shaping her body within this new space. Moving away from unwanted constructions was more difficult when they were linked to dominant cultural discourses; Grace and Salam described the need to leave their countries to reach safety and find new constructions of womanhood. I want to avoid a post-colonial view of the UK as the moral superior here (Danewid 2017) and recognise that women have also left the UK to forge identities elsewhere (Featherstone and Painter 2013).

As in previous research (Larkin 2015), most of the practitioners said working with young women was a different experience to working with young men, but they struggled to verbalise this difference. It was as much a sensed experience as an analytical conclusion. Unpicking gender was as difficult for the participants as it is in this research process. Some practitioners were reluctant to generalise from their experience of working with only one or two young women and one participant said they did not feel gender made any difference in their work. Yet the same participant linked being young and female to

increased risk of physical and sexual harm, and all the accounts included some highly gendered language. When Alice calls Hester a 'lying madam', for example, she is engaged in gendered affective practice. Yet, in that moment of mistrusting, Alice is also occupying an affective subject position as a:

'warm, hospitable and powerful host, whose generosity and largesse is extended to others who turn out to be ungrateful wretches' (Wetherell 2012 p8).

Practitioners therefore move between multiple understandings of young women, but these are always connected to affect, and they work to position young women in relation to social work. Weigert (2010) argues that all relational identities involve inequality, because the identification of self necessitates an identification of the 'other', and this involves a process of societal 'ranking'. In other words, we look to others to identify ourselves and to position them, and us, in power:

'the dynamics that generate inequality operate at both the individual and collective moments of identity formation and bestowal' (Weigert 2010 p256).

There were several examples of attempts to *bestow* identities onto others. Grace, for example, described herself as a Muslim young woman but rejected the form of Islam dominant in her country of origin, saying it limited her education and dictated the clothes she wore. These *bestowed* identities, and the spatial power-relations, had worked to render Grace socially invisible in that space. Migration had allowed her to develop new *becomings* but, although Grace was now socially included as a young woman, she described feeling excluded because of her religion and refugee status. I suggest Massey (1994) would understand these identity *bestowings* as acts of spatial power, attempts to fix the boundaries of a space and make a claim about who legitimately occupies it; the UK is for 'indigenous', Christian (possibly white) citizens. These exclusionary practices place migrants below 'indigenous' populations in spatialised '*hierarchies of belonging*' (Back et al 2012), in Grace's case framing her as an outsider both within local authority care and within the UK. The consequence of unequal belonging, as seen in Grace's account, can be that:

'others misrecognize us while we misrecognize others.. shame, displacement and status anxiety damage the quality of social encounters' (ibid. p149-150)

Bestowed identities are not defining, however, and they can be rejected; Grace was actively looking for positive representations of female British Muslims and relational connections that supported this part of her identity. To do this, however, she had had to move to a new living space, one where she was placed higher in the *hierarchy of belonging* (Back et al 2012). This hierarchy also emerged in reports of comments from others, about migrant children taking placements from ‘indigenous’ children for example, and in the practitioners’ affective-discourses. When Elaine looked to Clara, for example, to identify herself as the skilled, knowledgeable social worker, and then experienced Clara’s silence, she drew on the pre-existing category of the foreign ‘other’. Davies (2014) warns that this ‘*listening-as-usual*’, as a means of identifying ourselves, involves a flawed process of drawing on such pre-existing categories:

‘listening to the other, for the self-as-identity, is to judge against an imagined ideal and to find it wanting. Listening is, at the same time, used to define the borders of one’s being – it establishes “This is what I am not”, or, “This is the same as me – what I am”. But lacking distance from its own listening it is also swept along by dominant ways of thinking and speaking, becoming what those modes of enunciation anticipate of it. Its own capacities for ethical thought and practice are limited by its primary attachment to the self–other binary, and to self’s survival’ (ibid. p35).

There was evidence that practitioners found these ‘imagined ideals’ unhelpful in face-to-face practice, where conceptual maps could jar against the embodied experience of being with a young woman. This is a tension also found in my autoethnographic diary. When practitioners were able to identify and interrogate the constructions available, they could resist essentialising young women and shift their ways of thinking. These were the practitioners who described a process closer to what Davies (2014) calls ‘*emergent listening*’:

‘listening as a subject-as-intra-active-becoming opens up the possibility of valuing difference, not as categorical difference, but as an emergent, differentiating or becoming. Such listening involves stretching the ears, and all the senses. It requires a focused attention, an intensification of attention to the other, and to the happening in-between. This attention works through the most minute of details as neuroscientists have begun to find’ (ibid. p42)

Here, Davies (2014) is describing an embodied, relational listening, different to ‘*listening-as-usual*’, although she acknowledges these are entangled together in our interactions with others. Even when participants were rejecting some categories, Alice’s Daily Mail view for example, these were still present in their thinking; social work does

not operate in a social vacuum that discourses cannot penetrate (Masocha and Simpson 2011). The richest descriptions of young women came from practitioners who were open to the potential for change in themselves, and who approached encounters as a process of micro-adjustment with the young women, a joint enterprise of *molecular becoming* (Deleuze 2003).

Interestingly, while all the practitioners acknowledged the different gender relations between cultures, they took different positions on the importance of gender relations in their own relationships with young women. The practitioners connected being female with being at increased risk from adult males, but differentiated this from personal fragility, often describing young women as resilient and with personal strength. Vulnerability was relational and situated, therefore, because it was always described in terms of particular power relations. There was some evidence of practitioners recognising both the importance of gender-relations, and of place, in the process of communication; Grace's social worker arranged for her first police interview to be with a female officer and in her living space, something Grace felt helped her to speak. Yet there was no overall consensus on the significance of gender amongst the practitioners although, given the highly contested debates about gender in wider social discourse (Hines 2017), this is unsurprising.

Affective-discursive practices (Wetherell 2012) are also working here to connect understanding with feelings of belief or disbelief, illustrated in the tension between Susan *knowing* about migrants crossing the Mediterranean and her simultaneous struggle to *feel* a sense of belief in Joy's story. Susan linked her difficulty in believing Joy to the felt disconnection between media images and her lived reality. We could understand this as a way of avoiding the emotional discomfort of imagining this journey, a defended response (Megele 2015). Yet it is also an attempt to fix the boundaries of a space (Massey 2005); Susan's locality is not a space where these things have happened to people, this happens elsewhere. Salam described a similar disconnection between wanting to trust Theresa and her embodied resistance to this. Framing trust and belief as static positions, or as strategic actions (Ni Raghallaighi 2014), therefore seems unhelpful. As Wetherell (2012) says, and the data suggests:

‘affective practice unfolds relatively automatically with little conscious monitoring... it often emerges ‘unbidden’, very quickly, too fast for the kind of thoughtful strategic planning novelists often attribute to their characters.. we move in and out of ‘knowing’ what we are about during this flow’ (ibid. p129)

I find this a convincing description of social work encounters and the sensations and thoughts that emerge ‘unbidden’ there, and I agree with Wetherell (2012) that locating affect within bodies means acknowledging our emotional responses can be felt before they are consciously known. This research raises questions, then, about whether the notion of a static ‘culture of disbelief’ is helpful when considering micro-level encounters, and whether it helps us find ways of minimising feelings of mistrust. Cooper and Lousada (2011) remind us that all users of welfare services are initially ‘strangers’ to practitioners; social work is the offer of care to *‘the absolute, unknown, anonymous other’* (Derrida 2000b, p. 25 quoted in Sirreyeh 2013). Of course practitioners are also strangers to young women, and the range of emotions evoked for them are shown throughout the data. It may be a difficult moment to argue that complex feelings about ‘others’ need be acknowledged, when the rhetoric of the foreigner as ‘threat’ is drawn on by white nationalists (Danewid 2017), and when the immigrant is portrayed as a type of ‘folk devil’ to be feared and discouraged (Bowling and Westenra 2018). Other discourses can frame the refugees as ‘innocent bodies’ (Celik-Rappas 2017), but the data suggests these discourses of victimhood can be equally difficult to utilise in face to face encounters.

Massey (1994; 2005) argues that difference and variety are intrinsic parts of every space, but she also reminds us that this constant change has an uneven impact on individual lives and invokes a range of feelings. Cooper and Lousada (2011) argue that strangers more easily provoke feelings of hostility than compassion, and that there is a continual oscillation between these positions which welfare services need to contain:

‘how precariously balanced is the sense of equilibrium towards the stranger and how pernicious are the consequences when the balance is lost’ (ibid. p 89)

The findings suggest that practitioners may negotiate this tension by reframing the ‘stranger’ as an innocent refugee child, and young women may themselves re-frame practitioners as parents or siblings. However, while young women may well be in need of adult protection, the notion of the agentless ‘refugee child’ can quickly become

unworkable in the practice space. Recall Susan's struggle to apply this construction to the assertive young people she encountered. For Cooper and Lousada (2011), maintaining the equilibrium between compassion and hostility requires acknowledging and containing the emotions provoked in social work practice. Yet the framing of practitioners as 'cogs' suggests the affective domain of practice was minimally acknowledged and supported in those organisational spaces. Cogs are functional, unfeeling objects, but the practitioners' accounts are full of the complex feelings evoked in their work: anxiety, fear, frustration, anger and love. It is not possible to judge how dominant or momentary the 'cog' discourse may be, but the practitioners did describe their unreliable opportunities for critical reflection (Ruch 2009), where their own *moments of hesitation* (Wetherell 2012) could emerge and be held. This may increase the possibility they would find themselves caught in *affective ruts*, as Elaine had done with Clara perhaps. There is also a wider political and legal context here. As Massey (1994) notes:

'the particular mix of social relations which are thus part of what defines the uniqueness of any place is by no means all included within that place itself. Importantly it includes relations which stretch beyond - the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside' (p5)

At a time of austerity policies there is scant evidence of the state providing a model of containment and compassion for welfare services, particularly towards people with few economic resources, who enter the UK seeking asylum or opportunities for a better life. Massey notes that '*mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power*' (p150) and the data shows how power-relations continue to create inequality in mobility across the spaces of the UK. The practitioner can leave the border space or enter young women's living spaces, for example, but a young woman's movement is much more restricted. Their mobility is limited by their position as a looked after young person, by their age and by their lack of knowledge and information about the UK. Unsurprisingly, the young women wanted more choices about their living spaces, and more control of their personal spaces within these, as with Mia and her room in the shared house.

Although the young women talked of moving on from their relationship with practitioners, they wanted endings to be linked to their individual needs but practitioners described how the current legal policy framework makes this difficult to achieve. The data highlights the precarious nature of unaccompanied young people's lives, particularly when they reach 18 and become care leavers without any permanent legal status in the UK. Hope is linked, theoretically, to feelings of well-being (McMurray et al 2011; Treisman 2017), but unaccompanied young people are often living without the *ontological security* that a durable future may provide (Allsopp and Chase 2017; Chase 2013). Feelings of precarity can reduce with refugee status but they can still be present; Grace may have drawn her tree with more secure roots but she was still actively seeking feelings of security and belonging in the UK. Salam said she was planning to apply for citizenship but was frustrated and unsettled by opaque UK systems, her precarious housing and limited finances. Looking ahead she could not identify any adult who could offer the practical and emotional support she received from Jack, support she knew would end when she was 21.

The findings do suggest that a projected future-self can support young women to act agentically, and can provide opportunities for practitioners to support young women's chosen trajectories. The development and enactment of these projected futures was described as a relational process; Eva spoke of Helen's vision of herself living in a city, near her church, and how she engaged Eva to create a shared vision of the future, one they worked together to achieve. Yet there were also examples of practitioners working to restrict agency, in deliberate ways such as trafficking 'safety planning', but also in forms of absent practice where a young woman's aspirations remained unknown and unsupported. At other times practitioners described holding the hope for young women, when they could not envisage a positive future for themselves. Recall Chris drawing himself on dry land when he felt Sophia was struggling in the 'pond' or Theresa maintaining her view of Salam as a resilient young woman when Salam felt unable to leave the house. However, as my autoethnographic diary records, this focus on hope may also be an anxious and defended response (Megele 2015), which allows practitioners to avoid thinking about young women experiencing removal, detention or destitution. These are difficult futures to imagine for a young person, as I have found in

my own practice, but it is hard to imagine how young women can exercise their rights, or participate in decision-making, if practitioners manage their own distress and anger through avoidance.

Using theoretical lenses to consider research data also brings an opportunity to reflect on the theoretical frames themselves, illuminating strengths and limitations, a process that Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe as the data speaking back to theory. While I found Wetherell's (2012) notion of affective-discursive practice an excellent model for considering the impact of what is felt and said in situated encounters, and for unpicking processes at the micro-level, I found it minimised the power-relations and cultural/social contexts which may be shaping that micro-level space. In contrast, Massey's (2005) theoretical model of power/gender relations offered a robust means of considering how social and power relations are constructing our social and physical world. Her approach is less helpful, however, when considering the affective domains of the data or for theorising how affect may be working to shape the power/gender relations she describes. It is for these reasons that the two models have been used in conjunction with each other, and I have found them highly complementary when used together.

The connection between micro and macro may create opportunity for change (Massey 1994; 2005) but it also restricts what is possible within practice encounters. In the conclusion that follows I return to the research questions and reflect on the findings that emerged in relation to these. I consider what implications the findings have for practice with unaccompanied young women and the learning I have taken from this research process and then suggest a direction for future research.

Chapter 11

CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented, and analysed, qualitative research which explores how unaccompanied young women and practitioners construct and understand each other within practice encounters. It offers new knowledge about young women's experiences of social work practice in England, and about practitioners' experiences of working with them, placing this within a wider policy and political context. It increases our knowledge about the ways of thinking and feeling that are implicated in the constructions being utilised, and their situated and fluid nature, highlighting the connections between these constructions and feelings of *belief*, *trust* and *uncertainty*.

In this final chapter I revisit the research questions and summarise the key findings in relation to these. I draw these together to conceptualise the process of understanding, before considering the implications the findings have for social work practice. I then acknowledge the limitations of this project and reflect on the research process and my learning within it as an insider-researcher. Finally I suggest a direction for future research.

Revisiting the Research Questions:

The main research question guiding this project has been:

How do unaccompanied young women and social workers experience and construct each other and how might this influence social work practice with young women in the UK?

To answer this question I now consider the findings in relation to the individual sub-questions below, detailed at the end of Chapter 2.

How do the young women subjectively and emotionally experience their encounters with social workers in the UK?

The three young women's experiences of social workers were diverse, even across the small sample, and they described a range of experiences. However, these experiences were always framed as uniquely relational and social workers were never interchangeable for the young women. Unaccompanied young women are in the minority within the UK looked after system and they are a hard to reach group for social research. While the number of young women participants is small, this project offers a new window on a previously un-researched area and demonstrates that there is more we need to know.

Being understood was framed by the young women in different ways, but it was often an embodied experience, a felt connection with a practitioner. Practitioners were seen to be demonstrating understanding when they followed up on agreed actions and provided practical *and* emotional support. Social workers who explored the aspirations of young women, and who directed their actions toward helping young women achieve these, were also experienced as understanding. Practitioners were felt to understand when they listened and attended to young women's stories, and when they acknowledged embodied communications and unspoken cues. Allowing young women choice and control over what stories they shared, at what pace and with whom, was a further example of showing understanding. In contrast, young women were troubled by disengaged or absent practitioners, experiencing this as being misunderstood or being understood at a distance, through fixed lenses that they could not influence.

How do the young women think UK social workers reach an understanding about them?

For the young women, the process of being understood involved social workers being regularly physically present in their living spaces and knowledgeable about their aspirations for their future lives. For some young women, shared experiences in cultural,

educational and social spaces were also significant but access to these needed to be individually negotiated. They did not expect UK practitioners to be knowledgeable about their country of origin, and thought that practitioners could best understand their past experiences, and the meaning of their cultural heritage, by learning from them.

The young women were aware that practitioners had access to written accounts of their experiences but these were felt to give only partial information. To understand the individual implications the young woman felt social workers had to meet with them in face to face encounters and involve themselves in a process of engagement over time. They were aware that practitioners shared information about them with managers and colleagues but wanted to retain some control over what was shared. Sharing information with a new worker, with their knowledge and consent, was seen as helpful because it removed the need for them to repeat painful stories.

In what ways do the social work practitioners experience, and make sense of, unaccompanied young women and what does this mean for their practice with them?

For the five practitioners in this study, understanding was framed as a combination of information gathering and personal experience of a young woman which could be developed into a narrative, but they did acknowledge their understandings as partial and positioned. Practitioners drew on a range of constructions within their accounts, but the extent to which these were critically examined varied. Information was gathered from multiple sources, and other people could act as influencers in the understandings that were emerging. There were few organisational spaces in which practitioners felt able to reflect on their understandings of young women and no examples given of spaces in which their constructions had been challenged. Even when excluding discourses were rejected, they were drawn on as comparators in the process of assessment and young women's accounts could be weighed against them.

Understanding could also be an embodied, affective process, a feeling of knowing a young woman, but this could stall when the emotional aspects of the interactions were

unsupported and unexamined. Believing and doubting were fluid positions which could be in tension and which took work to navigate. When little or nothing was known about a young woman, or when communication stalled, anxious responses could lead to categorical thinking where young women were understood through generalised discourses. The organisational and policy frameworks, which asked for biographical narratives to be produced in short timescales, could increase this anxiety. When practice was distant and disengaged, young women's aspirations and concerns remained unknown and the practitioners were less able to support young women to achieve the changes they aspired to.

There were examples of practitioners holding uncertainty and creating spaces for young women to share their own stories. Some practitioners were able to adapt their spoken and embodied communication to the encounter space and focus on both 'doing' *and* 'being' (Lefevre 2018), even when the dominant organisational discourse framed the encounter as a task-focussed process. Some practitioners acted strategically by presenting different narratives about young women in different spaces, foregrounding vulnerability when requesting resources for example. The practitioners who offered the richest accounts of young women talked of their connections to people with a similar value base, including friends, family and acquaintances in local campaign groups. Having colleagues within a specialist service for unaccompanied young people was seen as providing a sustaining, collective voice and offering access to richer knowledge about the needs of unaccompanied young people.

In what ways are these experiences and constructions gendered and understood to be gendered?

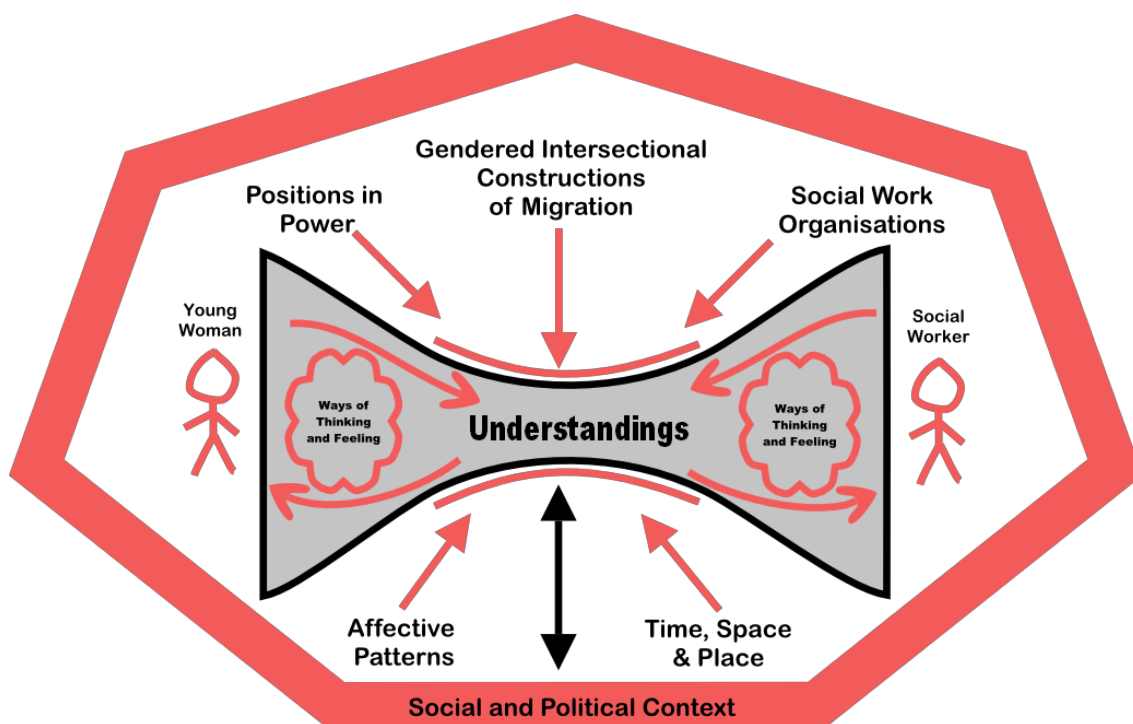
The young women identified gender as a factor shaping their lives, but the practitioners had a more shifting and ambivalent approach to gender. The young women described a process of continual adjustment to new gender relations in the UK, although always intersectionally, and this led to them adjusting their aspirations after arrival. The gender of the practitioner was significant for the young women, although they gave different weight to this significance. There was a suggestion from the young women that female

practitioners were better able to understand their lived experiences, even across cultural and religious difference, and that gender identification could offer an initial felt connection. The male social worker foregrounded his gender in his practice with young women but this was less significant for the female workers working with both young men and women. Young women who had experienced forms of violence from men, or who had come from cultures where genders were socially segregated, showed a preference for female workers and identified female bodies with increased safety.

Young women were constructed by practitioners as vulnerable to forms of abuse and easier to communicate with than young men. Adult male workers could be constructed as potential threats and female workers as safe care-givers but these constructions were not always critically examined within the practitioner accounts. This suggests gender may be insufficiently examined by practitioners, both as an influencing factor in the relational dynamics and in the understandings that are evolving within these relational spaces.

Who Do You See?: Conceptualising the Findings

The findings showed that space and place affected the ways that practitioners and young women constructed and understood each other. Space was implicated in what could be said and heard, and in who young women and their social workers were trying to be become. The diagram below illustrates how understanding develops through these situated, relational ways of thinking and feeling that could emerge within the practice encounter. It is focussed on the micro-level practice space, but situates this within the social, organisational and political contexts at the meso and macro levels. This conceptual map is not intended to be an exhaustive description of the complex process of understanding, and further research with other groups of young people could suggest other factors. Gender is seen to be significant but set within an intersectional lens that allows other identities, such as age or ethnicity, to be interlinked. Time and space are placed together, in line with Massey's (1994, 2005) theoretical frame, but I recognise they can also have individual logics which may need to be considered in practice.



As represented here, the social work meeting is a particular, purposeful encounter, shaped by the organisational and social contexts that frame the social work role and situated in time and space. Here understanding between young women and practitioners is shown as emerging through relational ways of thinking and feeling, which are funnelled through the gendered-power dynamics that shape these practice spaces. These relational understandings are also filtered through lenses that young women and practitioners use in this space to see each other, and by who the young women and practitioners are trying to be seen as. While understanding is situated it is also influenced by past experiences; the individual *affective patterning* that young women and practitioners bring into the encounter space can work to shape the lenses they apply, and may affect the extent to which these lenses are rejected or re-adjusted.

Limitations of this Research

As with all research, there are limitations which need to be acknowledged. The interviews were co-constructed descriptions of practice rather than observations of face-to-face encounters, but I would argue that they still illuminate some of the feelings,

constructions and understandings implicated in this work. The number of participants is small, particularly in the case of the young women. While the small number of participants allowed for a richer analysis of the data, and the voices of the participants to be foregrounded through thick description, it is important to note that a larger sample might have meant differing perspectives emerged. No claims for representativeness can be made. However, the depth analysis and theorisation, with reference to contingent research with social workers and young unaccompanied people separately, mean that a degree of analytic generalization (Yin 2012) to wider social work practice with unaccompanied young women is merited.

The young women interviewed were approached through trusted adults, so it is likely that the data captured young women with relatively positive relationships with professionals. Young women who were disengaged, without any trusting connections or on the boundary of going missing, were less likely to be engaged. The research was conducted with young women who were speaking English as a second language or through an interpreter, so there is an increased chance of miscommunication of certain words or phrases. Some cultural cues or communications may also have been missed.

The practitioners who took part had worked in specialist services at some stage in their careers, and so had an existing interest in this work. The data therefore did not capture practitioners who may be less committed to the social work role with unaccompanied young people or who may question whether social work has a role at all. My position as an insider-researcher has limitations as well as advantages. Practitioners were aware of my professional status as an Independent Reviewing Officer and so may have adjusted their accounts of practice to fit with their construction of my role.

The research findings have a number of implications for social work practice with young women in England. In the following section I consider the current context of this work and summarise the practice implications, beginning with the current professional context.

The Professional Context

This research shows that social work can have a significant role in young women's lives in the UK and there were multiple examples of practice which was framed as a positive intervention in young women's lives. Where this was lacking, the young women wanted their social workers to do more rather than less and to do things differently rather than not at all. The findings therefore show the practice space as a site of possibility and change, but one that is always connected to the meso and macro levels of social welfare policy (Massey 2005; Watters and Ingelby 2004).

Social work has always been a contested profession but it has never been a static one. The practitioner role has changed frequently in the last century (Freedberg 2007), so existing practices and policies do not define the profession and are never beyond challenge. Over recent years there have been persistent calls for *relationship-based practice* to be foregrounded over technological and bureaucratic approaches (Broadhurst and Mason 2014; Cooper and Lousada 2011; Ferguson and Gates 2015; Froggett et al 2015; Ruch et al 2010; Lefevre 2018). I suggest the participants, particularly the young women, were asking for such relationship-based work to be supported more consistently and robustly, so this argument needs to be re-made here. Yet there are questions about the political context of social work that, I would argue, relationship-based theories do not yet robustly address.

In 2004 Humphries called for social work to disengage itself from forms of internal immigration control, arguing that the core values of social work are incompatible with being an arm of the '*surveillance society*' (p 36). Today the profession is still struggling with its role in relation to immigration policy, questioning to what extent it is a counter-balance and to what extent a collusive partner. It is a question I frequently ask myself, but not one I can easily answer. What this research highlights is the difficulty of using rigid categories to form rich understandings of human beings, and I suggest this applies as much to understanding social workers as it does to understanding young women. Given the power invested in practitioners all critique needs to be heard, but I would argue that framing social workers as '*agents of immigration control*' (Cohen 2004) is

ultimately unhelpful because it overlooks the different ways they use their authority (Robinson and Masocha 2017). I am not suggesting that practice cannot be oppressive, ineffective or ambivalent, having seen too many examples of all three. Rather I am arguing that framing practitioners as unagentic enactors of law and policy disregards their power to influence social work practice, as well as removing any of their responsibility to do so. It lets us off the hook too easily.

This research shows that the current discourse of '*doing the best we can*' (Masocha 2013) is not supporting good practice with all unaccompanied young women. As social work professionals, who make claims about social justice and anti-racist practice (Bhatti-Sinclair 2011), we cannot continue to close our ears to exclusionary discourses and practices present in our own organisations. While I cannot address all the issues relating to work with young women from this project, there are a number of implications that have emerged and these are identified below.

Implications for Practice:

- Unaccompanied young women benefit from a reliable, engaged and skilled social worker to support them in the UK. However, while a stable, continuous relationship with a practitioner may be a policy objective (DfE 2017a) this research shows it is not consistently provided for all young women. The relationship is the basis of an engaged intervention and needs to be a priority for social work organisations and for those who resource them.
- The recent focus on measurement can frame the social work visit as an extension of policy and procedures into the home domain (Ferguson 2018). Moving away from this approach to social work visits could allow young women's shifting needs, rights and aspirations to be better understood. Creative approaches could be better utilised to engage with young women in these spaces, to reduce the formality of the encounter and to communicate knowledge that may be less accessible through speech.

- Social work needs to pay more attention to the impact of space on the understandings that emerge in encounters. Time is frequently foregrounded over space, such as in the notion of thick and thin stories emerging over time (Kohli 2007), but this research suggests that different spatial relations can also create different understandings. By asking questions about the relational dynamics within the living space, considering how power-relations may be working in and around the practice encounter, and meeting young women in different spaces, practitioners may begin to shift fixed constructions and develop more holistic understandings. This may also allow more identification and challenge of exclusionary discourses within the living spaces provided by local authorities.
- The affective and cognitive aspects of the work, both ways of thinking *and* feeling, need to be acknowledged and explored in consistently available *moments of hesitation* (Wetherell 2012). Constructions need to be similarly challenged and unpicked in spaces where decisions are being made about young women's lives. Working with uncertainty is an inevitable part of the social work process when little is known about young women. Practitioners therefore need multiple spaces where they can critically reflect (Ruch 2009), if they are to resist falling into binary or rigid thinking.
- Feelings of belief, doubt and trust can all be present within the encounter space and could be thought of as shifting moments rather than fixed positions. Creating and supporting spaces where these affective responses can be explored may help to undermine cultures where disbelief is a dominant discourse and support practitioners to identify and manage their doubt and anxiety. Social work organisations which respond to the affective domains of practice are more able to tolerate risk, contain uncertainty and support creative approaches (Froggett 2015; Ruch 2009)
- UK social work is currently lacking a robust feminist or intersectional lens to question gender-power relations, although this is not the case in other countries

(Eyal-Lubling and Krumer-Nevo 2016). As with other forms of power inequality, it is difficult to imagine how gendered-power relations can be navigated if they are not acknowledged, and their potential impact not analysed critically. I would argue that thinking theoretically is essential because it offers different lenses to the practitioner, who may be stuck in affective-discursive patterning (Wetherell 2012). The need for theoretical lenses is questioned by the politicised view of social work as 'common sense' (The Telegraph 2015) but I suggest we do young women and practitioners a disservice if we accept this without challenge.

- Positive relational connections can support practitioners to challenge organisational, social and policy narratives. Just as young women can be understood differently in different spaces, social work practice and policy can look different when viewed from different locations. Migration, austerity and neo-liberalism are global issues, so engaging with global social work debates may offer practitioners a way of reconnecting to value-based social work (Jönsson and Kojan 2017). I suggest that looking out beyond the local authority boundary, and sharing knowledge across disciplines, may better support informed and robust practice within the UK.
- Although the legal power to secure durable solutions for young women currently sits beyond social work, individual practitioners can undermine young people's chances of a successful claim if they are uninformed and inactive in their inter-agency role with the Home Office (ICIB 2018). The young women were asking for practitioners to be knowledgeable about the asylum process and pro-active in their support. Consistent organisational support for practitioners to access this knowledge would therefore benefit young women. This is also an international debate (Allsopp and Chase 2017), so making connections across local and national boundaries, with more creative use of digital technology, may lead to stronger voices and better solutions for UK social work.
- There is some evidence that social work education is addressing the need for students to think about refugees but this is sporadic and the work can be seen

as marginal (Burgess and Reynolds 1995). Work with migrants and refugees needs to be included as a core part of the role within all forms social work education, running as a theme through courses and placements, so that ways of thinking and feelings can be explored from the start of practitioners' careers. Post-qualifying and organisational training need to build on this and to reflect the diversity of the young people that practitioners encounter. Involving young women, or adults who were once unaccompanied, would enrich these experiences and offer perspectives which could undermine rigid constructions and humanise debates.

- Young women and practitioners without a shared language need skilled interpreters to support their communication but more could be done to consistently support interpreted encounters. There was no evidence in this research that extra time was given for interpreted meetings, for example, although the literature stresses this needs to be in place (Raval 2007). Feelings of cultural connection should not be assumed and there may be a lack of trust between young women and interpreters that needs to be acknowledged. Young women may be better able to communicate their lived experiences, particularly those that are painful and sensitive, with consistent female interpreters and offering a choice of gender could support young women's participation in the communication process.

As well as implications for practice, this research raises some new questions which could be the subject of future research.

New Directions: Areas for Future Research

There is still a great deal about practice with unaccompanied young women that remains unexplored and a number of directions could be taken from here. Given the significance of the living space for the young women involved in this project, and its importance as the main site of the social work encounter, I would suggest that ethnographic research situated within these living spaces could offer substantial new knowledge and would be

a cogent next step.

Although there has been some research into foster care (Wade et al 2012), there have been no comparable projects looking at experiences in shared housing, although these are now a key form of care for unaccompanied young people. The voices of residential workers, who can see young people more regularly than social workers, are rarely heard in research. Research could productively gather data on young people's experiences within these settings, the ways in which residential workers may construct them and how this interacts with social work relationships in these spaces. Both young men and young women could be invited to participate, to explore how gendered-relations may impact these shared living spaces. Following the success of the creative approach in this project I suggest that arts-based, and possibly digital methods, could be successfully used in this context. Shared housing is a common form of accommodation and so the research could be located in different locations, within the UK or internationally.

Researching as an Insider-Researcher

Over the course of this doctoral research I have been examining my own practice, as I have explored the literature and considered the practice of colleagues. The opportunity to move between the academic space and the practice space has enabled me to make connections, and identify disconnections, that have informed this research and my own professional development. My perspectives on social work have therefore changed but this has not been a straightforward or painless process, and I have had to acknowledge flaws in my work that I had put aside or accommodated. Having spent a number of years embedded in a culture that promoted evidence-based practice as the standard, and which continues to focus on measurable outcomes, I have sometimes struggled to maintain the argument that what is felt and sensed is also of value. Yet re-discovering the theoretical frames that first informed my practice with children and families, and discovering how these have developed and shifted, I feel strongly that maintaining the link between research, theory and practice is an essential one, if we are to provide the care and support that Mia, Grace and Salam are asking for.

As a woman, I have also found myself questioning what it means to be identified as female, as a social worker and as a human being, at this time in our cultural history. I accept there is no single answer to the 'gender question' or even consensus as to what that question may be. However, having completed this research I am more convinced that our identified genders, and the biological bodies we inhabit, do have an impact on our experiences of the world. I am concerned that we may miss something vital in our attempts to understand and support young women, if we don't consider this within our work and in our communication with them.

Final Thoughts

As a social worker myself, I am aware of the courage it can take to expose your practice to a researcher and I was impressed and encouraged by the social workers who took part in this project. None of the critiques I have offered here are directed at individual practitioners, all of whom are carrying out highly complex work within organisations battling with continual reductions in resources. My intention has been to present the human face of social work, carried out as it is by thinking and feeling human beings, and to argue that this is both our greatest challenge and our best resource.

The young women I interviewed for this project impressed me with their humour, strength and hospitality, in the context of highly disrupted and precarious lives, and the young women I meet in practice regularly do the same. It is important to remember these are young women who have survived extreme situations, and who can be living with the impact of trauma and separation every day. I am aware that what I have presented here is my interpretation of what they communicated to me, but I hope I have honoured the faith they placed in me when they shared some of their stories. I particularly hope that the aspirations they have for their lives in the UK are fulfilled and that they find the sense of security and belonging they are seeking.

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Appendix 1: Literature Review Methodology

Extracted from Critical Analytic Study completed in 2015

The model of Critical Interpretative Synthesis (Dixon-Wood et al 2006), rejects the use of a rigid pre-determined set of criteria to assess quality across the literature. The model offers a way of iteratively exploring the relevant theories and knowledge, whilst ensuring that the conclusions drawn remain sound. Rather than reproduce the themes within the literature, this model provides a critical voice of interpretation to the knowledge base. The aim is to produce a '*synthesising argument: a critically informed integration of evidence from across the studies*' (Dixon-Wood 2006 p10):

‘Authors are charged with making conscientious and thorough searches, with making fair and appropriate selections of materials, with seeking disconfirming evidence and other challenges to the emergent theory, and with ensuring that the theory they generate is, while critically informed, plausible given the available evidence’. (Dixon-Wood et al 2006).

Research papers were found through library search engines, references, footnotes, conference reports, alerts and seminars. All attempts were made to ensure the searches were comprehensive but the limitations are recognised. For example, only literature translated into English was considered. There are several terms and categories applied to unaccompanied young women, and to others who migrate, which make searches challenging. The following grid of research terms and sites was devised:

Search Terms	Sites/Locations Searched
Unaccompanied girls / young women	<u>Search Engines:</u>
Unaccompanied refugee children	University Of Sussex Library engines
Young migrants	SCOPUS
Unaccompanied migrants	APA PsychNET
Child migrants	<u>Specific Journal Searches:</u>
Separated/Independent Migrants	Journal of Refugee Studies
Asylum-seeking young people/children/girls	European Journal of Social Work
Refugee children/young women/young people	British Journal of Social Work
	Practice
Trafficked young people/children/girls	Taylor and Francis Online

Gender and Migration	Childright
Social Work and/with Refugees /Asylum	<u>Alerts:</u>
Refugee/Asylum Seeking/Trafficked Women	SCOPUS
	Google Scholar
<i>Cross-referenced with Social Work and UK:</i>	Taylor and Francis
Social Work with girls / young women	
Cultural competence / refugees	
Social work and child rights	
Social work and feminism / feminist social work	
Intersectionality / social work / gender	
Critical race theory / social work	

Once papers are identified, the Critical Interpretative Synthesis model excludes only papers seen to be 'fatally-flawed' (p.4), using a set of inclusion criteria and 'appraisal prompts' as detailed below:

Inclusion criteria

- Literature considering social work with separated young people in UK
- Research with/about separated young people from other professional fields in the UK (psychology, social geography etc)
- Research which considers the impact of gender on asylum process in the UK
- Literature about separated young women or social work with this group from other countries
- Articles in English (or translation)
- Qualitative and quantitative research, all sample sizes, to capture experience of yp.

Appraisal Sheet Headings:

1. What are the findings?

2. What methodology/methods were used? How effectively?
3. What is theory base? What are the theories of power?
4. What does it specifically say about gender/young women?
5. Weaknesses?
6. How relevant is it?
7. How does it connect or differ to other findings?

Direct comparisons across the literature can be problematic, but I have included literature which also considers unaccompanied young men, or indigenous young women, where I felt they offered knowledge about the experiences of unaccompanied young women. Similarly, literature about adult women is included where it considers common experiences such as migration, trafficking or sexual exploitation. Although similar terms are used across projects, participants may have been categorised differently. Not every study notes young people's identified gender, for example, and biographical data varies. I acknowledge there are other interpretations that could have been made and my positionality as an insider-researcher, and as a woman, will have affected my responses.

APPENDIX 2 – INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRACTITIONERS

WHO DO YOU SEE?

How do separated young women and British social workers experience and understand each other?

What difference does this make to how social workers work with young women in the UK?

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it's important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The study aims to increase our knowledge about separated young women and social work with them. The study will explore young women's experiences of having a social worker in the UK and social worker's experiences of working with young women. It is intended that this new knowledge will help inform, and potentially improve, social work practice with this group.

The research interviews will take place through 2016 and in early 2017 – you can be involved at any point during this time.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been invited to participate because of your professional role and knowledge of social work practice in this area.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

No. This is entirely voluntary. The research is being done by Rachel Larkin, who is studying for a Doctorate student at the University of Sussex. Rachel also works as an Independent Reviewing Officer and will tell you if she works for your authority. If you don't want to take part, this won't have any impact on your working relationship with Rachel in the future.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I TAKE PART?

There are two ways to be involved:

1. You will be asked to take part in an individual interview with Rachel. The interview will be held at an office location that is convenient for you and will take no longer than 1 hour. Rachel will ask you to use some creative materials (pen/paper/building shapes and figures/materials) to explore your experience of working with young women. If you don't want to use the creative materials, Rachel will talk with you about your experiences.

You will be asked for consent for the interview to be audio recorded, so that all the information can be captured. A consent form will be provided and there will

be an opportunity for you to discuss consent before the interview and to withdraw your consent after the interview takes place, any time up until the research is completed (April 2017).

2. You may be asked to be part of a focus group with other social workers. This may include separated young women who are now care leavers. The group will look at some of the materials from the first stage of the research and reflect on what this might mean for practice.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF TAKING PART? (WHERE APPROPRIATE)

The research interview will take some time out of your working day. As social work in this area is complex, it is possible that your view of the findings may be different to that of the researcher and you may feel frustrated or believe that the study has not contributed anything to social work knowledge. You may not enjoy using the creative materials.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

We hope that by participating, you will help us to increase our knowledge about Social Work with this group of young women. This is a relatively new area of Social Work practice in the UK and not much research has been conducted into UK social work with asylum-seeking or trafficked young women. The research will provide an opportunity for reflection and the findings will be shared within the profession and in other settings. These could be used to discuss areas of good practice and practice development.

WILL MY INFORMATION IN THIS STUDY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

All information used will be treated confidentially and it will be anonymised. No young people or professionals will be identifiable in the published data. Any identifying factors, such as name of Local Authority, ports of entry etc, will be removed or changed.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WANT TO TAKE PART?

If you would like to participate please contact Rachel Larkin, using the contact details at the end of this sheet. One further e-mail will be sent following this information, to asking if you would like to be part of the study. If you don't wish to take part, no further contact will be made but you are free to contact Rachel Larkin if you change your mind at a later stage and wish to contribute.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY?

The material will be used for a doctoral thesis. An article may be submitted for publication in a journal, and if this happens a link will be sent to participants so that they are made aware. The findings will be shared with all participating organisations.

APPENDIX 3 – INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG WOMEN

WHO DO YOU SEE?

How do separated young women and British social workers experience and understand each other?

What difference does this make to how social workers work with young women in the UK?

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it's important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The study is trying to find out more about how separated young women and their social workers in the UK try to understand each other. The study will find out about young women's experiences of having a social worker in the UK and social worker's experiences of working with young women. It is intended that this new knowledge will help to make social work practice better with young women in the UK.

The research interviews will take place through 2016 and in early 2017 – you can be involved at any point during this time.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been invited to participate because you have personal experience of coming to the UK as a young woman and working with social workers.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

No. You don't have to say yes to being involved. The research is being done by Rachel Larkin, who is studying for a Doctorate at the University of Sussex. If you don't want to take part, this won't have any impact on what happens to you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I TAKE PART?

There are two ways to be involved:

1. You can have an individual meeting with Rachel. The meeting will be held somewhere private and somewhere close to you. It will take no longer than 1 hour. Rachel will ask you to use some creative materials (pen/paper/building shapes and figures/materials), to help you show Rachel what you think and feel about working with social workers. If you don't want to use the creative materials, Rachel will talk with you about your experiences.

You will be asked for consent for the meeting to be audio recorded, so that Rachel can listen to this later. You will be given a consent form and you will be able to talk to Rachel about this before the meeting starts. You can change your mind and say you don't want your words or pictures used after the interview takes place, any time up until the research is finished (April 2017).

2. You can be part of a one-off group with some social workers, to talk with them about the things that young women and social workers have said in the research. Some of the art made in the research will also be looked at in the group. The group will meet at an office location in your area and last up to 2 hours. You will be able to talk with Rachel before the group and after the group.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF TAKING PART? (WHERE APPROPRIATE)

You are not going to be asked about your experiences before you came to the UK, but it is possible that you might feel upset when you think about some of the things that have happened to you. The research meeting will take some time out of your day. It is possible that your view of the findings may be different to that of the researcher. You may feel frustrated or believe that the study has not said the right things or helped to make things better. You may not enjoy using the creative materials.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

We hope that by participating, you will help us to increase our knowledge about Social Work with this group of young women. This is a new area of Social Work practice in the UK and not much research has been done with asylum-seeking or trafficked young women. The findings will be shared within the profession and could be used to improve what social workers do.

WILL MY INFORMATION IN THIS STUDY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You can choose a false name to use in the research. Anything that could be used to identify you, or other young women, will be left out or changed.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WANT TO TAKE PART?

If you would like to participate please tell Rachel Larkin when you speak with her or contact her using the number at the end of this sheet. If you don't wish to take part, no further contact will be made but you are free to contact Rachel if you change your mind at a later stage.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY?

The research will be used for a doctoral thesis. An article may be submitted for publication in social work journals. The findings will be shared with all the organisations. Rachel will send you a copy if you want one.

APPENDIX 4 – CONSENT FORMS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Consent Form for Social Workers

Project Title: WHO DO YOU SEE?:

How do separated young women and UK social workers experience and understand each other? What difference does this make to social work practice with young women in the UK?

Participant Reference:

I agree to take part in the above study, carried out by Rachel Larkin, as part of Doctoral Research within the Social Work and Social Care Department at the University of Sussex. I have had the study explained to me and have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I can keep for future reference. I understand that consent to take part means I am willing to:

1. Be interviewed by the researcher
 2. Have the interviews recorded
 3. Have the material I provide used in reports and published findings
- I understand that all the information provided will be treated as strictly confidential, unless any information comes to light which indicates unsafe or illegal practice and/or suggests a young person or other vulnerable person is at risk. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. I understand that anything I say will be anonymised, so that neither myself, the social work team or any young people mentioned will be identifiable in any published findings or reports.
 - I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. No reason needs to be

giver. I will be asked at the end of the interview if I still wish material from my interview to be used in the study and can withdraw consent at that time up until the Analysis stage of the project in April 2017. I am aware that I can decline to answer any of the questions asked during the interview

Name.....

Signature:.....

APPENDIX 5 – CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Consent Form

(Young Women)

Project Title: WHO DO YOU SEE?:

How do separated young women and British social workers experience and understand each other? What difference does this make to how social workers work with young women in the UK?

Participant Reference:

- I agree to take part in this study, being done by Rachel Larkin, a student from the Social Work Department at the University of Sussex. I have had the study explained to me and I have a copy of the Information Sheet, which I can keep to look at again. I know that signing the paper means I have agreed to:

1. talk to Rachel about some of my experiences in the UK
2. Have the conversations recorded
3. Have the artwork or pictures I make used in reports which could be published

- I understand that all the information I give Rachel will be treated as strictly confidential, unless I share something which makes Rachel think that a social worker is acting illegally or that I, or someone else, is at risk. I understand that Rachel will follow the Data Protection Act 1998 and keep all the information somewhere safe. I understand that nobody

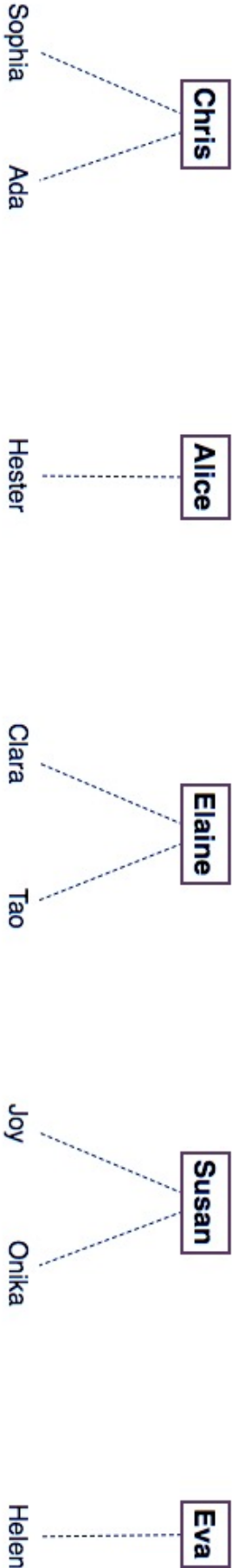
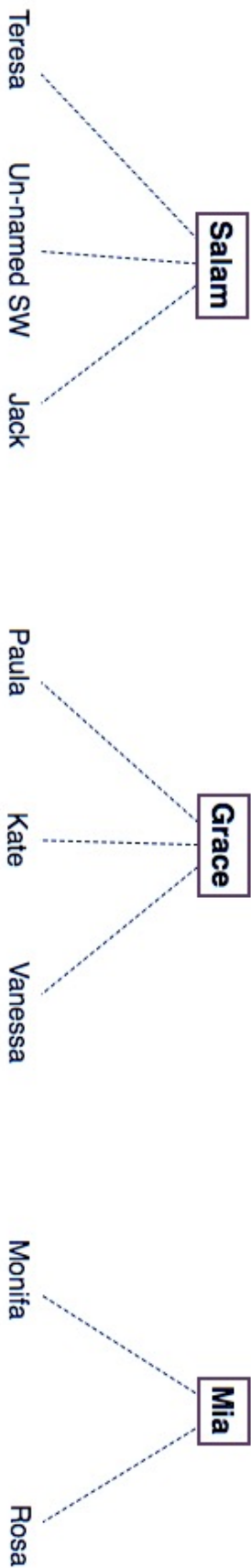
will be able to work out who I am in any of the reports or information that is shared or published.

- I understand that I don't have to agree to do this. I know I can choose not to take part in all of the study, or in some parts of it. I can stop at any time without being disadvantaged in any way and I don't have to give a reason. I understand that this research is not linked to my asylum claim, if I have made one.
- I will be asked at the end of the interview if I still agree that Rachel can include the things I said and the pictures I made. I know I can change my mind up until Rachel finishes interviewing everyone in April 2017. I understand that I don't have to talk about anything if I don't want to.

Name.....

Signature:.....

APPENDIX 6 – PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP GRID



APPENDIX 7 - DATA ANALYSIS EXTRACT. INTERVIEW WITH ALICE, PRACTITIONER 10/1/2017

Transcript	Reading 1 – Plot and My Emotional Responses/Thought processes I = Me (Rachel)	Reading 2: Voice of the I I = Alice	Reading 3: Relationships	Reading 4: Cultural/Social context
<p>Me: and does that...does that shift the way that you start to think about her</p> <p>Alice: no.....um.....no.. but what it does do... no it doesn't actually because I think[<i>breathes in</i>].. if I take what the Daily Mail would consider the worst case scenario.. that this is a rich girl.. she's told me she's rich...who's come over here to study and maybe she's not Christian and maybe her Mum <u>isn't</u> in jail .. nevertheless I've got to look after her and actually [<i>country of origin</i>] is a <u>totally</u> repressive country and it's probably really hard living there and if I was in that situation I might well be in her position.. doing the same thing.. so that's the worst case and then as it progresses up I thought.....yeah...her Mum might well be in prison... what do I know... how do I know she's</p>	<p>Want to explore the impact of this. What difference does it make?</p> <p>Alice is hesitant and unsure...I feel this is difficult territory. She takes a breath and then tries to unpick it – starts with the 'worst case'. It's a narrative that she is aware of and has considered here – she is unsure if she can believe anything the YW is telling her. I feel uncomfortable that I have also considered this with young people – I can identify with Alice here. Am I looking for validation? Alice has some knowledge of the YW's country – framed as 'totally repressive' – she avoids blaming the YW by imagining herself in that situation.</p> <p>Progressing 'up' to other perspectives. Possibility of belief here. She relaxes more – it's more comfortable to consider believing. Alice is resisting a prescribed idea</p>	<p>If I take what the Daily Mail would consider the worst case scenario, that this is a rich girl (she's told me she's rich), who's come over here to study, I've got to look after her. If I was in that situation I might well be in her position, doing the same thing. I thought yeah, her Mum might well be in prison, what do I know, how do I know she's not? What would I want her to be in order to look like a worthy asylum seeker? I'll deal with her. Sometimes I just see</p>	<p>Truth as a fundamental aspect to relationship building - what happens when it isn't present?</p> <p>Alice is consciously constructing YW in different ways here. Use of empathy to consider her actions. Alice and YW have different knowledge about situation here and there are doubts about the knowledge shared.– Alice able to acknowledge the limitations of her knowledge and leave space for other possibilities.</p> <p>Being able to manage in uncertainty allows Alice space for reflection.</p> <p>Absence of a parent means Alice moving into the parental caring role – seeing YW as teenager.</p>	<p>Heaven Crawley's work on HO and impact of disbelief on encounters – are there parallels here?</p> <p>Pauses and hesitations - This is culturally and socially a difficult issue. Alice aware of the narratives and working through them.</p> <p>Does Alice start with the Daily Mail narrative because it is the most dominant socially? This is a young women who has resources at home – relatively privileged in own country. UK seen as country with good reputation for education. SW role is same throughout - Alice in parental role. Migration as opportunity liked to age.</p> <p>Social situation in country seen as repressive – western perspective of freedom of movement and choice.</p>

<u>Transcript</u>	Reading 1 – Plot and My Emotional Responses/Thought processes I = Me (Rachel)	Reading 2: Voice of the I I = Alice	Reading 3: Relationships	Reading 4: Cultural/Social context
<p>not and actually she is a teenager and ...what would I want her to be in order to <u>look</u> like a worthy asylum seeker...actually no none of that.. this is a teenager and she's got her needs and got her worries and I'll deal with her.. what I do note.. having done this for donkey years.. is that when you meet someone who is <u>really</u> traumatised often they stand out ...often trauma's quite hidden.. quite hard but then sometimes I just see someone and I think [<i>bangs on table</i>] oh my gosh you really <u>really</u> have had it hard and I don't..always think that when I walk in.. doesn't affect how I treat them because everyone's in need of... [<i>sighs</i>]..respect and <u>love</u>... not a word we use in the care plan..</p>	<p>of the 'worthy asylum-seeker' – rejects this and frames her as teenager instead. This allows her to move away from the tensions in whether she is 'worthy' or not. She then becomes a subject for SW support and help – a more valid subject?</p> <p>YW is not presenting in a way that Alice sees as traumatised – she's comparing her to other YP who presented in ways that Alice saw as more indicative of trauma – stresses this with banging the table and repeating 'really' - emotional distress is very variable in young people.</p> <p>All treated equally?– respect and love – love is stressed by Alice but not seen as officially recognised as something that SW can offer. I feel my inadequacy to provide love for young people – a sense of personal boundaries being overstepped here? Do we create the conditions for this or consider that families are irreplaceable? Is love only for families?</p>	<p>someone and I think [<i>bangs on table</i>] oh my gosh you really, really, <u>really</u> have had it hard. I don't always think that when I walk in, doesn't affect how I treat them.</p>	<p>Taking responsibility for her.</p> <p>Alice moves to thinking about trauma within early stages of relationship – what link is she making here?</p> <p>There are different emotional responses to young people in first encounters – social narratives have been dominating with this YW but emotional narratives with other YP who may have more trauma.</p> <p>Her emotional responses and thought processes differ but she doesn't see this as impacting on her 'treatment' of UASC – love as part of which relationship? Identified as a need but who provides it?</p>	<p>Questioning of external model of a 'worthy' UASC - ideas of deserving and undeserving. Rejects this.</p> <p>Being under 18 (assessed as) allows access to services and overrides questions of why YW is here at this point.</p> <p>Literature about UASC and trauma – view of trauma as visible, as evident in psychosomatic behaviours. Then contrasted with ideas of hidden trauma - lack of clarity here about how trauma is defined and considered.</p> <p>Trying to integrate the social and the emotional here or making a distinction?</p> <p>Love as an identified need but not considered with the processes – links back to the role of SW and being 'looked after'.</p>