Refugeeship - A project of justification

Nicola Magnusson

'Refugeeship'
- A project of justification
Claiming asylum in England and Sweden.

Nicola-Anne Magnusson

To Rune, Alexander and
Oliver

Abstract

Doctoral Thesis
Department of Education
Stockholm University, S-106 91 Stockholm
Refugeeship: A project of justification. Claiming asylum in England and Sweden
The aim of this thesis is to explore the asylum process from an experiential perspective, starting in the country of origin, fleeing, claiming asylum and being granted refugee status. The theoretical interest is to contribute with an understanding of how this asylum process impacts on personal meaning-making, focusing on identification and positioning work of the person forced to flee and make an asylum claim. With this purpose in mind, I have remained close to the experiences of the participants' talk, made visible through interpretative analysis.

Drawing on a discursive-psychological approach, 19 interview-cases (10 in England and 9 in Sweden) have been analysed consisting of stories of the migration process: life in the country of origin, fleeing, claiming asylum and being granted refugee status. This talk includes rich description of what this has involved for these participants, in terms of the more existential aspects of this kind of migration, identification and positioning, as well as their attempts to give this process some sort of meaning. This I name refugeeship.

The results show that refugeeship is characterised by a multitude of implicit and explicit questionings concerning the refugee's rights and duties. Implicit questions concerning the refugee's flight, starting in the country of origin are followed by explicit questions when encountering the official legal system of asylum in the new country, which involves an erosion of sense of self. The refugee stories express what I call the moral career of refugeeship, illustrating the events in refugeeship which are ongoing, though changeable over time and space and incorporate a moral dimension. The refugee finds him or herself continuously justifying the migration, struggling for recognition and convincing 'Others' that one can in fact become a contributing member of the new society.
Key words: identification, positioning, asylum system, asylum seeker, refugee, moral career, justification and refugeeship.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the participants in this study, for trusting me with your experiences and teaching me more about forced migration. Besides my participants' willingness to share their stories with me, this thesis would not have been possible without the supervision of Professor Anders Gustavsson. It is a well known fact amongst those who have been privileged enough to work with Anders or have him as a supervisor that he is hugely inspiring. This has been my experience too. Besides inspiring, he has supervised me with great integrity, wisdom, patience and commitment. Thank you so much Anders!

Many thanks to Professor Charles Westin who has been a wonderful and supportive associate supervisor; his expertise of the field of migration and gift of the English language has contributed enormously to my work. I also thank you, Charles, for introducing me to Kesi Mahendran, at the Open University, UK. Kesi has served as a real source of stimulation and is a true mentor to me; thank you Kesi! Thank you so much Professor Sonja Olin Lauritzen and Professor Ulf Janson for your diligent and engaged reading of my work. At the beginning of the process of embarking on a PhD, Professor Birgitta Qvarsell, Professor Katrin Goldstein-Kyaga and Professor Ola Halldén were especially helpful. Thank you; the goal I set out to achieve has been fulfilled!

During the process many have in different ways been very supportive, I'm sorry I cannot name you all! Particular thanks to all of you who have taken time to read my work in progress and contributed with your comments at *Föreställningsseminariet* (the notion of ideas seminar) and *Tolkningsseminariet* (the interpretations seminar). These occasions have contributed with a sea of ideas which have been a crucial part of working through the analytical aspects of the thesis. Thank you to all my colleagues and friends at the department. A special thank you, to my great friend from start to finish, Helen Knutes. Thank you Helen, for always being one step ahead in the process, showing me that the highs and lows are all part of it! Thank you to Robert Ohlsson, for your academic know-how and reading of various chapters of this thesis. Besides being an academic role model for me, Robert has been a great listener and source of support throughout. Thank you to my dear friend Ewa Olstedt for all your guidance and for always being

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1. Introduction - official migration systems and the construction of asylum seekers

While it is a common belief that we live in an age of migration, it can be argued that we have always lived in an age of population movement where people have sought a safe haven in which to build a new life (Castles and Miller, 1993/2003, Franzén, 2001; Schuster, 2003). Therefore, the business of seeking asylum is not a modern phenomenon. However, the legal concepts 'asylum' and 'asylum seeker' are recent constructions (Clayton, 2006). Thus, what is new for migration of our times, this thesis argues, is the introduction of novel ways to label or categorise different groups of people migrating. For example, people may be categorised in terms of asylum seeker, refugee or economic migrant. Linked to these categorisations, systems to control and restrict certain forms of migration have been introduced. One influential body in this construction is the European Union (EU), which has promoted policies enabling more freedom of movement for those who are privileged enough to be a citizen of a member state and excluding those who are not (Castles and Miller, 1993/2003). Another is the United Nations (UN), which has a significant role in assisting displaced persons in the world and controlling some parts of the global refugee migration. Some categories which have emerged through the legalisation and illegalisation of migration are voluntary/economic migrant, asylum seeker, illegal migrant, failed or refused asylum seeker, sometimes known as 'bogus' (Black and Koser, 1999), documentless migrant, and refugee.[1] It is important to point out here that 'voluntary' or so-called 'economic' migrants may be third-country nationals.[2] The fact that they do not belong to the European Union may make it necessary for them to seek asylum in order to stay in the country. That is to say, even those who are not intent on seeking asylum, but rather wish to migrate for work-related purposes can be from third-countries. A common consideration in EU migration law is skill levels. That is to

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[1] In Swedish the term '*paperslös*' refers to undocumented and '*avvisad*' asylum seeker is a failed or refused asylum seeker.
[2] 'Third country national' is the term used by the European Commission to refer to any person who is not a national of an EU member state or EEA/EFTA countries such as Norway, Iceland and Switzerland.

say, third-country nationals can be welcome if they can 'prove' that they have the right skill sets or right number of 'points'. Again the emphasis is on restricting certain groups, and opening up borders to others, who may be seen as a contribution to the country. This thesis is concerned with seekers of asylum, categorised or labelled as 'asylum seekers', and those who have been granted asylum and are officially categorised as 'refugee'.

Migration has also been argued to have 'changed character' (Castles and Miller, 1993/2003; Franzén, 2001, Westin, 2006), as has people's belief systems regarding migration. Deaux (2006) writes:

> *Illegal immigrant* has in fact become a highly stigmatized category, adding an additional layer of negativity to the prevailing image of immigrants. Refugees also do not fare well in attitude surveys, despite what one might think would be some element of compassion for their plight.

Both England and Sweden have a history of labour migration and England, due to Britain's colonial history, has witnessed migration from former colonial countries since the mid-1940s. However, it was from the early 1970s, until now, that immigration to Sweden has been mainly of refugees (Westin, 2006). Refugees arriving in Sweden before the mid-seventies, between 1945 and 1972 came from countries such as Yugoslavia, Greece, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia; however, these 'refugees' were 'classified' as economic migrants and did not have to seek asylum in order to stay (Westin, 1973, 2006). Refugee migration began somewhat later in the United Kingdom, when an increase in asylum claims became apparent in the 1980s (Castles and Miller, 2003).

Although the terms 'asylum' and 'refugee' have their origin in Greek terminology, the meaning ascribed to these terms today has changed, born out of today's greater focus on who has the right to seek asylum, who fulfils the criteria for refugee status and who does not fulfil such criteria (Schuster, 2003). It should be stated at the outset that the concept of asylum is first of all a legal, administrative construct, determining the regulation these migrants have to follow when entering the new country. As a consequence, the meaning behind being a refugee or seeking asylum is locally determined, and it varies from one legal and administrative system to another. In everyday language, migrants are categorised according to different more or less informal discourses. A common characteristic of most legal systems is the assumption that different types of migration exist based, first of all, on personal intentions. This notion leaks into everyday discourse, and thus tends to be seen as a 'truth'. The process of migrant categorisation is however

quite complex. Third Country Nationals, for example, do not enjoy primary benefit from freedom of movement, as do citizens of the EU (Clayton, 2006). Those who are not members of the EU, citizens of Norway, Iceland and Switzerland, but wish to enter a European country, can feel forced, for example, to enter through seeking asylum whether or not they see themselves in need of 'protection'.

Another significant aspect of the local legal/administrative regulations concerns border control. The aim of this system is to control entry which in practice implies a restrictive stand with regard to the process of claiming asylum. In the UK,[3] it is not uncommon at ports and airports that border controls are in place to remove migrants on entry. These work actively to stop the process of making the actual claim (Black and Koser, 1999), as once the claim is made the claimant cannot be removed from the country until the claim is processed. Migrants who do not belong to the EU, EEA/EFTA[4] or cannot enter through a work/study permit or visa, but who do succeed in entering, are forced by law to claim asylum at the border. Those who do not respect this law and enter on a false passport or without a visa are considered 'illegal immigrants'. Put very simply, the only way of emigrating into the EU today, as a third country national, without a work or study permit, or visa, is by claiming asylum. Once the asylum application is processed, applicants will either be granted permission to stay in the country or be rejected. In this sense, the refugee does not have the right to decide about whether one is a refugee. If one is not refused, one is categorised as refugee by immigration officials. If one is refused, one is categorised as 'a failed or refused asylum seeker' and faces deportation. Leudar *et al* (2008) postulate that the label refugee is 'other conferred', that is to say, it is given to the individual, it is not something the individual can confer on him or herself. At the same time, one may be refused asylum and therefore not granted refugee status, but consider oneself to be a refugee. The research aim of this thesis is to understand how these aspects of claiming asylum and of being categorised as a refugee pervade one's identifications and self-conceptions.

The character of migration to European countries turned in the early 1970s. However, it has taken time for the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' to come into public use. In England it was as late as the 1990s (Castles and Miller, 2003). It was a little earlier in Sweden, in the mid-1980s, that the terms became part of common language usage. Today,

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[3] This is practiced, according to Black and Koser (1999) in the UK and is not uncommon in other countries. However, to my knowledge, this is not exercised in Sweden.
[4] EEA: European Economic Area, EFTA: European Free Trade Association

strong public discourse exists when it comes to the way the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are used. British tabloid newspapers readily use terms such as 'bogus' in referring to people migrating, inferring that their claims for protection are false. It can be argued that public use of these terms comes as a result of migration becoming an issue of policy and politics. The notion of asylum migration is readily debated in the media today. This coverage contributes to the conceptualisations of refugees in common-sense usage.

1.1 The refugee category definition and some differences between asylum seeker and refugee

In terms of the categories 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee', three different meanings can be ascribed to these terms: (1) an official meaning, which is legal in content; (2) a common 'knowledge' meaning, which is based on general, everyday notions surrounding the concepts; (3) self-description; that is to say, what a person labelled 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee' ascribes to the category label. This thesis aims to unpack the third meaning, in relation to meanings one and two.

In terms of official definition, the category definition of an 'asylum seeker' is not the same as the category definition 'refugee'. Refugees, officially speaking, are those who have been granted asylum, and the right to stay in the new country indefinitely or temporarily, depending on whether limited right to remain, Humanitarian Protection or indefinite refugee status is applied. An asylum seeker is someone who has asked, officially, for the protection of the state, but is still having their claim processed. Refugees enjoy many rights which apply to citizens of the country, however, with some differences. Most refugees cannot apply for citizenship for up to five years after being granted refugee status. An asylum seeker is not allowed to travel during the claimant period, and lacks a passport or travel documents, which are removed when one claims asylum. As a refugee, one does gain one's mobility back; that is to say, one is permitted to travel freely, with certain exceptions as to travel to one's country of origin. Before receiving citizenship, refugees are issued with travel documents, which resemble a passport in terms of format, but lack information about nationality or citizenship. Those who have been granted limited right to remain, may not however be permitted to travel freely.

The process of claiming asylum means asking another state for protection because the individual argues one's own state cannot or does not provide this protection. Most asylum seekers coming to the EU today are refused and the interpretation of the refugee definition has become increasingly rigorous (Black and Koser, 1999). Castles and Miller (2003) postulate that 90 per cent of asylum claims are rejected,

however, many cannot be deported as their countries of origin refuse to allow them back into the country, or due to the fact they have no passport.

Depending on where the participant is in the process of making an asylum claim, means one is either categorised by migration authorities as 'asylum seeker', 'refugee' or 'failed asylum seeker'. Officially, the definition of an asylum seeker is a person who has fled their country in order to seek safety and the protection of another state. As an asylum seeker the protection and right to take up residence permanently or for a certain period of time has not been granted. As an asylum seeker, the rights normally extended to refugees or citizens do not apply. During the asylum seeking period the individual has limited mobility rights. An asylum seeker has all their travel documentation removed at the onset of the application. Asylum seekers are normally obliged to report to a local police station regularly, up to once a week or as little as once a month, depending on the case. Some asylum seekers are kept in detention during the asylum seeking assessment period. Those that are not held in detention can be housed together with other asylum seekers and given a limited amount of funding with which to buy food; they are not permitted to work as asylum seekers.

It is argued that the distinction between the two categories of migrants, which exist within migration law in the United Kingdom and Sweden; 'voluntary' and 'involuntary', is a difficult delineation to make, as the two categories overlap each other (Clayton, 2006, Schuster, 2003, Castles and Miller, 1993/2003). The way in which asylum cases are managed, in terms of interpreting who is in 'genuine' need of protection, contributes to common-knowledge understanding of the 'real' refugee and the 'bogus' refugee.

Asylum claims are interpreted against the background of The Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees. According to the Convention 1951 (Article 1A(2) the definition of a refugee is a person who:

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

Due to the restrictive nature of this definition, a new concept was introduced to European asylum law in 2003 called 'Humanitarian Protection (HP)/Discretionary Leave (DL)'. Many states which have agreed to the refugee convention's definition have also made provisions

to provide a safety net status for those not qualifying for asylum according to the convention definition. Sweden and UK both extend their policies to include those falling outside of the above definition. This opened up the interpretation of cases from a wider perspective than that of the above definition. When refugee status is granted according to HP, the individual claims do not agree in all respects with the limited Refugee Convention definition, but compelling reasons to provide protection still exist (Clayton, 2006). This, in itself, reveals the restrictive character of the definition as Castles and Miller (2003) and Black and Koser (1999) point out.

1.2 Swedish and UK asylum law in a European context

Legislation in the UK and Sweden is influenced by the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Both states implemented European Union Law on migration and border controls into respective national law, to create common practices and goals with regard to the treatment of asylum seekers. Therefore, asylum law in the UK and Sweden has mostly commonalities when it comes to assessments of who has the right to remain and who does not.

The refugee determination process in Europe is centred on individuals proving their case in a legalistic framework according to the criteria in the 1959 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees. This has led to a popular perception that a successful applicant is a 'genuine' refugee and an unsuccessful one is 'bogus'. Some popular thinking also equates the unsuccessful asylum claimant with an 'economic migrant'.

> As the EU has not had a migration policy which enables economic entry, this motivation has not been regarded as legitimate. Europe's more recent recognition of its need for labour has only very marginally penetrated asylum policy for fear that the asylum route will be used by economic migrants (Clayton 2006: 139).

1.2.1 Complexities of assessing an asylum claim

In spite of the complexity described of categorisations of refugees and asylum seekers, much of the official assessment of who has the right to be granted refugee status or not, has its roots in understanding migration in terms of a choice that migrants make, and by assessing migration in terms of something voluntary or involuntary. The grounds for this distinction, and the legal assessments based on this way of thinking are firmly rooted in the notion of protection and trustworthiness (Clayton, 2006). That is to say, the only grounds for seeking asylum are supposed to be due to need of protection that the

home state cannot or is unwilling to provide and therefore the individual feels the need to flee to another state for such protection. This need is something that is interpreted against the background of how *reasonable* the claim for protection is. This is a complex process of interpretation according to Castles and Miller (2003) who argue that this distinction between voluntary, economic migrant and political forced refugee is ever increasingly difficult to make, as economic factors and political factors most often are interconnected - something to which globalisation is contributing more and more to. So, whilst recognising the narrow official definition of the criteria for who is a refugee and who is not, it is apparent that making this is becoming progressively more complicated. Similarly, Clayton (2006) suggests that countries which are experiencing rapid changes, be it due to war or a natural disasters, may involve individuals fleeing for various reasons, other than political, therefore rendering it difficult to make the distinction Castles and Miller raise, the distinction between someone in need of protection, a so-called 'convention refugee', and someone looking for a more economic stable situation, a so-called 'economic migrant'.

1.3 Dialogical meaning-making

Categorisations such as asylum seeker and refugee and their meanings are socially constructed through a complex interaction between everyday discursive and legal systems. The introduction of such distinctions has resulted in asylum seekers and refugees occupying a more central role in policy, academic writings and the media in general. Thus, legal categorisations and the discursive practices are basic components of the dynamic meaning-making concerning refugees and asylum seekers. Another dimension of these dynamics is constituted by the dialogue of 'Alter-ego' (Marková, 2005). Here the ego definition relates to how refugees or asylum seekers as individuals define themselves, and the alter definition is the socially founded definition that the refugee or asylum seeker encounters and to some extent may internalise as part of his or her identification. Jenkins (2008) writes about the internal moment of the identification dialectics, concerning, self-image and the external moment of identification which refers to public image. Interplay between the internal and external is an ongoing process, according to Jenkins.

Evidence of this complex interaction of meaning-making can be witnessed in the way the role of migration and the dilemma of refugees are problematised within various academic disciplines as well as within political rhetoric. As a result, new conceptualisations of the term 'refugee' emerge, including the notion that the asylum seeker and refugee is a threat to welfare states (Schuster, 2003). Often, the

common-sense everyday meanings ascribed to the categories asylum seeker or refugee, focus on questions of legitimacy to be in the new country, and not on issues of empathy or how asylum seekers can be supported (Goodman and Speer, 2007).

1.4 The problem area of the study and theoretical research interest

The focus of this study lies in an interest to gain a deeper understanding of how the complex systems of categorisation, affect meaning-making concerning refugees and asylum seekers. More specifically, my research interest is directed at the construction of identifications and positioning work when experiencing asylum migration. There are a number of studies focused on asylum migration carried out during the past decade (some of these are accounted for in Chapter Two of this study). It is however important to continuously re-examine this field, particularly in light of the increased hysteria and panic expressed with regard to the number of asylum seekers entering EU countries. We need to be wary of the consequences of the encounters with legal / administrative systems and negative media representations against the background of the trauma associated with pre-flight contexts and the trying experiences of the flight itself. The focal point of this study is on the consequences of fleeing and encountering an unreceptive environment made up of the procedure of claiming asylum, simplified images disseminated by the media and other ill-informed representations of asylum seekers, with regard to what this entails for positioning and identification work of the asylum seeker or refugee.

My theoretical perspective has its place within a broader social science scope, trying to understand how people make sense of themselves and their world and how such meaning-making can be influenced by other people, particular living conditions, as well as policy and politics.

An important point of departure that will be outlined in more detail in Chapter Three is that people's sense-making processes are social and dialogical. They encompass an interaction between the personal and the social. Here, the social includes the interpersonal, as well as policy, politics and societal systems, and the interaction between these. It is precisely this encounter that is of interest here. The dialogical approach of Self- Other used here draws on the work of Harré and Moghaddam, (2003), where identity is revealed in dialogical encounters. I also refer to Herman's concept of 'Dialogical Self' (2004) seeing the Self as 'a multiplicity of parts' which are performative and rhetorical and:

> Have the potential of entertaining dialogical relationships with each other (Hermans, 2004:13).

Our 'utterances' (Billig, 1997) are of a performative nature and reveal and construct identity. These theories fall into the broader tradition of discursive-narrative psychology, which is outlined in Chapter Three, *Theoretical point of departure.*

Wetherell (2001) argues that the discursive formation of meaning is created through practice and language in use, which are intertwined into knowledge discourses. However, discourse here is understood not in the strict linguistical sense, but rather as representations which are ascribed meaning and which impact on people's own understandings of their situation. This is an aspect of identification processes. That is to say, ideas around asylum seekers and migration only become meaningful within such discourse. Thus, the meaning that is attributed to the asylum seeking procedure is socially influenced and has significance for the way in which the asylum seeker and refugee understand their situation and their self-images, identification and the positions in which they become located and locate themselves. The use of the term 'identification' rather than 'identity' is to illustrate the dynamic and situational complexity of meaning-making and to raise the integrative aspect of identity work in relation to discursive formations (Ibid). What I would like to make clear here is that although this discursive aspect is relevant for the way identification is understood, the theoretical perspective informing my work, that of positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990, Harré and Langenhove, 1999) acknowledges that people are not solely and passively constructed in discursive structures, but rather that people are agentic, and active in discourse and category creation and use.

The narrow focus of this thesis is on the procedure of claiming asylum and being granted refugee status. However this procedure is first of all understood against the background of a longer and broader process of leaving one's native country and migrating to a new one, with a special interest in how this process is experienced by the refugee himself or herself. For the purpose of capturing the essence of the process in becoming and being a refugee, I name this process *refugeeship.* This term does not exist in the English language in the same way as *flyktingskap* exists in Swedish. However, refugeeship is not used as a literal translation of *Flyktingskap*. Rather, refugeeship here refers to a more existential process, as well as the dialogical process I accounted for earlier between the social and the personal aspects of becoming a refugee. The general purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the asylum claimant's experience, the

official, legal asylum seeking procedure, and their own lived experience of seeking and gaining asylum. This is explored in two European countries: England and Sweden. Whilst it is part of the research design that data from two different contexts contribute to contrast and diversity for the analysis (Olin-Lauritzen, 1997), it needs to be stated that this is not a comparative study in the traditional sense. The aim is, rather, to use analytical comparisons; that is, to compare data and interpretations from the two countries in order to raise important questions and to generate hypotheses of how the informant's experience can be understood (see Chapter Four, *Methodological considerations*, for more discussion around this).

Thus, this is a study about people in the process of refugeeship. It examines the processes these people undergo, with a particular focus on the constructions of identifications, dis-identifications and the positioning present in their *narratives* of the asylum process. Through interpretation, with a particular focus on rhetorical positioning and subject positions taken up and resisted, my aim is to understand the way the participants in this study make sense of their situation, how they navigate within the asylum seeking legal/administrative framework, and the impact such a system can have on identification and positional work. This is examined first of all through studying the refugees' and asylum seekers' own definitions and meaning-making of what this procedure involves. Thus, beyond the general aim of contributing to a greater understanding of how refugeeship is perceived and experienced by refugees, a more specific aim is to explore how they self-identify in the unique living conditions particular to the refugee situation. My main data are constituted of their narratives of migration presented during the interviews that they agreed to take part in. Fleeing, claiming asylum and being recognised as a refugee is a process that involves administrative practicalities and legal procedures. However, as aforementioned, it is the meaning-making, identification and positioning processes that are the primary study object of this thesis.

1.5 The 'migrants' in this study

This is a study about people who have felt *compelled* to migrate. That is to say the participants in this study do not identify their migration as a choice, rather they experience it as something 'forced' upon them, making them 'refugees' rather than migrants in search of economic opportunity. These people live today, in England or Sweden, either intentionally or by chance. The participants in this study have been interviewed because they first and foremost defined themselves as asylum seekers or had been granted refugee status. It is the participants themselves, who have felt and explained his or her migration as

something other than voluntary, and it is on these grounds that they have participated in this study. In cases where a potential participant has explained their migration as a 'voluntary choice', for example, in order to study or work, I have chosen not to include that person in the study, as the aim of the study is to understand the meaning-making and identification processes involved in feeling 'compelled' to flee and also the procedure of making an asylum claim.

This study includes both those who have been granted refugee status according to the above Geneva Convention definition and those who have been granted permission to stay, according to Humanitarian Protection / Discretionary Leave. Although the majority of the participants in this study hold refugee status, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the entire process, some asylum seekers were also interviewed (see Chapter Four, *Methodological considerations*).

Another important 'category' of refugees comprises those who have not endured the process of claiming asylum, officially. In this study there are some so-called 'quota' refugees who were granted refugee status by United Nations officials, whilst living in hiding in a neighbouring country, or in refugee camps. These participants have been assisted by officials in moving to England or Sweden. This involves proving their identity and cause for protection before arriving in the new country, as opposed to those who flee and have to claim asylum on arrival at ports and airports. Those who are granted refugee status before arriving in England and Sweden do not have the legitimacy aspects associated with making a claim on arrival. However, they have experienced a 'limbo' situation similar to the one associated with the asylum situation, whilst living in hiding or in refugee camps. They do live without nationality, are only issued a temporary passport, known as 'travel documents' and do not always choose their living situation at the outset in the new country. Although legitimacy issues are not experienced on arrival in the new countries, quota refugees do have to put their cases forward to UN officials before being issued protection and being moved to another country.

1.6 Structure and outline of the thesis

This introductory chapter, Chapter One: Introduction – official mi*gration systems and the construction of asylum seekers* has presented a brief background in terms of official migration systems, the particularities of refugee migration and migration to Sweden and England. It outlines the research problem and point of departure for the study against the migration background given, and questions are raised

which this thesis will attempt to shed light upon. This chapter has aimed at framing the study in terms of legal and common-sense categorisations and the way in which the theoretical and other interests of the study relate to such categorisation processes.

Chapter Two: *Previous research* presents the aim of this study in relation to previous research studies which focus on the categorisation processes of refugees and asylum seekers common to this kind of migration.

Chapter Three: *Theoretical point of departure* places the study into an established scientific and research field, namely that of discursive-narrative psychology which lifts the empirical data to another level. Key concepts of Positioning and Identification are introduced, defined and explained in terms of their usage in this research.

Chapter Four: *Methodological considerations* invites you, as the reader, on my 'methods journey'. Here insight is given into how the data collection was approached, how the research field and context were interpreted by myself, the researcher, and the methods which were employed in order to gain empirical material which was going to help me unravel the questions and problems outlined in Chapter One. The way in which the empirical material has been processed analytically is explained. The ethical aspects of the study, as well as my role as researcher are illustrated through my discussion of methodological considerations.

Chapter Five: *The road to refugeeship* is the first of the four results chapters. This encompasses the processes of: self-presentations relating to life before migration and fleeing from the country of origin. This chapter introduces the layout of the results chapters, which consists of descriptions relating to the participants' narrated sequential events and the meaning-making in the narratives.

Chapter Six: *The official asylum procedure- encountering the legal and administrative system and all that this entails* is the second results chapter and unravels what it entails to encounter the official, legal system of claiming asylum.

Chapter Seven: *Being a refugee*, the third results chapter, sheds light on the personal and social identification processes having been granted refugee status. It illustrates the positioning work and meaning-making present in the participants' dialogues in relation to the concept 'refugee status' and their understanding, and transitioning from asylum seeker to refugee, in terms of identification and dis-identification processes.

Chapter Eight: *Constructing continuity and discontinuity in the stories of 'beyond' being a refugee*, is the fourth results chapter, and reveals how, having fought for the right for protection which comes with refugee status, the participants enter a new phase of refugeeship,

that of the complexities of creating a new space, beyond the discourse-filled label 'refugee', in which to form other identities beyond such a label.

Chapter Nine: *Refugeeship and the moral course of events* brings together and integrates the findings presented in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight in order to discuss what indeed characterises *refugeeship*.

2. Previous research

The following chapter provides an overview of previous research which has a particular focus on asylum migration. Research on migration is not difficult to find, and therefore I limit the previous research presented here largely to studies which have concentrated on seekers of asylum and refugees. However, some studies concerning migration and identification in general, are also discussed. Migration, as a research field, is approached from a number of disciplines: medical and health sciences, political sciences, sociology, psychology, law, education, economics, cultural geography and anthropology; just to name a few. Within these disciplines there are hundreds of points of departure for studying migration. For example, some focus on ethnicity, others are concerned with policy or issues of political and public debate. Then there are studies which, for example, attempt to map out variables concerning patterns of migration or causes of discrimination. This chapter frames the study and places it into an established research field, whereby migration and, more specifically, asylum migration research is of interest to the questions presented in this thesis.

2.1 Asylum migration

Over the past ten years, recognition of the 'social construction' of asylum seeker or refugee categories has become more and more visible in research from a discursive psychological and narrative perspective. It concerns the consequences of categorisational processes common to this kind of migration, as well as the discursive practices common to today's migration generally (Blommaert, 2001; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Every and Augoustinos, 2007; Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, Baker, 2008). The United Kingdom and Sweden have witnessed a changing narrative of migration over the past decade, as have other European countries. Asylum applications have increased significantly and part of the changed narrative includes a growing amount of opposition towards asylum migration. Particularly in the case of the United Kingdom, but even in Sweden,[5] increased hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees has become apparent through

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[5] The countries of focus in this study are Sweden and England. Other countries belonging to the European Union are also oppressing asylum seekers and are active in trying to hinder such migration, and therewith hostile towards these groups.

various media channels, as well as in political rhetoric. Thus, migration of this sort is increasingly treated as a challenge, is often seen as problematic, and quite frankly unwanted.

2.1.1 Discourse research- media and public debate on asylum migration

Using discursive and rhetorical analysis, Lynn and Lea (2003) in their study *A Phantom Menace and the New Apartheid: The social construction of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom,* interpreted, how the asylum seeker is represented in British national newspapers. The specific focus of their study was on readers' letters, and the way in which readers expressed, in writing, issues of asylum migration and indeed their 'opinions' of asylum seekers living in the United Kingdom today. Lynn and Lea, referencing to Hall (1978) and Gilroy (1993), suggest that alongside a post-colonial decline, Britain has witnessed a reaffirmation of national identity and a reinforcement of the concept of 'place'. At the same time, the number of refugees coming to Britain has increased, giving cause for more political and media attention in the latter half of the 1990s. Goodman (2007) uses a similar point of departure as Lynn and Lea, in his study *constructing asylum seeker families.* Through a discourse analysis carried out on a UK internet message board, like Lynn and Lea, Goodman captured constructions *about* asylum seekers in public argumentation. Goodman found that two different *repertoires* were constructed, of an opposing nature: *The loving family repertoire* and the *Breeding repertoire.* The first repertoire, *loving family,* normalised the asylum seeker family, through talk of the asylum seeker family as 'any' 'normal' family, who wants the best for their children. The second repertoire, *breeding repertoire,* had an opposing view, dehumanizing the asylum seeker family through questioning legitimacy. The 'talk' constructing the *breeding repertoire* condoned the splitting up of families through asylum application procedures and other brutal ways in which asylum seekers are treated on entrance to the asylum system.

Leudar *et al* in their research *Hostility themes in media, community and refugee narratives* collected three different data sets: (1) interviews with asylum seekers/refugees (2) interviews with 'locals' and (3) news narratives. Their Study sheds light on the context in which refugees and asylum seekers were living. Like Goodman's results, the analysis in Leudar *et al's* study also illustrated patterns of dehumanizing refugees and asylum seekers through a number of 'hostility themes', found in the data material. These themes included: *potential lawbreakers*, *bad*

parents, scroungers of the host country. Leudar *et al* raise an important issue regarding these dehumanizing strategies, namely that:

> It is, simply not a matter of discursive representation. The measures introduced by the government create the social and legal environment in which 'they' have to live (2008:194)

Through the analysis of the newspaper texts and 'local' narratives, Leudar *et al* found:

> The environment in which refugees/asylum seekers live in, in the UK is mostly hostile (ibid: 204).

The newspaper texts analysed for the study were based on articles found in two British daily newspapers: The Daily Mail and the Guardian and concentrated on articles mentioning asylum seekers and refugees during the months November and December of 2003. Due to this specific time span, the articles were very much based on media reactions to 'measures' introduced by the ruling labour party of that time, with regard to a new asylum policy. The articles report the controversies made apparent through the proposal which included the following measures:

> Their benefit payments should be withdrawn, and their children could be taken into care if they refused to be repatriated; (2) they would be forcibly screened for infectious diseases; (3) they could be tagged so that their movements could be monitored; and finally (4) their access to legal aid would be limited. (Leudar *et al* 2008: 193)

The analysis of these articles found the following hostility themes:

> 'They' are an economic drain,' they' lack basic human qualities such as love for their own children and responsibility to the community, potentially 'they' are criminals, and 'they' are carriers of dangerous diseases (ibid: 1999)

In Lynn and Lea's analysis of letters to the editors of a national newspaper, introduced earlier in this chapter, three discursive strategies are identified, adopted by the letter writers in their positions taken up:
1) Differentiation of the Other
2) The 'enemy' in our midst
3) The differentiation of the self

The analysis also revealed that rather than going down the route of being prejudiced or naming race, the authors of the letters constructed their 'grievances' towards asylum seekers by making comparisons with

'Britons' living on the fringe of society, such as disabled people or those claiming social benefits, and expressed the 'unfairness and inequality' towards these other social groups in showing 'generosity' to asylum seekers, through the "reconstruction and repositioning of other social groups" (2003:447).

Although Lynn and Lea do not talk about hostility themes explicitly, their study certainly supports the results found in Leudar *et al's* project. Lynn and Lea write for example in their conclusion that:

> It is clear that the majority of the letter writers featured here actively encourage discriminatory practices and the denial of basic freedoms to those who would come here seeking asylum, all of which encourages the creation of this 'New Apartheid'. (2003:448)

Norman (2004) also revealed the construction of hostility themes in her research: *Equality and Exclusion: 'Racism' in a Swedish Town*. Norman conducted fieldwork in a small town in central Sweden, she names 'Gruvbo' and sought to understand the processes of *othering*, in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, as it appeared in local discourse construction. By studying the way in which constructions of refugees and 'locals' played out in various contexts within the community, various themes relating to processes of 'othering' were identified. These themes of othering came out through the use of referring to gender, consumption 'behaviour', material presentation of self and home, as well as clothes and manner. 'Local' residents constructed the 'difference' between 'We' and 'Them' in terms of these themes. A counter construction was formed by those in positions of 'authority', in an attempt to lessen the difference. As Norman argues, however, this instead led to a construction of *sameness*. These constructions of difference and sameness incorporated 'knowledge' from various public spheres, such as political debate and 'explanation' as a key aspect of the *talk* of 'locals' and 'officials' in Gruvbo. Norman concludes that both the processes of difference, which were processes of hostility and exclusion and sameness, which were attempts to reduce difference and create inclusion, were forms of racializing processes. The way in which the 'locals' incorporated common debate to defend their positions on refugee migration, much like officials at an 'anti-racist manifestation' held in Gruvbo, attempted to create a sense of 'sameness' , led to the same outcome, that of:

> Ethnicity, culture and refugeeness came to resemble irreversible (natural) traits, setting groups of people off from others and placing them in a subordinate position. From that point of view, these varying expressions could be conceptualized as racism even if they were not based on racist ideology and even if they were unintentional or simply well-meaning. (Norman, 2004:225)

2.1.2 Research on the 'insider': asylum seeker and refugee constructions and experiences

Whilst there are numerous studies, some of which I have mentioned above, which explore the social construction of asylum seekers and refugees by studying outside processes, such as media representations, there is a whole body of literature which has studied an 'insider' experience, that is to say the migrant's experience (Westin, 1973; Nyberg, E, 1993; Ehn, 2000; Blommaert, 2001; Verkuyten and de Wolf, 2002; Benmayor and Skotnes, 2005)

Leudar *et al's* study also had an 'insider' component, besides the newspaper analysis and 'local' narratives'. Their study included biographical narratives of refugees, living in the UK. Their study attempted to shed light on narratives of refugees and the consequences of the hostile context in which the refugees found themselves living. They make the point that this negation and hostility is reflected in refugees' and asylum seekers' biographical self-presentations and is ultimately detrimental to what they call, *psychological adjustment*. Leudar *et al* found that refugees and asylum seekers in their *talk*, constructed their identities around such hostilities, drawing on the hostility directed at them by 'Others', for example, in media debate. In the interviews with asylum seekers and refugees they found that the participants constructed *contrary identities* to media and hostile local representations. Extreme-case formulations were also used by the participants as a 'device to contest contrary positions' according to Leudar *et al*. One aim of Leudar *et al's* study was to explore the effects of such 'hostility' directed towards refugees and asylum seekers on their well-being. They found that refugees/asylum seekers orient to the hostility themes in their narrative constructions of themselves. They also conclude that:

> Most of our refugee/asylum seeker informants reported psychological problems and attributed them to their 'problems of living' in the UK (2008:216).

Westin (1973) studied in his PhD thesis: *Existens och identitet/ Existence and identity*, letters written by migrants to a newspaper for migrants, and examined the 'identity aspects' expressed in the letters. Through interpretation of what Westin took to be 'self-presentations' found in all the letters, this study contributed to a valuable understanding of how these migrants experienced their situation and life conditions and the problems they faced.

Nyberg, E. (1993) Studied children families and their migration, collecting data through interviews and observations, as well as carrying

out a field study in the region that the Chilean families in the study, originated from. Broadly speaking, Nyberg explored the *experience* of migration, through examining the different aspects associated with the migration. A common theme of 'loss' was found. For example the exposure to violence of persecution resulted in feeling a loss of safety and security. Migration itself entailed a loss of closeness to friends and relatives. Various other aspects of loss are raised in Nyberg's results, contributing to an understanding that this kind of migration can entail a threatening picture for the individual, including threat of incompetence, isolation and annihilation. Nyberg found that in order to deal with the experience of persecution and indeed reduce the perpetrator's attack, to failure, it was important for the families to create meaningful goals and pursue previous ones from the country of origin in the new context. Interrupted continuity was associated with difficulties in finding meaning, and Nyberg argues that in order to remove the hindrances to creating new opportunity, this is tackled through seeking continuity.

2.2 *Refugeeship* as a process

The ambition of my research study is to examine the entire asylum process: fleeing, claiming asylum, being granted refugee status and creating a life beyond being just a refugee. In Chapter One, I introduced the term refugeeship, and explained that it refers to the more existential aspects of the events or actions encountered through the migration process, such as those mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, and that refugeeship included identification, dis-identification and positioning processes in relation to the various events or actions of this kind of migration. Berg (2010) in her study: *Eksilets stoppesteder, Fra flukt og asyl till integrering og transnasjonale liv: Exile stops- from fleeing and asylum to integration and a transnational life* (own translation), based on people living in exile in Norway, illustrates the processes which can be involved in asylum migration and, moreover, the processes associated with moving beyond the exile position. Her work shows that this is not an uncomplicated process and this presented itself in many forms. Berg examined the process of exile which may or may not have an end. Her study shows that refugees experienced and approached the question of exile differently. Whilst many of the participants in her study had a relationship with their countries of origin, this played out differently. In a small number of the cases, exile was indeed terminated, literally, by the return to the country of origin. However, in most of the cases, a combination was employed, whereby a life was created in Norway, and at the same time, ties to the country of origin maintained. These participants expressed something of a closure on exile and a sense of 'integration'. Some of the participants in Berg's

study experienced this process of combination as a challenge and a struggle, and others solved exile through a commuting-like process, whereby they remained in Norway, but attempted to visit their 'home country' as often as possible. Berg makes the point, that regardless of how exile is approached and 'solved', most refugees are living transnational lives. Graham and Khosravi (1997) also examined living in exile, among Iranian refugees living in Sweden: *Home is Where You Make it: Repatriation and Diaspora Culture among Iranians in Sweden*. Their study unpacks the notion of home and homeland, as well as home culture and investigates the creation of a diaspora culture in Sweden or in other countries, in order to reconstruct certain aspects of Iranian culture. The results of this study reveal the complexities of such a reconstruction process and show that the Iranian diaspora context consists of several 'homes'. That is to say not everything can be found in one 'place'. The original home country, Iran, may represent mostly nostalgia for some, whilst another country represents a sense of place, in terms of practical aspects of life, like work, study or a place to raise one's children. Then there is a preferred place or final destination, be it Iran, or somewhere else. Finally there is a home which is represented by a place which best expresses Iranian culture, as recollected before leaving Iran. Graham and Khosravi, argue, in this sense that:

> In short, the Iranian diaspora is increasingly coming to resemble a number of countries (Iran among them) with significant Iranian populations which are informed about each other and which view each other hierarchically depending on their cultural and economic significance. Different parts of the diaspora are seen as satisfying different individual and group needs and as providing different kinds of opportunities. (1997:130)

The research I have presented so far, has illustrated the contexts in which refugees/asylum seekers can find themselves living, and research which examined this in terms of consequences for the refugee and asylum seeker, as well as research which demonstrates the more processual aspects of *becoming* a refugee, *being* a refugee and *moving beyond* the refugee position. This next section looks further at these processual aspects often called identification work, often associated with the process, and which people readily find themselves *doing* as a result of migration.

2.3 Migration, combining identifications and positioning

Asylum migration research is relatively recent, whilst research which explores identity has been taking place for a lot longer, as has using migration as an example for identity studies and the development of

identity in relation to 'immigrant' and ethnic populations is a growing field (Nyberg, C, 2006; Aveling and Gillespie 2008; Ali and Sonn, 2010; Kadianaki, 2010).

Research on migration has shown that the process of change linked to moving to another country is always associated with some sort of re-organisation of the sense of self (Westin, 1973, Nyberg, E. 1993; Benmayor and Skotnes, 2005; Nyberg, C. 2006; Borgström & Goldstein-Kyaga, 2006; Taylor, 2010). During the last decade an interesting theoretical discussion has developed concerning the space for new mixtures of identifications and belongings regarding the self re-organisation, when it comes to migrants, and the way in which migrants represent themselves as social actors in transcending boundaries through the use of concepts such as 'cultural citizen' or 'cosmopolitan' (Borgström & Goldstein-Kyaga, 2006). The 'immigrant' identity is therefore understood as fluid and contextualised. Kadianaki (2010), drawing on the work of Aveling and Gillespie, (2008); Bhatia, (2002); Deaux, (2006), Howarth, (2002, 2006); Verkuyten, (2005) writes:

> There is more and more evidence in favour of a fluid and contextualised immigrant identity, negotiated and constructed in particular social contexts, forged through social representations, dominant social discourses and specific social structures, and affected by issues of power (2010:438).

Borgström & Goldstein-Kyaga (2006), in their study about how globalisation impacts on people's identity work, illustrates the way young people, growing up in multicultural environments are forced to integrate several, sometimes opposing, aspects into their identities. The results show that this leads to opportunity, rather than conflict of identity. Nyberg, C. (2006) studied the identification processes of young people, who had grown up in Sweden and had collective historical migration experience, due to their parent's migration history of migrating to Sweden from Uganda as a result of the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972. In her study: *Pluri-cultural Identifications in a Swedish-Ugandan-Indian Context* she illustrates the multiple identity categories or *Pluri-cultural identifications* found in young people's accounts of themselves, and shows that on the one hand they were agentic in their social identity work and in integrating various identifications, even opposing, at the same time as engaging in an ongoing activity of negotiating self-definitions with regard to family and other social relations and contexts. Nyberg found that integrating various identifications was not so problematic for the individual's self-image; rather the problem occurred in self-presentation work to others. König (2009) supports Nyberg's notion of people's capacity to move between several 'cultural positions'. König explored the notion of self

in relation to the lived experience of culture, by studying those he calls 'multicultural individuals' to see if they could identify personal cultural positions as their own. In his study, drawing on the theoretical ideas of Bakhtin and Herman's concept of the dialogical self, König wanted to explore:

> The consequences of a dialogue between personal cultural positions in a spatial opposition, instead of as they are usually construed, as temporally dispersed events. (König, 2009: 104)

The aim of the study was to delve into the inner emotional work multicultural people *do* whilst shifting cultural contexts. Those who were considered 'multicultural' in the context of König's study were those who had the lived experience, as a child, adolescent or adult, of living in at least two countries other than their country of origin. König argues that the dialogical self exposed to cultural contexts constructs an encompassing multicultural self, whereby various cultures are grouped. The various 'positions' may be conflictual and may merge based on what he calls 'idiosyncratic reasoning'. König makes an important point about the capacity of the inter-and intrapersonal dialogue and its powerfulness to assist the acculturation process. 'Integration programmes' for asylum seekers, (and he states Holland as an example, although there are a number of contexts which easily serve as examples such as the 'Swedish for immigrant' [SFI] [6]courses in Sweden) ascribe the 'immigrant' knowledge about the 'new country'. There is little or no opportunity to explore the personal background of the individual or as König puts it:

> invite him or her to gently oscillate in a personal dialogue between then and there and here and now. The only relevant questions asked are to determine if the individual has the right to assume legal asylum (2009:117).

König concludes that supporting dialogue between 'personal cultural positions' with regard to how and why people define their personal cultural choices facilitates acculturation in multicultural societies.

Despite the ever increasing focus on the flexibility of self to move between various positions or the capacity to create and combine multiple identifications, we should not ignore the contextual existence of individuals either, and in this sense there are two sides to this coin. It is not always possible to move freely between various arenas which

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[6] SFI: Svenska för invandrare (Swedish for immigrants) although a language acquisition course, does tend to become a context whereby the immigrant finds him or herself exposed to 'knowledge' regarding the 'new' country within the limited context of the classroom

may allow for this somewhat 'luxury' project of combined identifications. Rather, some individuals, as well as facing a lack of cultural or even economic resources, to enact multiple identifications, also face the parameters placed on them, by being up against collective knowledge, or macro story lines (Deaux, 2001). The somewhat 'stigmatised identity' (Howarth, 2002, 2006) an asylum seeker has, with no opportunity to travel outside the new context during the asylum claim, hardly puts him/her in a position to descend on the project of mixed identifications, instead he/she engages in a process of resistance to stigmatised identifications.

2.4 Final comment

My research concerning asylum seekers and refugees contributes to these investigations of the self re-organisations, for example how one deals with the mixtures of identifications and belongings and how one's positioning work in everyday discourse and narratives, tends towards an overall coherence. The point of departure for my empirical analysis is a desire to understand more about the identification and positioning work of asylum seekers and refugees, who are living in what can be expressed as a largely hostile environment, which does not commonly facilitate the process of complex identification work associated with changing worlds and globalisation. This study aims to examine these processes of multiple identifications and fluid positioning work, in the limited space asylum seekers and refugees often have to create such a 'luxury' mix of identifications. In current research, and in my study, identity work implies the unfinished business of identity in construction. That is to say, identity is understood as a work in progress Talk is an important context where identity work takes place and where identities are constituted, everyday life interaction is another. In the case of refugees, it is quite obvious that both self-and alter-defined identity work takes place within a context of legal and economic structures, which limit the space for personal and linguistic innovations. The next chapter will explore in more detail the theoretical framework employed here to enable the study of such processes.

3. Theoretical point of departure

The theoretical grounds, supporting my analysis presented in the empirical chapters, Five, Six, Seven and Eight are broadly speaking, inspired by social psychological theories, using theories which are usually summarised within the discursive-narrative tradition. These theories provide conceptual guidance in my exploration of the process of social meaning-making concerning refugeeship, as expressed by the participants.

3.1 Introduction to discursive psychology

Discursive social psychology[7] as a research tradition (see Edwards and Potter, 1992; Harré and Gillet,1994 for an overview of the tradition), can be understood as a response to finding new ways of understanding and studying social psychological phenomena, rather than those methods common in traditional psychology. Discursive social psychology is commonly used in what is known as the 'new paradigm' of social psychology and is a shift away from the study and image of a self-contained, solitary individual psyche. Billig (1999) postulates that we may sit alone and think, but our thoughts are saturated with dialogue and social contexts. What is meant here is that language and thoughts are not inseparable, according to a discursive psychological approach. Discursive psychology's criticism of traditional psychology lies in the way traditional psychology studies the individual and her thinking as something first of all cognitive, taking place in the individual's head, and ignores social context and human encounters, and the way in which the psychological processes are largely dependent on the context and human interaction.

The perspective used here, is concerned with how people construct identity, represent their experiences, life situations and social reality, in interaction with others. Language is central in 'getting at' an understanding of these processes. However, although language is a fundamental tool here, it is not only the language itself that has been analysed, thoughts, are also of interest. Perhaps not in a cognitive sense, but in order to gain an interpretative understanding, as understood within the tradition of phenomenological sociology (Schutz,1972),

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[7] Often referred to as just discursive psychology

whereby the understanding of the life world, and how it is formed, is a concern, as well as how we interpret others, and our own actions as meaningful.

3.1.1 Discourse-oriented narrative analysis

The narrative tradition is broad, with several approaches and points of departure to understanding what a narrative is, as well as the knowledge which can be 'generated' through the interpretation of narratives. The study of health and illness experience has, for example a long tradition of using a narrative approach, and looks at the movement of stories and metaphoric constructions (Hydén and Hydén, 1997; Kleinman, 1998). The narrative approach employed in this thesis (Bruner, 1990, Mischler, 1999; Gergen, 1988; Taylor, 2010), has a discursive-narrative psychological point of departure. Although, my own approach cannot be described as strictly discursive narrative, I draw rather on these theories in an interpretative analysis, aiming at understanding the experiences of refugeeship, that to a large extent seem to be influenced by social meaning-making, within the contexts of the participants' ordinary, everyday life. The data I have used has a lot in common with life stories and narratives and illustrates the way research participants, for instance draw on wider discourse or 'master narratives' (Mischler, 1999) in talk about their experience and situation. Specific to the discursive-narrative approach, is that rather than seeing a narrative as *representing* a 'whole person' or as illustrating a particular intention or mental state, the talk in the discursive-narrative approach is seen as something we *present* and *do*, in relation to our on-going identity construction. This is sometimes described as *doing* identity. As Gergen (1988) argues, we talk ourselves into 'being'.

   This approach is concerned with the *resources* available, culturally and discursively, as something which allows and shapes our talk. Another aspect of the discursive dimension is the assumption that it is not a single person behind the talk. What this means is that in talk, culturally available meanings are drawn upon, making the talk more social, rather than individual. What and how we draw on particular meanings and culturally available resources, is part of the construction of identity.

> The identity is emergent and co-constructed. (Wetherell, 2001:186).

That is to say, I can carve out positions for myself as well as, making positions available by others for others. As we will see, this is precisely what goes on in the lives of people fleeing from their country of origin. They are born in a certain type of universe of socially shared meanings.

Their decision to leave their country is often discussed with others sharing the counter-discourses in opposition to the regime of the specific country. Seeking asylum means encountering a meaning-making system of inquiry – namely, the legal and official system of asylum. Receiving refugee status means gaining access to a new space of meaning-making, influenced by official decisions and everyday life encounters, between refugees and residents born in a country.

Common to this narrative perspective, is an understanding that people order their experiences as stories (Hermans, 2004), sometimes known as 'storying' (Bruner, 1990). Storying our experience gives a sense of self, as it: (1) leads to self-understanding and (2) gives the opportunity to share our experiences with others. Stories often also include values and thus people mirror themselves and others in these values, ending up with a given set of statuses. All this is part of human meaning-making. When people story their experiences, the 'telling', in itself, is understood as a process of meaning-making. Hermans (2004) suggests that the construction of 'self' is assisted in a number of ways. One of these ways is that when we talk about our experiences to others, we do not only 'tell' our story, rather, we also 'hear' our story. Through telling our story and hearing the reflections of the 'Other' to our narrative, we rehear our own story, gaining insight into its meaning and new perspectives.

3.2 Story lines

Our personal stories not only include autobiographical meaning-making. There is also what Davies and Harré (1999) call the 'braided development' of several meaning-makings. These are created and organised in conversation. For example, events which have happened, the various characters, moral dilemmas and controversy.

The contexts of acts and positions are story lines (Slocum and Van Langenhove, 2003:225). Building story lines are accomplished through the employment of discursive tools, such as concepts, metaphors, simile, tropes and so forth (Ibid: 228)

Plummer (2001:188) describes themes and story lines as being closely linked to the plots that 'start to organise a life'. Life is placed into major themes or story lines, whereby 'belonging' or 'exclusion' can become themes or story lines running through a life narrative.

On a more macro level, various newspapers' repeated stories of the growing numbers of asylum seekers can lead to a story line of 'asylum seekers as a social problem to be solved'. Slocum and Van Langenhove, when analysing what they call 'integration speak', give an example of a macro story line, namely, an EU story line as 'an even closer union' (Ibid). This can be understood as a theme which arises through the

process of interpretation, studying the way in which an institution such as the EU talks about integration. Here we see that story lines and positioning can take place on an institutional level and often the positions people take up are an act of rhetorical positioning in resistance to such macro-level story lines. Even if the macro story lines are not stated, the speaker may assume the context, such as the one given above: 'asylum seekers as a social problem to be solved' and direct their talk to this story line. This is what Bakhtin called 'hidden polemics' (Bakhtin, 1986).

3.3 Self-concept, dialogical self and positioning

Self is understood here as flexible and dynamic. It encompasses a cluster of multiple I-positions and voices, rather than seen as a static, internal state. Hermans and Dimaggio (2004), referring to the theory of 'Dialogical Self', draw on the work of James (1890/1950) and Bakhtin (1973, 1981) and write:

> Given the intrinsic interwovenness of internal and external dialogues, the self does not function as a 'container' of cognition, thought and emotion centralized in its self. It does not operate as a unified agency in a multivoiced environment. Rather, the self is multivoiced because the multiplicity of voices is also in the self and their mutual relationships characterise the self as a 'society of mind' (2004: 2)

The positions and voices of 'Self' are understood here, as in constant dialogue with each other. In this sense the self is not understood as something which is static and located in the minds of individuals. It is rather socially contingent and dynamic. I-positions first of all refer to where a person finds him/herself in a specific context, in terms of what he or she says or does. Voices refer more specifically to different types of expressions from a specific I-position. 'Dialogical self' intertwines the concepts Self and Dialogue. Traditionally, self is understood as an internal state, and dialogue as an external process, whereas the theory of dialogical self looks beyond this distinction of internal and external, and instead recognises the interconnectedness of internal-external processes. The 'self' is extended to include individuals and groups from one's wider societal context and includes therefore internal and external positions. This is known as the 'extended self' in dialogical self terminology (Ibid).

3.3.1 Relationship between social and personal identification

Jenkins (2008) sees the collective (social) and the personal (individual) identifications as entangled with one another and in an ongoing process

of identification creation. Wetherell (2008:76) writes along similar lines and poses the question:

> Do we want to keep encouraging forms of work that corral the social and the study of identity to roles and categories and separate the subjective from the study of the social?

Davies and Harré (1990:263) claim that development of a sense of who one is and how the world is interpreted, involves certain processes. They describe these identification processes as:

1. Learning of the categories which include some people and exclude others, e.g. male/female, father/daughter;
2. Participating in the various discursive practices through which meanings are allocated to those categories. These include the interactional meaning-making through which different subject positions are elaborated;
3. Positioning of self in terms of the categories and interactional meaning-making. This involves imaginatively positioning oneself as if one belongs in one category and not in the other (e.g. as girl and not boy, or good girl and not bad girl);
4. Recognition of oneself as having the characteristics that locate oneself as a member of various sub classes of dichotomous categories and not of others- i.e. the development of a sense of oneself as belonging in the world in certain ways and thus seeing the world from the perspective of one so positioned. This recognition entails an emotional commitment to the category membership and the development of a moral system organized around the belonging.

3.3.2 Interactional episodes and the presentation of self

Understanding psychological phenomena is something born out of the 'interactional episodes' (Harré, 1993). Goffman's work on the presentation of self in everyday interaction places emphasis on the importance of how we are perceived by others in our maintenance and construction of self. To some extent we have agency over presenting ourselves in a particular way, in particular contexts. However if we are not successful in convincing others of our identifications, then this has consequences for our identifications. It is not enough to attempt to assert certain identifications; we depend on the validation of others, if we are to be successful at this task (Jenkins, 2008). Goffman's theory of 'self', exemplifies a person's capacity to perform a multiplicity of 'roles' in various contexts. Through these performances our impressions are monitored in order to convey the 'right' impression in the 'right' context. Goffman's famous term 'Impression management'

is drawn on by Harré (1993) who calls this interactive work of self-presentations, 'Presentational activity'. Much like Harré's theory of social being, which includes positioning theory, Goffman's theory of self in everyday life, focuses on studying 'episodes' in everyday contexts:

> Episodes as the structures of social encounters are like melodies in that they come into existence sequentially. If one wants to understand how psychological phenomena are created in the sequential development of structured sequences of act-actions, one has to understand the dynamics of social episodes. This is what positioning theory aims at (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999:5).

Goffman focused on interaction between individuals in their social context. Positioning theory also looks to this interaction. It includes, however, the specific dynamics of the particular episodes. Harré and Van Langenhove postulate that by looking at three aspects of interaction, one can gain a deeper understanding of what is going on and how social and psychic phenomena are constructed. These three features of interaction outlined by Harré Van Langenhove are:

> (1) The moral positions of the participants and the rights and duties they have to say certain things; (2) The conversational history and the sequence of things already being said; (3) The actual sayings with their power to shape certain aspects of the social world (ibid: 6)

3.3.3 Positioning theory and discursive practice

One central question of this study is how the participants identify and dis-identify in making sense of, 'refugee status'. Refugee status is here roughly understood as a socially constructed category influenced by both official and everyday life meanings. Positioning theory can help shed light upon how the participants position themselves in relation to the dominating discourses and socially constructed categories offered to refugees and asylum seekers. The concept of agency is central to the dynamic way in which positioning theory sees 'social being' (Harré, 1979/1993). Positioning theory is useful for understanding the influence that dominating discourses can have on people, as well as how the person relates to different discursive affordances. For example, the ways in which people resist macro-story lines:

> Looked at in terms of what is logically and what is socially possible, a position can be looked at as a loose set of rights and duties that limit the possibilities of action. A position implicitly limits how much of what is logically possible for a given person to say and do and is properly a part of that person's repertoire of actions at a certain moment in a certain

> context, including other people. This bounds the content of the repertoire of socially possible actions (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003:5)

Taylor (2010), when discussing the power of positioning oneself and others through discursive practice, talks about *resources*, referring to the implication that some discourses are more 'established' than others. Therefore, breaking through strong, or established discourse which is difficult to change, can be challenging as a 'member' of a particular 'category', making it difficult to manoeuvre and take up new or old positions. Social categorisation is basic to positioning theory. People, who appear within a specific context, tend to be categorised according to prevailing social and linguistic conventions. The category of 'refugee' tends to be linked to strong discourses, at least in certain parts of society. Having said this, Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) challenge the term 'categorisation', referencing to Billig (1987) and Potter and Wetherell (1987). Their concern lies in understanding the categorisation process as 'a 'necessary cognitive process' and assuming categories have a 'fixed structure'. Categorisation is not seen as a cognitive process here, rather as a social process, and categories here are understood to have a changeable nature, over time and space.

Positioning theory has a similar point of departure as Goffman's 'Dramaturgical' theory. The term 'role' is dismissed, as being more static, and replaced with position, as something more flexible, dynamic and fluid. Positioning theory is useful in my study for understanding the way the asylum system positions claimants and the capacity and agency of people fleeing from their country of origin and seeking asylum in another, and thus gradually taking up different positions in interaction with 'Others'. These positions can be analysed to understand more about the construction of social and personal identifications and the way in which subject positions are used in order to say something about one's identities (Burr, 1996, Davies and Harré, 1990). Thus, positioning theory relates more to the interactional work which takes place between people, in taking up positions or the 'voice of others', for example, in order to convey a particular standpoint (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). Billig (1996) makes a similar point, in his concept 'rhetorical talk'. 'Rhetorical talk' illustrates the way in which our talk can be 'shaped' or directed towards 'Others', despite the 'Other' may not be present. This may be in response, for example to feeling challenged by a particular notion or anticipating the response or challenge from the 'Other', all these practices in talk, construct and reveal identity. Again, concepts such as 'positioning', 'presentation of self' and the ideas of Billig in terms of 'rhetorical talk' are all points of departure for the approach to the narrative analysis carried out in this thesis.

3.4 Ontological assumptions

The ontological standpoint in this study rests upon the assumption that human beings are to a large extent products of social processes. The experiences, acts and products of human beings are always influenced by human meaning-making, and that this meaning-making is heavily influenced by socially shared understandings.

These social encounters are processes of interaction. Within these social processes people, groups and institutions understand and position themselves, as well as are being positioned by others. People, as products of social processes are also understood here as active agents, with the capacity to take up and resist positions, as well as re-position themselves, and others, in interaction. Therefore they are active agents in using their shared knowledge to reach these ends.

The linguistic turn, the 'turn' towards a more social view of language, which has greatly influenced the social sciences during the last half century (Gustavsson, 2008), takes as its point of departure the understanding that human life worlds are shaped by linguistic form and content. Within this tradition, concepts like discourse have been developed, referring to social patterns of talking about and conceiving something in a specific context. As we shall see, discursive practices concerning asylum seekers and refugees heavily influenced the lives and experiences of the participants in this study. However, in discursive psychology, individuals are not merely passive recipients of external discursive practices, there is space for individual agency, whereby, one can accept or reject understandings and positions offered or even ascribed by others, In fact, individuals even seem to be able to invent new understandings and positions which will, in turn, be understood and reacted upon by others in a continuous social dialogue.

When studying the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, it becomes obvious that their lives, to a large extent have also been influenced by societal and sometimes economic structures. These structures are, to some extent also, of course, influenced by meaning-making. However, it is imperative to stress that imprisonment, torture and the kind of persecution many refugees have suffered, have a special kind of reality of their own, in the sense that they for instance affect the human body, causing pain. Stating that such experiences, for example pain and torture are social constructions, can naturally be understood as provocative. When I stress the importance of social meaning-making in this thesis, I do not at all deny the reality of societal structures like prisons or similar institutions used for asylum seekers. Neither do I question the reality of physical pain or the damage which can be caused through such institutions. These realities constitute a background of life

experiences, often characteristic to the experience of becoming a refugee. However, this study does not focus on these experiences, but on experiences of the asylum migration process in relation to, for example, sense of self and the dialogue of meaning-making linked to the experience of the transitions involved.

3.5 Summarising some of the key concepts used in this study

Here I will briefly summarise some of the key concepts utilised in this thesis.

The term self-presentation and identification are used in the thesis primarily by drawing on the work of Goffman (1959) and Jenkins (2008). Goffman in his book: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life introduces observations of daily life and interaction for the creation of self. Daily scenes and the metaphor of theatre is used to exemplify the way people 'perform' or manage their 'impressions' in front of others. Goffman's concepts, public and private self, are based on the idea that public self is performed while the private self is aware that these performances are necessary for maintaining identity in the eyes of others, and even maintaining respect in social interaction.

Identification is understood and used here to emphasise the more dynamic, fluid aspects of 'who we are' rather than the term identity, which has become a contested term in the social sciences in recent years. According to Hall, in du Gay *et al*:

> Identification turns out to be one of the least well-understood concepts-almost as tricky as, though preferable to, 'identity' itself; and certainly no guarantee against the conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter (2008: 16)

Although identification is a challenging concept, it is understood in processual terms as an ongoing construction, a process never complete (Ibid). Identity or identification, deployed here is fragmented and changeable over time and space and not singular but multiple. Jenkins writes:

> With respect to identification, the individually unique and the collectively shared can be understood as similar in important respects (2008:37).

Jenkins sees the individual and collective identifications as entangled with each other and therefore he postulates that the theorisation of identification must take consideration to both aspects, and equally. Wetherell (2008), likewise, takes this important theoretical stance, of the difficulties of making simple distinctions between 'I' and 'me'. In

this thesis social and personal identification are seen as being in constant dialogue with each other. This understanding constitutes the basis of the study object of this thesis. Hall, in Hall and du Gay (1996) writes:

> I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture,* between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourse, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken' (1996:5-6).

Position and positioning are concepts which have been used within several disciplines. This thesis, using the works of Davies and Harré (1990), Harré (1993), Harré and Moghaddam (2003) and Hollway (1984), adopts positioning theory to understand the way in which the participants in this study locate themselves and others through talk, the expression of feeling positioned within discourse, and the practice of resisting or adopting particular positions within particular discourses. This thesis, whilst recognising the force of discursive practice, sees the individual as agentic in her or his positioning work and identification construction, and not merely a victim of discourse. At the same time, the constraints certain societal practices place on individuals and their identity work are recognised.

As I have made clear in the above sections, people are, to some extent, understood as products of social processes. The so-called linguistic turn, placing emphasis on an increased understanding of the significance of language for human thought and action (Gustavsson, 2008), is a point of departure here. The experiences of seekers of asylum and refugees are understood here as something which is constructed due to the social processes common to asylum migration, rather than solely as the experience of the individual. People are acknowledged as agents in the creation of these processes, Harré (1993) writes:

> The fact that people are created by other people and that their actions are in essence joint actions does not mean that the actions people perform are socially caused. People, as we construct them, are built to be capable of autonomous action, to engage, usually with others, in reflective discourse on possible courses of action, and to be competent in the discursive presentation of and taking up of personal responsibility (1993:3).

The agentic capacity of people implies to take up and locate others in dialogue, construct and maintain discourse and position oneself and others in relation to discourse. This does not mean that taking up certain

positions or resisting them, cannot be challenging, due to constraints allocated to particular individuals, groups or institutions. Thus, the theoretical landscape in which my analysis is conducted is characterised by complex tensions between social factors and personal agency.

4. Methodological considerations

The previous chapter placed the study into a theoretical frame; it serves as a guide to analyse and understand the narratives collected for this study. This chapter will take you, the reader, on my method's journey, in an attempt to illustrate how the study was conducted and the kind of material I collected to answer the questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

4.1 The study's point of departure in relation to the theory outlined in Chapter Three

People, who flee their countries of origin in search of a safe haven, find themselves in a position of having to embark on the legal and administrative procedure of asking another country for protection. Listening to the way in which asylum seekers and refugees talk about this procedure is a way to gain deeper understanding, insight and knowledge of what this process involves for refugees. The data collected sheds light on the legal and administrative procedure, as experienced by the claimant. The official categorisations have implications in the public and political spheres, circumstancing the potential room in which the participants have to manoeuvre.

The object of study is more specifically to explore the experiential process which the participants of my study express in their transition from their country of origin to their new country - What I call refugeeship. This means I am interested in their refugee stories and meaning- making concerning fleeing, claiming asylum, being granted refugee status etc. My exploration brought my focus to the positioning and identification processes found in the participants' stories. This approach utilised in my analysis is influenced by a discursive psychological perspective. By analysing the participants *talk*, allows to uncover the meaning ascribed to the experience. More specifically, I explore what elements the stories consists of, what people are brought into the account and how relationships are described with a special focus on how the participants present themselves in their story.

4.1.1 The aim, objectives and questions of the study

Against the background of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three, the study aims to explore how refugeeship, as a process, is articulated and experienced, starting from life before leaving one's country of origin, fleeing that country and seeking protection in another, including the official asylum procedure, and what it involves to be categorised as a 'refugee'. The focus is on the experience of fleeing and claiming asylum in order to live in Sweden or England, and the transition to becoming and being a refugee. Hence, my broad research question is:

What meaning do refugees and asylum seekers ascribe to the transitional aspects of fleeing, making an asylum claim and being granted refugee status in a new country and how do they make sense of the transitions they go through?

How we experience a specific situation is related to how we perceive the general situation we are in. This, in turn is influenced by 'Others', how they make sense of the specific transition a refugee undertakes. Thus, social meanings are also a focus in my study as they appear in the stories of the persons who have experienced this type of transition. An important part of the social meanings of fleeing and becoming a refugee concerns the official procedure of seeking asylum, and what it involves to be 'labelled' refugee. In my analysis of the refugeeship identification, dis-identification and positioning processes that are taken up in the stories of refugeeship, emerged as key findings and was further explored. This focus on identifications, dis-identifications and positioning in the analysis is linked to my more theoretical interest in self-constructions under particular living conditions.

The more specific objectives of the study are to explore:

(1) Refugeeship as an official process and as a lived experience; (2)The meaning-making of these processes which are central to the study's focus, and involve several actors or parties which are in interaction with each other; a) the official part/actor, b) the asylum seeker c)'others' attempting to make sense of asylum migration. All this is explored through the stories of the refugees themselves. The theoretical perspective employed in this study sees this interaction as dialogical meaning-making, and is essentially about the creation of categorisations, positioning and identification work, whereby Alter and Ego come into play.

Thus, more specific, important questions for exploration are:

What identity talk is present in the participant's talk of refugeeship?

How does the category 'refugee' play out in the participants' stories, and how are current representations and the framing up of the concept 'refugee' talked about by the participants in this study?

What identifications and positions do the participants take up when they talk of their experience?

This study has a qualitative, explorative point of departure and analytically draws on a narrative-discursive approach. According to this approach stories are understood as situated 'tellings'. An area of interest was to understand what participant's are *doing* in their account-giving. Through talk identities are performed and constructed. A basic notion, upon which this study rests, is that people in dialogue construct their identities and take up, as well as resist, different positions. People are not static, passive receivers of identity and life situations, but, at least to some extent, active and agentic in their construction of identifications. This is both a personal and social continuous process. In order to 'get at' these processes I set out to generate dialogue with refugees and asylum seekers. These dialogues, thus collected contain story descriptions of the participants' migration and asylum seeking experience. Reaching an understanding of their experiences involves gaining an understanding about the subject matter. A basic assumption here is that language is central and that it is through language that social reality, understanding and meaning-making are constructed. The fact that others have important roles in the meaning-making concerning fleeing and becoming a refugee motivates a closer study of social meanings per se. However, my interest in the refugeeship, as the experiential process of the refugees themselves, led me to the decision that I should concentrate on their stories and the expressions of social meaning-making only as it appeared in their stories. Studies with a focus on the social meaning are important, and I hope to continue researching about these processes.

4.2 Understanding the interview context

Since I sought answers to my research questions through analysing talk, it was a natural choice to carry out interviews. Focus groups are of course also compatible with my 'dialogical' interest, but given the sensitive, somewhat private nature of the research subject, I felt it

would not have been appropriate to employ focus groups. Sometimes, I felt that it would have been interesting to follow my participants in their everyday lives, in order to learn more about the influence of other people and environments, (such as refugee reception centres), on the refugee stories. However, observations of the participants everyday lives in both England and Sweden would have been very time consuming and impossible to carry out within the frame of the present study. Consequently I chose to focus only on interviews. Having said that, in some cases where more than one interview was not possible to conduct, time spent 'in the field' enriched the interviews, even in the cases of those I only met once. By being with my participants in various situations, like accompanying them to talk to a housing officer, or by helping them look up activities in their local area, gave valuable insight into some of the challenges they faced and the opportunities or lack of opportunities available to them to solve their daily challenges. I could see for myself how they approached this, as well as how they were approached and treated by 'Others'. For example, as a white 'native' in the company of my participants, persons of 'authority' would on occasion talk through me, rather than talking directly to my participant. Such manner disclosed what I interpreted as a lack of respect for my participant's ability to take in the information being given, or answer questions about themselves by themselves.

An ambition of mine was to keep the interview situation as open and interactional as possible so the interviews I carried out represent an interactive and dialogic process. Mishler (1999) sees participants' accounts as 'co-produced'. These interpersonal aspects which are present between interviewee and interviewer are sometimes named reflexivity (Aull Davies, 2003). According to Fairclough (1989) interviewing consists of three levels; discourse, text and interaction. These levels, Fairclough postulates, are not inseparable; rather, they have a relationship with each other. In the interview situation, discourse is produced, and in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee interpretation processes take place. The interview is set within a social context of significance to the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Using Faircloughs' idea of the three levels, issues of equality are part of the social conditions present in an interview situation.

The interview situation in this study was complex in many ways, when it came to these interpersonal aspects. For example, the dynamics of equality and inequality were not uncomplicated. Asylum seekers and refugees have a great deal of experience when it comes to being 'interviewed' by migration authorities of various kinds, for example, in

'screening interviews'[8]. Therefore, I made a conscious effort to establish a 'climate' within the interview, which did not resemble that of a migration authority interview or whereby I was betrayed as a person on the side of migration authorities. Unfortunately, I felt at times very aware that the interview could take on the shape of an 'authoritative' context, probably due to a combination of my failing efforts to create a different (more lenient) atmosphere, and partly a pattern response easy for the participants to fall into, given their experience of having to present a more 'scripted-like' version to migration authorities. Having said this, the interview did not naturally take on the form of me, the interviewer, always being seen as the authority. This was especially the case of those who had long experiences of being politically active, organisational leaders, or of working with issues of asylum and refugee rights. In these cases the interview could easily become that of a 'lecture' in human rights, given by the interviewee. So, it is in this sense that I mean that the balance of equality in the interview situation did not always coincide with the traditional allocation of roles between interviewer and interviewee, it was rather like a continuous pendulum, swinging back and fourth between me as the interviewer, seen as the 'leader' of the interview, and the interviewee, as someone with the 'knowledge'. As for the 'scripted' version this will be taken up later on in the chapter. I now turn to the method of data collection.

4.2.1 Data collection through interviews

In order to collect these stories, 25 interviews were carried out. 19 recorded interviews are presented in this study, ten from England and nine from Sweden. In England, all the interviews were conducted in English. In Sweden, six were carried out in Swedish and three were conducted in English, always according to the participant's preference. The remaining six interviews carried out both in Sweden and England, have been left out because of incoherency or because the participant did not allow me to record the interview. Those who did not allow a recording all expressed that this was due to fear of further persecution. Immediately after these interviews, I talked into my digital recorder what I recalled from the conversation. However, this resulted in a summary of my 'impressions' of what the participant had expressed,

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[8] In the words of Clayton (2006:395) "the screening interview does not deal with the substance of the claim, but in current practice is to establish the identity and nationality of the applicant, to take fingerprints and photographs and decide whether their route of travel suggests that they could be returned to a safe third country."

rather than the actual words the participant had used. Since I was interested in the dialogical aspects of how the participant had talked about their experiences, interviews really needed to be transcribed verbatim for analytical purposes. The only use I made of this data was for checking my results, after the analysis of the transcribed interviews. This gave an opportunity to look for important contradiction and contrast, in terms of the refugeeship and its interpretation.

4.2.2 Transcription and language of conduct

Transcripts were produced in the interview language, and the analysis was carried out in English. In Swedish interview excerpts were translated into English. When the interviews were in Swedish this meant that neither interviewer nor interviewee was speaking their mother tongue. Although I consider that I have transcribed verbatim, I have edited certain grammatical errors such as "but I always interested in political circumstances in my country" to "But I was ….". Since such corrections do not involve changing the content of what was being said. I did not include these small errors in transcription out of respect to my participants.

4.2.3 Transcription conventions

In accordance with my choice of method and analytical approach, and in order to understand the stories collected as dialogues, it was important to transcribe the interviews verbatim with as much detail as possible. Pauses, therefore, in terms of minutes, were accounted for, by putting the number of minutes in brackets, such as; (2), and emphasis on words or raised voice was made apparent in the interview texts by underlining. To illustrate laughter, (***) was inserted. Names were replaced by country initials and numbers, such as, UK1 or SW2. The reason for this somewhat impersonal approach is to protect identity, but a further reason, in line with the discursive narrative approach is to avoid using personal names which can lead to associations and therewith preconceived notions about the participants. Square brackets [ ] indicates when the interviewer talks during an excerpt and XXX represents when a name, location or organisation has been omitted for confidential reasons.

4.2.4 What did the interview situation look like?

I was keen to keep the interview situation open, to allow it to assume a rather low key climate. By low key, I mean I was cautious that many of my participants had suffered extreme trauma in their countries of origin

and this was extended when encountering the asylum system in the new contexts. The asylum system involves a series of interviews, whereby the purpose is to establish the identity of the claimant, the 'trustworthiness' of his/her case and whether or not there are clear grounds to grant asylum. With this in mind, I was keen to create a completely different point of departure in our interviews together, and make clear that this was a space where personal experience was of interest[9]. It therefore goes without saying that in terms of method, the interviews were of an open-ended character. An interview guide was not used. The interview was prompted by me asking about life in one's country of origin or about arriving in England or Sweden, but only if the participants showed that he or she was expecting me to take the lead at the beginning of the interview. Many of the participants took their own lead, however, and began the interview by saying "I will begin by telling you about…", for example. When participants told me about a particular situation or experience such as how one engaged smugglers to get out of one's country of origin, I might then follow this up by asking "did you know which country you were going to?" So in this sense the interview was more 'ad hoc' than a structured or semi-structured interview and this was intentional. Towards the end of the interview I would ask for some background information such as age. This was asked deliberately towards the end, so as not to give the interview such a formal feel at the outset, and most of the background information came forward throughout the interview anyway, such as "I come from...".

With five participants, several interviews were carried out. Besides these 'formal' interviews, I met most of the participants informally between interviews. Recorded interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 134 minutes (2 hours and 14 minutes). The participants talked about life prior to migration, claiming asylum and what it was like to arrive in the new context and what their lives looked like today. The interview ended when the participant gave signs of not wanting to continue. This could be through them clearly stating, "Are we finished now?" to not really talking anymore or by asking, "I think I have already talked about that, haven't I?"

4.3 Data collection from two different countries

Although data were collected in two European countries; the intention was not to carry out a comparative study in the traditional sense, but rather to add contrast to the analysis work (Olin-Lauritzen, 1997). Since the interest of the study was to understand people's experiences of a

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[9] Official interviews in relation to making a legal claim for asylum, do not tend include room for *personal* explanation.

particular official system, claiming asylum, it seemed important to collect data in more than one country, so as to avoid the risk of collecting data material which only illustrated migration from one country to another. The following table gives an overview of the participants in this study, in terms of: migrant status, country of origin, number of interviews, new country, previous background/today, age and sex. I do not indicate who the participant is in this table, in terms of UK1, SW1 and so on. This is to protect identity and ensure confidentiality.

Table of participants (Migrant status, Country of origin, Number of interviews, New Country, Occupation/background, Age, Sex

Migrant status	Country of origin	Number of interviews / informal encounters	New country	Background / and today	Age	Sex
Refugee	Ethiopia	1 recorded interview, plus 1 informal	England	PhD in Agriculture / Unemployed working as volunteer	50+	M
Refugee	Kenya	1 recorded interview	England	Living in refugee camp / Student	22	M
Refugee	Congo-Kinshasa	1 recorded interview, 3 informal	England	Working for a travel agents/ Refugee advisor/ Project co-ordinator	40+	M
Asylum seeker (at time of interview: now refugee)	Kurdistan-Turkey	1 recorded interview 1 informal	England	Unemployed/ Unemployed	30+	F
Refugee	Iran	2 recorded interviews, 3 informal	England	Political activist/Voluntary worker with refugee	40+	F

				and women's rights		
Refugee	Iraq	1 recorded interview, 3 informal	England	Law degree and diplomat / Unemployed	50+	M
Asylum seeker	Zimbabwe	1 recorded interview 1 informal	England	Property developer /Unemployed	50+	F
Refugee	Rwanda	1 recorded interview	England	House wife / Student	40+	F
Asylum seeker at time of intervie w/ later 'refused '	Albania	1 recorded interview	England	Builder / Unemployed	40+	M
Refugee	Burma	1 recorded interview 2 informal	Sweden	Student, politically active / PhD working for UN	40+	M
Refugee	Iraq	1 recorded interview	Sweden	Lawyer / Student	30+	M
Refugee	Kurdistan Iraq	2 recorded interviews	Sweden	Political activist / Working for local council Stockholm	40+	M
Refugee	Iran	3 recorded interviews 3 informal	Sweden	Political activist / Student/ Care worker	40+	M
Refugee	Iraq	1 recorded interview	Sweden	Professor / Unemployed	50+	M
Refused asylum seeker	Lebanon	1 recorded interview	Sweden	Marketing graduate / Unemployed	30+	M
Refugee	Kurdistan Iran	2 recorded interviews	Sweden	Political activist / Unemployed	50+	M
Refugee	Iran	2 recorded interviews	Sweden	Political activist / Pre-	50+	F

		2 informal		school teacher		
Asylum seeker	Iraq	1 recorded interview	England	Medical doctor / Unemployed	30+	M
Refugee	Iran	1 recorded interview 2 informal	Sweden	Psychologist / Psychologist	40+	F

4.3.1 Selection of participants

The participants have been included first and foremost because they defined themselves as feeling compelled to flee their country of origin and as someone who had experience of claiming asylum in England or Sweden. The imbalance, in the ratio of men and women is purely an issue of access, as is age, country of origin and background. In total, these differences contribute to the variation I wanted in order to have data from different types of refugee backgrounds.

4.3.2 Recruitment of study participants

Finding the participants for the study was extremely challenging, mainly due to the practicality of access. Many refugees' and asylum seekers' life situations are uncertain and each day is taken as it comes with new challenges arising. Committing oneself to an interview time was therefore often difficult. Besides these more practical issues, access has a more complex side to it, which I understand to do with my ability as a researcher, to gain the trust of the participants and be someone they feel comfortable with, and indeed feel it is 'worth' telling their story to. Initially the interviews had a rather formal and matter-of-fact feel to them. However, over time, the participants talked candidly about what it had meant to them, to flee their country and to be labelled 'refugee'.

For a while I toyed with the idea of only interviewing those who had received refugee status, but decided to include even those who were still in the claimant phase. This was partly an issue of access, that is to say, it was difficult to find sufficiently many participants to take part in the study who had refugee status. Partly to do with the consideration that stories from those still in the midst of the process, could enrich the material rather than only collecting retrospective experiences. Therefore, I opened up the study to include asylum seekers. Had I had a larger number of participants from different phases of the refugeeship, it would have been interesting to compare their perspectives from each phase, but here I use the different perspective as a way to enrich the data of the whole process. In terms of data which gave insight to the entire process, refugeeship, I reached a point where the data was

becoming more of the same, this steered me to end the data collection phase of the study.

Data were collected between 2006-2008. Some of the participants were interviewed several times during this period. To begin with, snowballing technique was employed. One participant would put me in touch with another potential participant. This was helpful in terms of access to a field in which I was looking to interview people regarding a sensitive subject (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Having a gatekeeper, who was himself/herself a refugee, gave status to me as the researcher, and as someone who could be trusted. In order to enrich the data, and not to fall into the limiting trap of the snowballing procedure, whereby the data can become increasingly uniform, as the participants tend to belong to the same group and know each other, I additionally turned to refugee organisations and the Red Cross drop-in centres for refugees in Norwich, England and in Stockholm, Sweden.

4.4 In Sweden

In 2006 I began interviewing refugees living in Stockholm and Uppsala. They were recruited through using snowballing technique and word of mouth. Non-refugees or refugees recommended people they knew, who may know someone who had the kind of migration experience I was seeking. In order to open up new avenues to find refugees and asylum seekers, who would be willing to talk to me, I searched amongst refugee organisations and contacted them to see if I could come in contact with potential participants. Some organisations invited me to attend meetings and conferences they organised. In the spring of 2007, I attended a conference arranged by an international refugee organisation operating from Stockholm[10]. The conference delegates ranged from asylum seekers in need of support, to Swedish lawyers and doctors, who volunteered their services in terms of legal advice or medical attention to asylum seekers, as well as journalists, or asylum and refugee organisations promoting the refugee cause. Attending two days of this conference gave me the opportunity to understand more about the contexts that asylum seekers and refugees had fled from and what they had fled to. I learnt about the type of organising which can take place amongst refugees and asylum seekers, and I was given the opportunity to talk informally with refugees and asylum seekers about their experiences. I took names and telephone numbers and attempted to book some formal interviews with people I met during these two conference days.

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[10] The names of organisations have been omitted in order to ensure confidentiality

4.4.1 Researching secretive groups

Proceeding to book formal interviews with people I had met through my participation at the conference, opened up a whole new dimension to my understanding of the experiences and life conditions of refugees and asylum seekers. These refugees and asylum seekers were continuing the political project which had caused them to flee their countries and this put them at risk even in their new society. For instance, on several occasions a different person showed up for the interview than the person I had thought I had made arrangements with on the phone and whom I had spoken to at the conference. It took some time for me to make sense of what was happening. These refugees and asylum seekers would swap mobile phones and change their names readily in order to help conceal their identities. This made it difficult for me to keep track of who was who. On the other hand it provided valuable insight into refugee life and the continued fear of persecution they had to live with. Follow-up interviews became interesting. When I called someone who I thought I had already interviewed and agreed on a time to meet again, another person turned up, whom I had never met before! When I felt sufficient trust had been gained between myself and these participants, I inquired into this behaviour. It was explained that constantly changing names and exchanging mobile phones made it hard to be traced. This fear of persecution, lived on as one continued to be politically active in the new context. In some of my cases, asylum seekers were living in Sweden illegally, and therefore concealing identity was even more important[11].

4.4.2 Red Cross Sweden

Eventually, in 2008, I turned to the Red Cross in Sweden, as an alternative source for recruiting participants to the study. It was arranged for me to come to a refugee drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees requesting advice regarding their claims or issues, such as housing or employment.

This Red Cross centre runs a number of services including everything from Swedish language for asylum seekers and refugees who are not admitted to Swedish language course for immigrants (Svenska för invandrare [SFI]) to a friendly person to talk to over a cup of coffee. The centre also runs medical services for asylum seekers without documentation[12]. I began by meeting up with a group of people working at the Red Cross with refugee and asylum issues. They ranged

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[11] I discuss more fully, ethical issues later in this chapter.
[12] Known as '*paperslösa*' in Swedish, asylum seekers without documentation, at the time of data collection did not have the right to free health-care services.

from project leaders to lawyers. I presented my research and got permission to carry out interviews at the centre. The centre's staff helped by putting me in touch with, and introducing me to potential participants, which led to a number of interviews, that took place at the Red Cross drop-in centre in Stockholm.

Visiting the Red Cross gave insight into yet another context that refugees and asylum seekers readily find themselves a part of. I was able to observe the way in which the 'clients' of the Red Cross made use of the services and their thoughts about what the centre was for, as well as the views and the approaches that the staff had towards the 'clients'. I was made aware of the way in which 'refugee challenges' are talked about by those working with the issues. Although, these observations do not provide enough data to analyse, they did provide a compass for making sense of issues arising in the data, which I may not have made sense of otherwise.

4.5 In England

One of the participants living in Sweden moved from Stockholm to London, so I contacted him, and in the autumn of 2006 I went to London and met up with him. He became a key participant and gatekeeper for this part of the study. He took me to the home of various friends and contacts, living in London, who agreed to meet with me for interviews. During this visit it occurred to me how challenging it is to carry out social research with people who are in a marginalised position, and on a daily basis have to deal with the challenges the refugee situation entails. The refugees I met with during this visit saw themselves as political human rights activists and spent much of their time helping asylum seekers or refugees who were struggling with issues of housing, poverty and trauma. To put it frankly, this made me feel that my position as a researcher was really challenging. I was faced with feeling guilt and a strong sense of wanting to help and support them in their daily and in the longer term political fight to improve the situation of refugees and asylum seekers. I also found myself faced with issues of feeling privileged and spoilt as a white Western woman, and I began questioning whether or not anyone can research anything?

4.5.1 Me as migrant in Sweden, or native in England

Understanding the perceptions of my participants, is naturally, based on my interpretation of their perceptions. However, my interpretations are based on a great deal of conversation whereby participants showed their curiosity about who I was. Out of these conversations came often their own interpretations of who they thought I was. In the ethics notice

(appendix 1), I introduced myself as a PhD student, from the University of Stockholm, which I re-iterated in our first encounter. It was not unusual for the participants to then ask me if I was Swedish, in Sweden, or if I was English, in England. In Sweden, when I explained I was indeed not Swedish, this gave a positive response from the participants, and I soon became 'almost' one of them, a migrant at least, if not, a so-called 'privileged migrant'. The participants in Sweden then took an interest in how it was to live in England and what it was like for refugees and asylum seekers living there. Some offered their own interpretations of England. The common representation of England, was that of offering 'opportunity' to educated people, but a country, which was not as 'humanitarian' as Sweden. Some spoke of relatives who had fled to England and their experiences of the asylum system there.

In England, some asked where I was from; it was natural for many to assume that I was Swedish, as they were introduced to me as a researcher from Stockholm. This seemed advantageous at first, as they also showed a positive reaction to me as someone who was not English, but also an 'outsider'. When I explained that I lived in Sweden, but I was in fact English, this was initially taken as something less positive, and I was seen as a 'native'. However this often passed rather quickly and the participants began to talk quite frankly about their experiences of England, positive and negative. Some expressed that they did not think I seemed 'typically' English, but instead seemed 'open' and 'friendly' and 'not afraid of difference', to mention some of their explanations, as to why I did not seem 'typical'.

4.6 Interpersonal aspects: Self-Other in the interview with me

The position taken by the participants in the interview situation with me resembles, I suspect, the way my participants manage the demands they experience made on them: (1) in the official interview with the migration authorities in claiming asylum; (2) in interaction with society at large; (3) their interpretation of the media and the general notions surrounding asylum seekers. These were experiences which initially affected the interview situation. To them, I represented something more than just a researcher. For example I was also a member of the 'general public' in the new context, a context in which many of the participants expressed as hostile towards them. The official migration interviews do not allow the opportunity for the participants to express the more personal aspects of their cause for protection. The interview situation with me often became a forum for the participants to take the opportunity to express who they 'really' were, and also a space in which they could put forward their side of the argument for why they needed asylum or even their 'opinion' of asylum policy. Sometimes as

the interviewer, I was positioned as a caring person who understood their situation, and in the Swedish field-work context even as someone who understood as the participants assigned me the position of also being a 'migrant'. However, as aforementioned, sometimes I was positioned as a 'privileged migrant' or 'high status migrant', one of those who 'belong' to the EU and therefore entitled to move freely. In the English field work context I would be positioned rather differently, as in England I was not seen as a migrant but rather as representing the wider society. Initially this entailed that the participants talked less candidly about their experience of claiming asylum in England, until the trust was built up. Thereafter, I would find myself being positioned as 'not like the rest of the English', and more as someone who was trying to represent them and give the asylum seeker and refugee 'voice'. Interpretation of the interview context and the interpersonal aspects of it, has given me insight into how the participants experienced the interview with officials, as this sometimes played out, at times in taking on a similar form in the interview with me. The interview and its positioning work which was carried out in our conversations, also disclosed how the participants position themselves in interaction with others.

4.6.1 Issues of 'access'

The concept of access began to take on a whole new meaning to me at this stage of the data collection. In research literature the term 'access' is often discussed in terms of being allowed to enter a field, something that an 'external' body has the authority to allow (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). This study has impelled me several times to reflect on the meaning of 'access'. Gaining access to a field implied in this case finding people to interview and gathering data. However it occurred to me that there is another side to access, which is about whether any subject can be researched'? Are people willing to talk about all their experiences or are some topics too private? Can all researchers, research all subjects is another question that concerns issues of access. Are participants willing and able to share their experiences with me, and am I, as a researcher, able to handle and process what I am being told? When I began, in 2006, interviewing asylum seekers and refugees, what occurred to me, after some time, was the fact that I was being presented with a 'scripted' version of these people's experiences. Asylum seekers were more willing to describe the migration and what this process had meant to them. Refugees, however, were more reluctant to 're-live' their experience and it took time with them to cross what I call the access threshold. This threshold can be described as the difference between the scripted outer descriptions and the more

personal, reflective, inner descriptions of what migration has involved for them and their life situation. Crossing the threshold is very much an issue of trust, and I spent many hours philosophising over what the issue of trust and the access threshold involved for my participants, and indeed what it meant to me as a researcher. I would like to explain why trust as an issue existed in this field. In ethnological terms this field would be described as a 'sensitive subject'. Sensitive in the words of Renzetti and Lee (1993:6) because:

> the research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience

The refugees and asylum seekers in this study had escaped and fled their countries under dangerous circumstances. Many had been and still were part of the political organisation that put them at risk. This meant that, I found myself studying a secretive group of participants, many of whom went to great lengths to cover up their identity. At times I experienced this as somewhat of a fiasco and wondered how I would ever gain 'access' to the field as a white, non-refugee researcher. When I carried out some of the first interviews, I was painfully aware that I was being seen as 'one of the authorities' and again a scripted tale was told. However, once we crossed the threshold, this meant I was presented with another type of material, and the participant's experience of torture, imprisonments and trauma came to the fore. This was a new level in the research interview process which involved making decisions about what to do with the material I found myself collecting. How could these descriptions of detailed torture be used, and indeed should they be used[13], and how should the interview situation be tackled, when I found it transforming into a therapeutic space? When I found myself in this situation, I repeatedly asked my participants during such interviews if they wished to end the interview. Sometimes the recording was interrupted while participants cried, but they always wanted to continue and several even stated they were glad they had talked about their trauma. I always attempted to contact the participants after interviews to ask how they had felt, having done the interview. Some explained that the interview with me was the first time they had talked about how their experiences had affected them. By allowing the data collection to take the time necessary, in order to gain trust, made

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[13] I decided not to incorporate my participant's humiliating stories of torture in the thesis; it is a topic in itself and would require a different kind of analysis from that carried out here. However, from the stories I was told, I would like to agree with Professor Charles Westin, who wrote in his report on Torture and Existence: "Torture to which they were subjected even is a source of strength and confirmation. The point must be made that the torturers do not always succeed or come off victorious" (1991:4)

the study possible, and the issue of accessibility and crossing the access threshold, from scripted interviews to a rich data set, was overcome.

4.6.2 Red Cross, England

Having decided that snowballing technique had reached its peak, I turned to a Red Cross drop-in centre in Norwich, England and started off, having filled in forms regarding ethics and confidentiality, by 'blending in' with the volunteers. This tended to open up the question from the side of the refugee or asylum seeker as to who I was, which served as my cue to introduce the subject of my research. Those who wanted to talk to me were given a time to meet with me, and the Red Cross provided us with a room for interviews. Many, especially asylum seekers, had a great need to tell their stories; some refugees took longer to consider whether or not to talk to me, before coming forward for an interview.

In order to find more participants for the study, through the help of the Red Cross, I then proceeded to attend a meeting where social workers, police officers, housing officers, and others gathered to discuss concerns regarding how to 'deal with' and 'assist' refugees and asylum seekers. This put me in touch with potential gatekeepers to the field. Again, much like my encounters with the Red Cross in Sweden, I also learnt about how refugees and asylum seekers are *talked about* and *constructed* by authorities. Again, although this is not analysed, it gave further understanding to the refugee situation and contexts my participants make reference to in their talk. Through such organisations and by attending meetings I would be introduced to potential participants. One particularly fertile contact became a gatekeeper, who I interviewed subsequently and led to contacts with a number of persons who he thought might agree to be interviewed. This participant explained that many might decline my request for an interview, as they did not wish to talk about the fact they are refugees.

4.7 'Expert' interviews

Besides deepening by knowledge on migration policy, legalities and the administrative aspects of claiming asylum in the United Kingdom and Sweden, through extensive reading, in order to enrich my understanding of this somewhat complex system, I carried out some interviews with 'experts' working with asylum policy. This part of the study was carried out both before interviewing refugees and asylum seekers and during the data collection period. This entailed an interview at the House of Commons in London, in 2005, with a Labour politician, working with integration, as well as a policy administrator working for the Refugee Council, England and a project manager for integration

issues at the Red Cross, in Stockholm. These interviews are not used empirically, as a contribution to analysis (and therefore I have not attempted to interview a politician or policy maker in Sweden), but rather the interviews were carried out to complement my own knowledge and understanding of the application of migration policy and law, again to understand more about what the system imposes on asylum seekers.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Following ethical guidelines is often more complex, than the guidelines themselves allow. When researching a sensitive topic, it is impossible to stay detached. Feeling involved in people's lives, and wanting to support them in their situation is inevitable. So some consideration needs to be given. An awareness of the situation in which you find yourself a part, your own behaviour as researcher is necessary to reflect upon. When I set out on the interviewing process, I had an ethics notice prepared, but it soon became apparent that the content of this notice had different meanings for different people. I therefore tried to explain in conversation with my participants what I was doing and why. This gave the opportunity to convey my purpose in a way which would be meaningful to the participant. Many of my participants were highly educated and could relate to the business of doing a PhD. Others found it more helpful to understand that I was writing a book about asylum seekers. When we had finished talking about the ethics notice, I asked my participants if they understood what it would involve taking part in the interview, and in some cases we talked in more detail about what kind of book the material would be used for, or who would be likely to read it. Some participants stated that they would like to be named in the book and that they were not afraid of the consequences of their participation, whereas others were keen to convey that they would not like to be identified. I always explained that none of the participants would be identified regardless of whether they desired this or not.

Here I would like to re-address the issue and definitions of what makes a particular research subject a sensitive one. This, I learnt, was somewhat of a subjective experience in relation to the participants in this study. Whilst one participant experienced being interviewed as a 'sensitive' issue, another participant acknowledged the interview was empowering. This was not only recognised by the participants themselves, but also by Red Cross staff, who conveyed the positive reaction of the participant. This links to yet another ethical consideration, that of understanding what meaning the participants ascribed to their participation, and whether or not the end result, in the form of a PhD thesis, would fulfil their expectations of what it would entail to participate. I therefore explained that whilst I would go to great

lengths to ensure that participation would not bring them to any harm, their participation would not at the same time lead to any direct positive consequences for them as individuals, as refugees or as asylum seekers. Potentially the thesis could raise awareness, as an academic piece of work; but quite possibly would not even do that.

Another complexity I faced in some interview settings was the issue of family and friends remaining present after the interview had commenced. On one occasion, I turned up at a participant's home in London for a scheduled interview and the room was full of family members and friends. I waited an hour or so before raising the issue of the interview. The participant showed me that she was ready to be interviewed, so I asked where she wished to be interviewed and if I could record the interview, whereupon, she readily agreed to be recorded and said that we could do the interview in the same room where we were sitting, along with her family and friends. It occurred to me then that the ethical guidelines of respecting confidentiality are defined according to Western culture. If these participants were going to talk to me, they could do it with their nearest and dearest present.

4.8.1 Ethical aspects of the writing up

When we read research reports of various kinds it is easy to get the impression that research is a painless process, where everything goes according to the research design and plan, and participants are readily available and willing to be researched. This is of course seldom the case, but research reports are edited versions of what has gone into collecting data. This is primarily not to protect the researcher from being labelled clumsy and incompetent; it has above all to do with one's ethical responsibility as a social researcher, researching social subjects. An example of this is my earlier discussion about the challenges involved in researching 'secretive' groups. In order to give a rich description of the life conditions of the participants in this study, and how life conditions played a role in the data collection process, where I started to describe some of the scenarios of which I could readily find myself a part. However giving such examples can be problematic and contribute to negative common discourse. The purpose of presenting such examples is to highlight challenges and opportunities that my research came up against. I hope that it has become clear that these scenarios exemplify genuine fear on the part of the participants, and the difficulties asylum seekers commonly face in their life situations. Another ethical aspect of writing up is raised by Kvale (1996). He makes the point that a moral question is raised about what impact a research report has and what it can lead to.

4.9 Issues of validity/reliability

Validity and reliability will be discussed in two ways: 1) both as questions relating to credibility and a process of control; 2) specifically in relation to this study and my use of an interpretative narrative approach. Kvale (1996) relates validation to seven stages which characterise the entire research process: Thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, validating, and reporting. Most of theses aspects are documented throughout this thesis. However, a more specific discussion relating to my options will be conducted here, as will a discussion of the analysis process, so as to make more visible how the interpretations were arrived at. Generalisability will not be discussed in this chapter; rather, this question is raised at the end of this thesis, in Chapter Nine.

The task of securing credibility in this study, and therewith its validity and reliability, has already begun to take form through the process of thoroughly documenting the study, how it was conducted, the results and the process by which the results were reached at. Issues of validity become visible through critically evaluating the decisions made in the study's design and implementation. Kvale (1996) argues that validity should not be raised as an 'aspect' or 'stage' in the research; rather, it should permeate every stage of the process. Hence he raises the issue of validation in relation to his seven stages. This I attempt to fulfil through careful explanation throughout the entire thesis.

4.9.1 Reliability

This study is about the asylum seekers and refugees themselves. It is about the experience of fleeing one's country, encountering with the procedure of claiming asylum, as well as the process of being granted refugee status. Since my objective was to understand, through talk, what meaning this experience took on for my participants, as well as it's consequences for identification and positioning work, the most valid method of data collection was to collect stories through carrying out interviews with asylum seekers and refugees. My strategy to establish trusting relations with all of my participants (which took some time before we could really start talking about the topic of the study), aimed at securing reliability in our dialogue and reaching understanding. When I felt I did not understand a participant correctly, I made a special effort to check the interview content and meet or talk with the participant again. The recording of our talks and the transcription verbatim aimed at ensuring reliability, in terms of collecting data as accurately as possible. In transcription, I carefully

checked for mistakes and misunderstandings, and the transcript excerpts aim to give a correct representation of the participants talk through stating pauses and emphasis on words etc. Once embarking on the interpretation process, my interpretations were tested out on my supervisors, at seminars and through the presentation of analysis in conference papers. An aspect of reliability according to Kvale (1996), is to choose one's methods giving due consideration to ethics. Given the conditions of informed consent and carefully protecting anonymity, the informal and rich relationships of the interview appeared to provide the best opportunities for me to listen to my participant's wishes and demands regarding the research situation.

4.9.2 Validating the analysis process

One of Kvale's seven stages of research in relation to validation is 'Analysing'. To follow is some description of the way I have approached analytically the empirical data. Here I attempt to take you on the analytical journey upon which I embarked in processing the data. Although very hard to put into words, we are dealing with an abstract process which swings back and forth. I try to open up this process and reveal some of its more concrete aspects. I describe it in terms of 'aspects' rather than 'stages' to capture the complexity of analysis as something which is not as straight forward as 'stages' or steps.

Having transcribed all interviews verbatim, I began by carrying out a rather simple content analysis. This involved an initial reading of each interview set, openly, and with no more than the research aim in mind. Drawing attention to parts of the interview that appeared at first glance, to be of interest in understanding the participant's experience of 'refugeeship'.

Then, I identified a structure given to the narratives by the participants, which was later repeatedly checked in the data. This structure consists of four aspects. These aspects, set out below, are alternated when participants give meaning to their experiences and become intertwined to form a broad narrative of refugeeship:

1) *Life in one's country of origin* is expressed through a number of accounts, self-presentation and story lines, which illustrate who one is and how one perceived oneself and one's life before migration. The self-presentations relate to the country of origin and participants make use of biographical events to say something about life before a 'negative' turning point. They construct identification through the accounts, in the sense that this story form is used to identify themselves to me and others. These early biographical aspects relate, for example, to profession, political activism, family life and childhood. These themes are discussed in Chapter Five.

2) *Towards becoming a refugee* and *encountering the official legal asylum system* describes the circumstances of the decision to leave, the fleeing process and the official procedure of claiming asylum. The fleeing process often includes many different places one passed in the country of origin and before crossing the border. This aspect includes a double realisation of the idea to flee one's country. First, crossing the border means taking concrete measures to really leave. Secondly, asking for asylum means taking seriously the act of fleeing once again, expressing officially that one wants to leave one's country. On a personal level this means leaving a part of oneself behind by leaving behind the identification framework which characterised their life situation before migration. At the same time this aspect is a space of limbo whereby the participant can find him- or herself stripped of all previous citizenship and other identifications and not yet having received confirmation of a new belonging. 'Proving' one's position in relation to one's claims is dominant here in the participants' descriptions and discussion with me in the interview.

3) *The granting of refugee status* implies to some extent a sense of hope, but at the same time it involves a new life situation and new challenges in starting a new life. This was expressed in talk that appears to be about making sense of what the 'status' involved, concerning identification, social and personal, as well as being positioned socially and institutionally. This includes loss of status through being granted refugee status, and gain of status, in terms of being recognised as legitimate.

4) Talk of the future in the narratives involves description of the way the participants try to move beyond the refugee position. Moving beyond being a refugee is described both socially, in terms of seeking belonging in social groups which are not necessarily associated with refugees, and personally with regard to making sense of ones' experiences of persecution and fear which at this stage are not part of one's new situation as refugee. The participants almost seemed to be posing the question 'can I ever stop being a refugee?'

4.9.3 Understanding this act of narration and the analysis work

When the participants told their stories, several things were accomplished. Simply, one could say that the narration included descriptions of events that had happened in the participants' lives, as well as meaning was given to the events, through accounting, self-presentations, and forming story lines. The meaning-making identified in the material, is with regards to various contexts and biographical events. In this thesis the story lines which have emerged through analysis have been themes, if you like, that are common to all the

participants' histories of refugeeship, and re-occurring throughout their histories.

Thus, apart from structuring analysis of the participant's refugee stories, which resulted in four chronological aspects of refugeeship, all interviews were also analysed for experiential themes relating to the research questions. First these themes were interpreted from an experience-near perspective (Gustavsson, 1996, 2000; Geertz, 1973) in other words I tried to understand the thematic descriptions of refugeeship as they had been understood by the participants themselves. These experience-near interpretations were presented as cases in order to make it possible to understand them in a personal context.

In my next step of analysis, I compared the case studies for similarities and differences in order to transcend the personal perspective and get sight of the common dynamics of the refugeeship. Here, more experience-distant (Ibid) interpretations were developed in order to make visible the more general characteristics of the refugee process. Interpretations were continuously checked against all the data. Sometimes, contradicting data led to abandonment of a preliminary interpretation. On other occasions, a more in-depth analysis revealed new facts that allowed for a development of the interpretation that was more in line with the information I had.

4.10 An introduction to my first interpretations of some of the themes raised in the interviews

In all my data material, a striking theme of self-presentations emerged, for example in the stories about life before migration, self-presentations played an important role in expressing who one 'really' is. This interpretation, that the repeated self-presentations aimed at proving who the participants are, was grounded both on numerous presentations, many of them unexpectedly rich and argumentative, and on the repeated findings of an erosion of sense of self, experienced by the participants throughout the transition from their country of origin to the new country and becoming refugees. These finding, indicated that the participants felt a need to show who they are to others and to themselves and confirmed so to speak, the interpretation that their self-presentations were founded in the refugeeship itself.

In a further step, this interpretation of the self-presentations was deepened in a more detailed analysis of loss of earlier self-identifications and difficult encounters with discrediting social categorisations associated with refugees and asylum seekers. From the perspective of this interpretation, the participants' lengthy talk about who they had been before the 'turning point' could be understood as

attempts to reconstruct a more familiar sense of self, associated with self respect and esteem.

As we shall see in Chapter Five, a sense of self within this life before, what I identify as 'a negative turning point' in all the narratives is constructed and portrayed. This turning point refers to the circumstances which the participants describe as something that had changed for the worst in their life situation and which forced them to flee. This need for self-presentation and reconstruction of the sense of self is an important part of their experience of the migration trajectory which was not typically given a lot of attention in the official interviews with migration authorities.

In a more general sense, one could say that the narration expressed basic existential themes, for example a change or threatened sense of self, experienced during the refugeeship, similar to Goffman's spoiled identity concept. In my interpretation, I found the participants to be preoccupied by a number of personal existential changes relating to this kind of migration that seemed to involve some key themes about loss of one's past, striving to justify the refugee project and managing the great deal of discreditation and exclusion, as asylum seekers and refugees in one's new country. These series of existential themes were raised during the course of the story-telling, characterising what meaning the participants ascribe refugeeship. They illustrate the identification and positional movement present in narratives. These included moral challenges and conflictual feelings over the migration and how one feels one is seen today in the new situation. The meaning-making aspects of refugeeship described here, were not, at the outset, expressed clearly by all participants, but nevertheless seemed to be something that participants touched on when having crossed, 'the threshold'. These interpretations are based on a close comparative analysis of direct and indirect expressions. Here I was attentive to the more interactive aspects of their talk in terms of Self-Other, and by interpreting positions taken up or resisted. Also contexts and concepts frequently referred to, like 'refugee status' and how such concepts were used by the participants served as input to interpretations of these meaning-making aspects.

In retrospect, I can see that several dimensions of interpretations have emerged in my analysis. One of which describes a series of events relating to refugeeship, in a chronological order. In this dimension, legalistic, political and social aspects relating to official norms and conventions surrounding various aspects of refugeeship are topics that enter into virtually all narratives. On another level of interpretation, there are meaning-making aspects, illustrated by account-giving and self-presentation, relating to the more fluid, processual aspects of refugeeship. Here we uncover what meaning the official process to *becoming* a refugee and *being* a refugee carries for the participants and

others in their surroundings in terms of positioning and identification work. As will be described in Chapter Seven, Eight and Nine, the interpretative dimensions of the experiential refugeeship could be organised around what could be called a core dimension that I refer to as the *moral career* of refugeeship. Again, this interpretative dimension is grounded on several different, direct and indirect expressions of the refugee stories. Exploring these expressions one by one, comparing them to each other and trying to understand them as a whole in terms of a moral career describes the basic components of my interpretive analysis.

The presentation of these interpretations aims to illustrate basic characteristics of refugeeship. I will follow the temporal structure of events, given by the participants in their story-telling. My analysis is presented in the four chapters entitled: *The road to refugeeship* (chapter 5); *The official asylum procedure- Encountering the legal and administrative system and all that this entails* (chapter 6); *Being a refugee* (chapter 7); *Constructing continuity and discontinuity in the stories of 'beyond' being a refugee* (chapter 8).

5. The road to refugeeship

Accounts of historical trajectories

The accounts in the participants' narratives tell the story of their migration, partly as something historical, and partly as something ongoing today. These parts of their narratives are to a large extent referring to 'factual' events, structuring the way the participants re-call the process of refugeeship. This narrative structure is maintained among other things, by the fact that the participants obviously were aware that some steps in their refugeeship process are officially recognised and well-known to many people. They drew upon this in conversation with me. The narrative structures and sequential events are also used for my presentation of the empirical data, found in the interviews.

These events have their point of departure in life before the participant had begun feeling compelled to flee and they continue beyond being granted refugee status. As the introductory chapter points out, becoming a refugee is often understood as legal in terms of a sequence of changes in official status. These various status categories refer, legally, to a person's citizenship rights and duties. The most important phases included in gaining official refugee status are: (1) leaving the country of origin, which in some cases, in actual practice means giving up one's citizenship from the country of origin; (2) applying for protection by making a claim for asylum in a new country; (3) waiting for the official, legal and administrative decision of being or not being recognised as a refugee in a new country; and later, perhaps, (4) becoming a citizen. The participants' trajectories relating to this process of migration commonly mirrored the official phases of becoming a refugee. This is hardly surprising, given that participants had a tendency to slip into a 'scripted'-like version of what I can imagine the interview with migration authorities would have looked like, (see Chapter Four). In these official interviews, questions would be raised about the circumstances of the migration, proof of one's identity, and reasons for one's need for protection. However, the narratives I collected also included two phases that are not commonly included in an official refugee process, namely, a rather inclusive and detailed account of one's life before the flight had become necessary, as well as reflections on and descriptions of life in the new country,

beyond being recognised as a refugee, with the granted status (see Chapter Eight). These events of refugeeship make up a trajectory which represents both the migration process as a whole and a narrative, an autobiographical structure hooked onto this trajectory. The story told includes a turning point, which I regard as a significant interruption in one's life circumstances, ultimately triggering a flow of decisions leading to one's migration. The narratives placed much emphasis on this turning point.

5.1. The emphasis on life before migration

The participants in my study gave a lot of emphasis on their life before it became necessary to seek refuge. To some extent, this aspect of their narratives was invited by my questions concerning the road to refugeeship, and about their lives in their countries of origin. An unexpected finding was that many of the participants gave most emphasis on life before seeking refuge was even necessary. The way the stories were expressed gave the impression that this phase of their lives was the most important for me to understand about their migration process. I begin with these descriptions, because the participants all began their narratives with these self-presentations, almost as if it was important to them to portray *who, what* and *how* they were before the migration was even necessary; and moreover, to have this established before sharing the more tragic aspects of their life narratives of life after a turning point. These aspects of their stories can be said to highlight life before becoming a refugee. They concern experiences which to some extent were linked to events preceding the flight, leading up to a sort of turning point in the participants' lives, a turning point that was often associated with some kind of persecution or threat by a dominating regime or its authorities. In most cases, this is the beginning of the migration history for these participants. Besides descriptions of biographical events, they gave self-presentations relating to contexts before the turning point. These self-presentations made use of adverbs and adjectives explaining who and what they were, before the turning point. The self-presentations convey them not only as individuals, but also relationally, in terms of who they were in their societies in relation to others, and how they perceived others as seeing them. Through these self-presentations the participants constructed their previous identifications, through multiple I-positions, such as; 'I was a mother, I was a wife and I was working full time, I was successful, or 'I' as expert of human rights or 'I' as respectable citizen.

The fact that the participants give self-presentations is in itself, not particularly surprising, given the situation of being interviewed and meeting me for the first time. However, the extent to which the

participants occupied themselves with earlier self-characteristics can be understood as a more or less conscious desire to add at least some positive self-identifications to the poor social status they thought they currently held. Another observation is that these self-presentations were always associated with positive core identifications[14] which, the participants returned to throughout all the interviews and in subsequent interviews. They portrayed the level of independence they enjoyed, and some pointed out that they were not a burden to anyone before the turning point. The following two excerpts show the typical ways in which the participants talked about their earlier lives before the turning point. These examples also show how they described their lives and how they perceive they were seen by others and saw themselves; this past description often links onto their present situation as asylum seekers or refugees:

> **UK 10** In my country I was a respected man in the community (.) everybody liked me (.) even the government and then er I mean everything changed for me (.) I had to flee from being in a position of high status to being in a very very very bad living standard

> **UK 6** When the war broke out (sighing (2)) my life at this time from finishing my education until 2003 (.) it was wonderful (.) I can't describe it (1) I had a house (2) a house with a garden I had influence because I was a member of the party system and er I felt secure I grew up there (1) how can I explain this (.) I hadn't thought (1) I hadn't thought that (.) one day I will be a refugee

Both these quotes give an account of life before, expressing who they were, and how they felt about their lives The new national contexts and position repertoire available to the participants in their new societies, as asylum seekers, seemed very limited, first of all in relation to the identification as asylum seeker, and later, often in their identification as refugee. My participants therefore engaged in a process of resistance and dis-identification around the connotations attached to the refugee concept. They did this by anchoring the narrative to earlier core identifications. In contrast to the rich variety of complex identifications that most of the participants had experienced earlier in life, the simplified and limited self-identifications connected to categorisations given in the asylum system seemed somewhat impoverished. As this chapter unravels, we will witness the very nature of the asylum system seemed to erode individualism and uniqueness, categorising all asylum seekers in a standardised way, which gave rise to these attempts by the

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[14] Core identification refers to identifications such as I am a father, a political activist and come from Iran. Here, core identification is not referring to something static and unchangeable.

participants to hold onto earlier aspects of self which made them unique.

5.1.1 The negative and positive account-giving

The accounts given by the participants regarding life before the turning point, how they perceived their life situations, themselves and how they were seen by others, could be characterised as positive in the sense that these accounts are imbued with positive connotations and on the whole of good feelings. Life seemed to have its sense of direction, be it politically or professionally.

One important meaning relating to the turning point was loss of highly valued earlier life circumstances. In fact, my close analysis of the interviews indicated that the participants' emphasis on this earlier, highly valued life was an indirect way of expressing the loss they experienced in relation to the flight. As we will see in more detail later, the talk about the positive life before becoming a refugee could not only be understood as a description of the past, it served equally well the purpose of characterising the time after the turning point. In some cases the present, as an asylum seeker, was portrayed as something far worse. The examples from the data material also illustrate an aspect not commonly included in refugee discourse that of a happy life situation before a catastrophe or significant political change had taken place. The following excerpt illustrates such positive memories of life before the turning point:

> **UK10** I was living a very high standard life (.) I had my private home (.) my car (.) my private surgery (.) and my job at the hospital so I don't care about money actually (.) my children were in private schools there (.) and ermm (.) I think that (.) leaving Iraq at this time is a life saving measure

This man had planned to move to England, in search of protection, as a life saving measure. He was hoping to regain his occupation as a doctor in England, but learned on arrival that, as a third country national he was not in a position to make this choice, rather, he must claim asylum. Thus, he went from a situation of independency, before the turning point to one of dependency due to the legislation controlling third country entry to the European Union. The loss he experienced in having to flee can also be described as a radical change in identification framework, as well as in terms of life style. Another point of interest in this quote is when the participant says "so I don't care about money actually". In saying this he takes up the position as someone affluent and independent of economic support, thus advertising that he certainly is in no need of money. The bottom line is that he did not come to

England as a 'needy' asylum seeker in search of economic gain. Again, we see that the talk about the past has relevance for our understanding of the present, and the positioning shows its rhetorical qualities. The participants' 'aim', besides presenting the life they once had and who they were, seems moreover to defy a positioning as voluntary, economic migrant. These participants seem keen to stress that their intention was not to be a burden on the welfare system in the new country. This is particularly interesting against the background of current representations of asylum seekers, whereby the migration discourse typically includes notions of the asylum seeker as someone in need of economic support. All of the above quotes are from participants living in England; where an economic strand within the migration discourse is particularly salient. However, in the next quote, a similar positioning movement is seen from a participant living in Sweden:

> **SW5** er you know (4) er nobody er (.) normal would ever do this (.) claim asylum unless they really really had to [no] because you know I left the prestige of professor now I'm a refugee this is a huge difference as professor I had two thousand something (salary) and as an asylum seeker I had two hundred or something

The following participant described her life situation even in positive terms, and herself as an independent person. She too gives a description of a successful life before the turning point, and she resists being positioned as someone who would claim asylum for economic gain, by describing her happy, prosperous life situation before the turning point. This participant had only quite recently arrived in England at the time of data collection which might explain her use of present tense when describing who and what she was before migration:

> **UK7** First of all I'm a housewife (.) a mother <u>and</u> I work (.) I am employed (.) this would have been my 40th year this year [wow] I'm a property administrator [ok] (1) I look after properties

She went on to describe in detail her work responsibilities and then told me:

> So I have a good job and I work from home [mm] and the company has an office (1) I haven't had a problem all my life

This quote ends by the participant saying "I haven't had a problem all my life" at the same time, communicating that the situation she now finds herself in is out of her control. She also, like many of the examples in my material, positions herself in this statement as someone who did not need assistance due to 'problems' until the turning point.

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What has been described so far may seem surprising given that these participants have fled their countries. Many would probably have expected to hear stories of a life, which was so unbearable that one was left with no choice but to flee. However, the participants' emphasis on their earlier, more appreciated personal and social positions seem to function as compensation for experiences of less appreciated positions ascribed to them in their capacity as asylum seekers, an ascription with which the participants clearly do not identify. This initial finding will be explored in more detail as this chapter unravels.

5.1.2 Conflictual feelings over the flight- a variation in the accounts

Despite what is said in the above examples, the stories present a far more nuanced picture than that of just positive self-presentations of life before the turning point and life today as asylum seekers or refugees. Firstly, not all participants give a positive and affluent picture of their lives before the turning point. For example, many self-identifying as political activists described their lives as more or less always involving a fight or struggle. Here, on the other hand positive aspects described before the turning point, rather stands for a sense of hope. Secondly, even those who re-collect a positive life before the turning point can vacillate in descriptions of life in the past in relation to current conditions. This gives a rich description of conflictual feelings over good and bad times experienced by the participants. The positive sides of one's earlier life, transfers into something negative. The stories illustrate the inevitable complexity of the migration process and the decisions it entails for the participants. This is illustrated by the way the participants talk about the migration *choice*, understanding the migration as something which has saved their lives, yet at the same time deprived them of things that meant a lot to them. In this sense most descriptions of life after the turning point and during the initial asylum claiming procedure are characterised by a sense of regression. The almost contradictory feeling which exists in their meaning-making processes comes through partly in the various I-positions taken up, which they also vacillate between, sometimes expressing the positive sides of the migration and sometimes describing feelings of confusion over whether or not the decision to flee was right, sometimes seeing themselves as heroic survivors, and sometimes as victims of wider political conflicts. This seems to be very much linked to the feeling of loss that the participants struggle to understand. While recognising that one had to flee, one struggles with an underlying feeling of loss occasioned by migration.

Even those who had been politically active, having experienced injustice, escape from prison and the torturous conditions in detention, expressed this sense of loss resulting from having to flee one's country, family and friends. Ultimately this loss is about not being able to live in the country to which one feels a sense of belonging. To illustrate this sense of loss, I quote two participants verbatim. First a man, living in Sweden today describes his feeling of giving up his political fight:

> **SW3** The regime knew I was alive they said to my organisation "you are active" they said "we are going to arrest him" but anyway I succeeded in networking again but in the end they arrested my brother and some others (.) because I had a family now (.) children and a wife it became much more dangerous for me to continue

After some time he fled from his country. This was not an easy decision to make and he describes the moral dilemma involved in having to leave his country and abandon political work to secure the safety of his family and himself. Part of him felt that he should have stayed on to continue his important political work, yet another part realised that he had no choice but to flee:

> I thought it's not good to leave the people like this (.) when you have experience and know how to do things it is a big deal building an organisation and democratising society (.) I thought maybe it is stupid but anyway (.) to stay to fight on maybe I should have (.) but when you have children (.) a family as well (1) this needs consideration (.) If I'd been alone then I would have liked to have stayed but when I think about my children my family as well

In this above quote a revealing I-positional movement takes place. This man says "if I had been alone" which is used to position himself as someone who was occupied in important work and not planning to flee. However, at the same time he positions himself as the 'family man' who takes responsibility for his family, and therefore must flee for their sake. He expressed a sense of abandonment in relation to his political work, but justified this abandonment through his explanation of the danger the political work was putting his family in.

Secondly a quote from a woman living in England today, who was sentenced to prison at the age of 20 for her political activism. She escaped prison and fled by foot to a neighbouring country. Some years later she fled to England:

> **UK5** I was forced as I see it because I didn't want to become a refugee (.) I didn't want to leave Iran (1) I wanted to live in Iran I wanted to work as an Iranian resident (.) I wasn't planning to come to Europe or any other country but because of (2) being at risk (1) you know of danger (.) you know it wasn't my choice you know I didn't want this

(1) it's quite complicated you know for a lot of people (1) because you miss your family (.) you had a group (.) a job and well much of my life is the same here because I er well like it was before(.) apart from the fact that I'm safe here it is er still feels like I'm struggling for my rights and my identity and knowing yourself and er what you are going to do

UK 9 We had to leave (.) a lot of people were killed (.) my personal er was er my case was very hard (.) my wife er she was raped (1) they cut her hair (crying) [mm] (3) We left our country and I am very happy for this country because it is safe (.) safe for the children (.) but we have been here for seven years as asylum seekers my youngest son was born here it is very <u>very </u>hard to leave your country(.) we had to do everything illegally I'm happy we are here it's safe but(.) but I'm not happy waiting(.) not knowing(.) I'm mean for the children (.) not knowing

These quotes from participants SW3, UK5 and UK9 swing between justifying the necessity to flee and sadness about the loss it involved. UK5 comes to the conclusion that she is safe in the new country and allowed to express her political opinions, but she is still struggling, however, in a different way today. She is finding it difficult to recover a sense of belonging, experiencing that she must struggle today too, to assert her rights as a refugee. Illustrated is a sense of abandonment experienced in leaving one's country of origin. To some extent a sense of shame is present in their talk about having to leave their country or their political work. UK5 expresses in her talk that "she was not planning to come to Europe". I get the impression that she wants to emphasise that this was forced migration and not a luxury move to "Europe".

Whilst some participants talked about life before the turning point as unfair or unjust, they described hope in striving for a better life, either personally or politically. Others describe their life situation as successful and prosperous. Regardless of how one's previous life was experienced, common to all the descriptions, is that self-presentations disclose an active, hard-working, conscientious and independent person, either politically or professionally and a person who was never planning to 'move' from their countries of origin. A sense of purpose shines through in these descriptions, political, or not.

The positive-negative aspects of the narratives appeared in a third variation, focusing on the image of the asylum seeker and refugee as hard-working, and as someone who is a contributing member of society. This theme is opposed to the typical social image of the asylum seeker and refugee as a person who does not support him-herself and at worse, does not want to. What the excerpts teach us is that all participants give representations of themselves as someone who was contributing to the societies in which one used to live:

> **UK2** I worked with agricultural development I was a general economist I worked there for about six years and then er (.) there was an advertisement to start a postgraduate programme in agriculture which was in my area and er I said er (.) because we were working on production and we had insect and disease problems I wanted to study agriculture and protection (.) I gained my MSc in 1981 and moved from XXX to a plant protection institute; because of my qualifications I was placed there. While I was there I still wanted to learn more so I thought I would try to do a PhD

The above quote displays the development in UK2's life before the turning point. It illustrates the hard-working nature many participants attribute to themselves. In a similar vein the next quote is from a woman who calls herself a political activist. She explained how she was dedicated to change for the sake of her society:

> **SW7** Everywhere I looked I saw injustice (.) I looked around in my society and thought (.) well I really needed to do something (.) and it was the revolution and I was really active (.) I was about 19 years old and they always wanted me as part of the demonstrations and I did (.) So I became a kind of leader (.) I had been in prison and everyone knew I had been in prison so they made me a kind of hero (.) I felt really good about this (.) I could make change

I have cited these examples because they are representative of my material. Participants give accounts which reflect how they contributed to their societies through work or politics, and at the same time were ambitious and hard-working. For example quotes of SW7 and SW3 both take up the position of 'leader/representative of the people'. These stories may be seen as accounts of who one was and what one did before the turning point. These excerpts also illustrate the positions taken in narratives before the turning point. Desirable positions are contrasted with the less desirable position repertoire experienced as asylum seekers. The first quote takes up the position of 'I' as 'environmental manager, in charge of landscape protection in his country. The second quote takes up the position of 'I' as 'justice organiser'. These positions present personal attributes and serve the purpose of expressing the ways in which these persons were committed to their countries and were competent enough in their earlier lives to be a contributing citizen. These narrative excerpts are representations of who one was, but they are also argumentative, constructing justification to flee and establish one's worth in the new context.

5.2 Legitimatisation of the flight

Accounts of one's flight and of its legitimacy occurred frequently in the narratives. These seemed to address an implicit question, over and over

again pertaining to one's responsibility for the flight. Many explanations looked back to the turning point, and the reasons for becoming asylum seekers were explained as something which one did not fully control. Some participants experienced the necessity to flee as something completely out of their control. Others could partially relate the indispensability to migrate as something which could be explained partly as a consequence of their own actions. For example, political activists could explain their reasons to flee as a sequel of the beliefs they held, and the organisations within which they were active. They understood forced migration as springing from their activism. At the same time they see their activism as something they inevitably had to participate in. It was their nature to recognise injustice and to take practical action to combat it. Whatever the mixture of reasons and responsibilities, most participants felt a need to explain why they had left their countries of origin.

Some examples to follow show this construction of explanations relates to how one understands the need in the end to flee one's country:

UK5 who had been in prison before and exposed to daily torture, now found herself facing imprisonment again:

> **UK5** I had become involved in working with these questions again (.) er I had been involved again and it became dangerous again (.) I had my children and er although this time we were very careful not to be discovered by the police again they found out (.) I don't know how (.) they found my husband's family (.) er they kept me for three days (.) they gave me a chance to give them all the information (.) they interrogated me then on and off for a whole year (1) I realised that I couldn't cope any more with this and then er I realised I couldn't bare it anymore and it was getting worse and worse (2) so I decided to go into hiding again (.) I could tell by their questions that they were waiting to catch me out I knew it was a matter of time they were going to take me again it was a very hard decision to make (.) especially leaving my children but I thought it would only be for a couple of months

The next participant not only constructs an explanation for the migration relating to the circumstances he was living under, but also supports his reasons by talking about his encounters with migration authorities on entry to Sweden:

> **SW2** I left Iraq 2006 when I was injured in Baghdad they were targeting me they put small bombs in my car it was not a big explosion but is was a car explosion it damaged my eyes and there was no medicine no health care in Baghdad no one could help me (.) I had to travel I had to have five operations (.) I had been working had set up an office in human rights we were supported to do this and it was me and another we were two guys with the assistance of a human rights manager of an organisation we wrote lots of reports and sent them to

> UN er after that I feared I would lose everything if I stay there er because we were fighting alone just me and my friend against millions of people who don't like what we are doing (.) I came here (3) in 2007 (.) to Sweden and er at that time the immigration office wanted Iraqi people to prove his nationality and why he left Iraq (2) because they wanted real reasons to let them stay (.) not just "I'm from Baghdad and people are being killed there" but the immigration officer told me I was a special case and I was granted refugee status from Geneva

The above quote not only gives explanation, SW2 also positions himself as 'genuine' and in need of protection due to his human rights work, rather than someone who 'just' left Baghdad because people were being killed there.

The following excerpt provides an additional illustration of the kind of explanation in the material, relating to the feeling of lack of choice:

> **SW3** I didn't want to come er (.) here (.) I wasn't thinking of moving to another country but suddenly I was forced to leave my country and during this process I thought often how can I get back to my country (.) I had to leave I lived for several years before leaving under ground (.) in hiding I was fighting after being released from prison for 3 or 4 years from hiding (.) against the government (.) but they were getting more and more suspicious and they arrested my brother and tortured him for information about me and I was told to flee (1) but it wasn't my will (.) my wish (.) I was against fleeing (.) I felt why I have to flee

The explanation, much like self-presentations of life before the turning point recurs throughout the interview. Following the general narrated sequence of events, the participants having engaged in these meaning-making processes of explanation exemplified above, told me about the actual events surrounding their own flight and encounters with official migration authorities in the new country. Here, then, a new historical aspect was introduced to the narrative, but also these descriptions were characterised by self-presentations, identification construction and explanatory meaning-making. The participants explained to me how they drew on concepts such as 'political refugee' in seeking to position themselves as asylum seeker or refugee in the new society. This seemed to explain acceptability in interaction with others, why they had to flee. SW3 uses the concept 'political refugee' to justify his position as refugee today:

> **SW3** When I first came here I came in contact with the label political refugee (.) I still use this term when I have to return to the reason why I came here (.) so then I use this term (.) I was a political refugee actually and even now in the future when I discuss why I came here (.) I call myself political refugee

Here political refugee first of all seems to stand as an explanation to others that he is not an economic or voluntary migrant. SW3 explains how he still draws on the concept of 'political refugee' when he gives his 'reasons' for why he lives in Sweden. Having to give an explanation as to why he is a refugee living in Sweden is still, after over 10 years, part of his daily experience.

5.3 Escaping and Fleeing

> **SW7** being on the run is part of the thing(.) er when we decided to leave for good and go to another country we thought we have to (.) er we thought if we stay living in the camp we can't do anything (.) our time is just going and we thought we have to get out of here go somewhere we can't <u>live</u> you can't <u>live</u> when you are in hiding we have to go where we are allowed to do something it is awful living like this (.) knowing you will never develop never being able to <u>live</u> (1) in hiding (.) it's terrible and we had a child we had to do something in hiding she could never have gone to school

The special conditions of seeking asylum, which make this migration differ from other forms of migration is that it involves an escape. All but three of the participants in this study, have endured escaping as part of fleeing. Escaping means taking risks, the risk of being caught, the risk of being deceived by a smuggler, risks in the transportation process, not to mention the risk of deportation on arrival or a refused asylum claim[15].

The reality of fleeing is that it is a long and drawn-out process, likely to involve many stages over several years, as exemplified in SW7's quote above, often living in hiding in neighbouring countries and refugee camps along the way, as is evident in several examples in this study.

> **UK4** It took 12 days to arrive in England by lorry I took a little bit of food with us but we were without food or water for 3 days (2) Kurdistan does not allow us to leave (.) but we knew we must leave because they want to destroy us (.) there is no help for the Kurdish people (.) they want to finish us off we had to leave (.) we had to pay

The above quote is from a married couple I interviewed, who spoke a lot about their flight, giving me the impression it had been traumatic for them. They had to escape because their ethnic identity as Kurdish people living in Turkey put their lives in jeopardy. They could not

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[15] An asylum claim can in some cases be treated as an act of hostility from the claimant towards their country of origin, sometimes meaning that someone who is deported due to a 'failed' asylum claim can risk facing persecution on return, for the act of making the claim (Clayton, 2006).

freely leave the country, so they had to get out through an organised escape. They explained that they did not know where they were being taken; when they were dropped off at the destination, they discovered they were in England. They were aware that they had risked their lives escaping, but understood that staying on as Kurdish people in the region in which they were living, was going to cost them their lives anyway. So they took the risk.

Another participant living as a refugee in Sweden today described his fleeing in detail to me. He fled because of his political engagement. His description highlights the risk aspect of fleeing, as well as the existential aspects of leaving behind loved ones and relinquishing one's life as one knew it up until then:

> **SW1** I just left my apartment (.) just left it like it was and actually er (2) one thing was that er which prevented me from travelling on public transport in XXXXX is that to travel er you have to show your ID card to buy tickets and to take a train and everything because everything is kind of political (2) so I could not buy a ticket (.) but at that time I was lucky (1) there was a celebration at that time so a lot of people came and they were taking the train (.) so I pretended to see them off and got onto the train (.) I took the train from XXX to XXX (1) it was December and very cold (.) freezing point (.) very cold very windy (1) I had to avoid the military avoid completely so I walked and walked and one day I came to the border and then I realised I wanted to say goodbye to my mother so I went all the way back [you went all the way back] yes all the way back to say to my mother goodbye (.) bye (1) and then it was Christmas so I spent Christmas with my mother and then the next morning I got up and started again for 6 days of walking ****** but it was good [returning to say goodbye] yes (1) because that was the last time I saw my mother

This next participant talks about making the decision to flee. She first escaped prison when she was temporarily released to attend a mass burial which took place after mass killings in Iran. Her quote illustrates the length of time many participants spent escaping and in hiding before reaching England or Sweden. UK5, having escaped this time round, lived for several years in another part of her country before escaping for England:

> **UK5** Even though I had guards there (.) there were so many crowds that it was my auntie that said to me (.) look it is now or never (.) you have to escape now (.) if you go back there you never know what would happen to you (.) I was ready to go (2) it was winter (.) they didn't allow us to wear our warmer clothes (.) it just took a few minutes (2) I thought (2) and then I asked my sister (.) shall we go (.) she said yes I think we should go it is our only chance and we don't have anything to lose everything is lost we are going back there anyway if they find us they will just take us back to prison so what have we lost we are going

back there with them anyway so why not take our chance (.) so then we slowly (2) er we started putting ourselves amongst the crowd to get lost amongst the people the only friend we could trust was a childhood friend I went to school with her I went to her house we walked there it took us three hours (2) we were walking but then we found a way to get from one city to the next and that night we stayed there (3) it was gone midnight er they opened the door and they knew (.) they were also political and they just knew something horrible had happened to us and the mother said just go to the basement (.) because she was so scared of being caught and then she said I'm sorry I can't keep you here you must leave tomorrow because they are already after my children this house is not safe if they come here for my children then they are going to find you (1) so we were looking all the time for somewhere to stay at night when it was dark so we were on the run like this for nearly 2 months

When participants talked about 'the leaving', it was often, with a great deal of emotion. At the same time as surviving the fear and danger, often involved in escaping, they are leaving behind their life and people dear to them. I tried to understand what fleeing really involves and what meaning it takes on for my participants. What seems to being expressed besides risk and fear is a deep sense of abandonment. This idea of abandonment was touched on earlier in the chapter and will be explored as the chapter progresses.

First, I would like to go into more detail here concerning fleeing. We launch straight into another quote giving further illustration of what the flight can look like. Some of the participants fled with children, which added to an already high level of stress, as the children were also at risk. Whilst the following woman was living in hiding she had given birth to a baby. Her story picks up at the point of leaving her life in hiding and attempting to escape with her husband and child:

> **SW7** My daughter was one and a half now and was talking all the time and the whole time we had to do like this (puts her finger to her mouth to illustrate how she tried to keep her child quiet) anyway that night we had to hide in the hills roughly 11 o'clock in the evening they (an escort) came and er so we knew we came to a village and the people were really nice and we got food (.) er because I had a (.) you know small luggage with my daughter's clothes in but after some time they said that we couldn't have that luggage you just have to take some nappies and extra clothes they said otherwise it won't be possible we left our things we took a few bits for her and the (1) the conditions er well there was a war going on (.) fighting (.) military (.) on one side Iraq and the other was Iran and there was a war between them so it was quite dangerous and I remember er I had no idea how I was going to manage but I thought ah I will manage (1) but still after 25 years it is a nightmare (participant begins to cry)

This quote describes the first part of this family's fleeing process. Some members of a political organisation to which this mother and father belonged to, were experienced in helping people escape persecution for their political activity and assisted this couple in fleeing. This mother had already spent some time in prison and was later released. The couple then lived in a camp together, with their child, for some years before managing to leave the country altogether. United Nation officials in the country of origin placed the family in Sweden. When this mother was describing her flight she began to cry; after 25 years she was still deeply affected by her journey.

These stories convey some of the aspects of fleeing. As aforementioned, what seems to surface when the participant's flight is talked about is a great deal of fear, but also a strong sense of survival. I cannot help feeling that there is more to the feelings of fear and survival, and wonder how *escape* plays out in refugeeship as a lived experience. I will therefore dig a little deeper into how the stories of fleeing develop and what meaning the flight takes on for the participants.

5.4 Abandonment

Fleeing seems to involve a lot more than just making a journey or leaving a country; it involves abandoning certain things. The drastic nature of fleeing often means escaping secretly with no way of saying goodbye to close friends and family. The 'walking away' (sometimes literally), from a political cause or from a profession, as well as leaving behind personal belongings and a home and workplace, are just some of the special conditions attached to this kind of migration. A sense of abandonment therefore dominates these narratives. However, this does not play out fully in the material until the participants talk about arriving in a new country and had begun to realise what this had really entailed for them. It was at the point of making the claim, that it became clear to the participants what they had lost, and even felt they had abandoned. The aspect of doubt around fleeing such as; was the decision to flee the right one or not becomes apparent, especially when encountering the official system which places demands on the claimant to justify why one fled and why one needs protection. The quotes demonstrate this sense of abandonment and loss, which are feelings intrinsically embedded in the flight.

The following quote is from UK5 who left her children and husband behind, when fleeing for a second time, this time to England, hoping that her family would follow her shortly after she had escaped. However it took over five years for her asylum application to be processed, which meant it was impossible for her to bring her children

to England before this, I pick up her story where she is telling me about life as an asylum seeker, without her children:

> **UK5** I didn't send any photos because of the regime (1) sometimes I called them but it was a really scary time because they had arrested my husband and my mother-in-law looked after the children they er they er didn't let them go to school the first year after I left so they were in a really bad situation after I left (.) I had made trouble for them (.) but once I knew my husband can manage er well we knew what was going to happen (.) you know (.) otherwise we had already experienced that er (1) they moved to another city and they started a new school I knew this because I called my mother and I would speak to her sometimes (.) then er it wasn't safe to contact them too much (2)I don't know if I was right or now maybe it has affected them a lot er I don't know (.) maybe but er (1) I think I did the right thing

This woman, who has been living in England for over 10 years now, still questions her decision and her quote emphasises the uncertainty present in her talk of whether she was right to abandon everything for her own safety. She points out that she "had made trouble for them", referring to her family members and, much like the previous stories presented here, her decision is characterised by a sense of compulsion at the same time as she queries the decision, expressing uncertainty over whether or not it was the right thing to do. Fleeing often entails a moral dilemma for the participants. Deciding to stay may put the family in danger, but fleeing can mean a sense of abandoning the political organisation or other important commitments. Some participants position their families as victims of their activities, rather than themselves. This sometimes becomes their justification to flee; expressed almost as if it is easier to flee for the sake of others, than for one's own sake. At the same time a lot of guilt is expressed by many of the participants over their decision to flee or the predicament in which they feel they have placed their families in.

This sense of abandonment is conveyed in descriptions of fleeing, leaving a country and its regime, leaving behind family and loved ones as well as giving up a political activity or a professional occupation. This then translates into the feeling that one has abandoned one's personal autonomy, at an individual level. A lack of autonomy at a social level casts its shadow over one's life in the country of origin curtailing ones freedom of choice or political options. This, however, was something different from the experienced lack of autonomy as asylum seekers (more on this in Chapter Six).

The participants made sense of the necessity to flee as something that was linked to the safety of others, for the sake of family members, or sometimes for the safety of the political organisation, to which they belonged, rather than something they were 'only' doing for themselves.

The fleeing process is given meaning through the way in which the participants narrate the events leading up to their flight. This is done through selecting events which give purpose to the necessity to flee, events which justify the sense of 'selfishness' some accused themselves of. These events illustrate the persecution and fear under which they were living and the risk at which it was putting their children or parents.

Fleeing, then, is a special part of becoming a refugee. Having made a decision to leave, most fugitives[16] need assistance in leaving their countries of origin. The fleeing process is one full of practicalities as well as involving a more lived experience of an existential nature. Therefore, the term 'fleeing' does not only refer to the actual departure, but also to the processes surrounding this, such as leaving behind a mother and father whom they are aware they might never see again, a professional or political affiliation and indeed a sense of self, based on these affiliations and relationships. Ultimately all those acts seem to be experienced as abandonment.

5.5 Summary

In summary, it seems reasonable to suggest that the participants once embarking on their stories of the actual migration process, engaged in conversations of a somewhat argumentative nature. The participants construct a number of explanations and answers to implicit questions concerning who they actually were. In order to understand this explanation work, one must be aware of the limited position repertoire they were offered when fleeing (which can involve several years of living in hiding and in refugee camps) and as asylum seekers. They lost almost all earlier positions and identifications and the recognition with which they were associated. In light of their collective experiences of what life had become, as an asylum seeker, it was not difficult to see that one point of departure for these explanations has to do with amending the rather one-dimensional position experienced as available to them as asylum seekers or refugees. This will be explored in more depth in Chapter Six, but is already indicated here; namely, that for all participants, losing one's country of origin meant experiencing a sense of loss of ones' self, in the sense of the repertoire of positions available to take up, identifications and recognitions associated with the life one had to leave behind.

An important aspect of the explanations concerning who the participants really were seemed to be their own responsibility for having left their country of origin. On a general level, they were all convinced that they had been forced to leave and thus did not have any personal responsibility. A typical way in which the participants stated

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[16] In leaving one's country, one is not officially yet an asylum seeker

this was by referring to refugeeship as something political. However, in each of the participant's personal histories, there had always been space for personal choices. This raised questions for the participants regarding whether or not, they in any way, were responsible for the consequences associated with the flight. This plight was often indirectly illustrated in the explanation given for the flight, but at the same time voicing uncertainty whether or not they had done the right thing in fleeing.

Thus, in this phase of the refugeeship, participants' refugee narratives seemed to highlight a preoccupation with sense of self, drawing on positive I- positions associated with life before the turning point. The narratives were based on a process of meaning-making, where the participants tried to position themselves in relation to the representations and categorisations offered by people they encountered. To some extent, this preoccupation can be understood as a response to what seemed to be an almost implicit question of legitimacy associated with refugeeship: what right do I have to abandon my country for a better life? This question will be returned to many times in the analysis of the narratives. Here, I just want to point to the general pattern that the participants were occupied by, and what is sometimes referred to as identity work (Taylor, 2010). As we shall see, this occupation with self-presentations seemed to be part of an ongoing reconstruction of the participants' selves in their talk. It is first of all based on retrospective reinforcement of current self identifications linking onto identifications and affiliations from life before leaving one's country of origin. This can be understood as an ongoing dialogue and negotiation between present and earlier I-positions (Hermans, 2004). This becomes apparent in the process of questions and answers being posed and presented, or agreement and disagreement in the way the participants talk about their experiences.

The empirical material comprises partly of what Lawler (2008) calls 'raw materials' of identity, such as 'Where I was born' and other biographical details. The accounts given by the participants also disclose a fixation with earlier positive identifications and affiliations, which they draw on continuously when giving their accounts of migration. I interpret this as a response to the gradual loss of sense of agency experienced by the participants as a result of refugeeship. During the asylum procedure, at the same time as proving one's identity, a loss of earlier identifications is experienced.

One key finding of Chapter Five is constituted by the indirect expressions of a sense of involuntary abandonment.

1) A basic sense of abandonment in relation to everyday lives is expressed through the realisation of having to escape from an ordinary life and its routines including: relationships, life projects, professions, home and belonging, be it to the wider society or to a political

organisation. This layer of abandonment is experienced by the participants in relation to their earlier everyday sense of belonging.

2) A specific layer of abandonment concerns previous responsibilities, in relation to family, friends and political projects. Some express guilt having to abandon a political organisation or family members, and the responsibilities implicated.

5.5. 1 The need for positive self-presentations and earlier life representations

The participants' rich self-presentations appear to boil down to the feeling of being cut off from an earlier life and an identification framework which existed in the country of origin. Typical expressions of this, in the accounts given by the participants, were that experiences of the present were complemented by presentations of the past and vice versa. One of the key existential themes appears to be how the participants' self-understandings had been affected by the flight and how they struggle to reconstruct new positive self-identifications. The positions illustrate another function of the need for positive self-presentations, and that is to strengthen one's position as a 'genuine' asylum seeker, who does not fall into the one dimensional designation of the asylum seeker represented in the new context. Van Langenhove and Harré claim that deliberate self positioning takes place

> in every conversation where one wants to express his/her personal identity" (1999: 24).

They go on to explain that this can be achieved in three different ways:

> by stressing one's agency (that is, presenting one's course of action as one from among various possibilities), by referring to one's unique point of view, or by referring to events in one's biography(Ibid).

The material is made up of self presentations, and these are performative (Goffman, 1959) They serve the purpose of monitoring the impressions that participants give in interaction with others, in the sometimes futile attempt to restore a level of respect previously experienced in one's country of origin, as political activists or as 'high status' professionals. Quite a few participants remark that they feel unsuccessful in maintaining their identifications and find themselves ever increasingly seen as something other than the person of high status they were before the turning point.

Breaking off from the past meant abandoning friends, family, a familiar home and neighbourhood, in fact the whole life the participants had before fleeing. However, in my analysis of the existential aspects of

refugeeship, I see that all these losses also have an even more important personal meaning. Not only had one fled from one's earlier life, one had also fled from certain sides of one's sense of self, that is to say positions previously taken up as professionals, political activists or human rights activists. These positions were important for self-definition by providing sense of belonging, self-esteem and recognition. Missing these categories in which to locate one's identifications came across in the interview situation with me, as an erosion of one's sense of self. This predicament seemed to constitute a basic existential challenge to the participants, expressed in their stories as well as in their everyday lives in the new countries. An interesting expression was that most of the participants attempted to find a way to master this challenge in one way or another. This existential theme still characterised the lives of the participants when I met them, even if they by this time, already had been granted refugee status in their new countries. In their stories this played out, in the way the participants were still occupied by presenting their previous life when asked about refugeeship, rather than talking about their current situation as refugees.

The next chapter continues to explore the positioning and identification work of my participants, now in relation to encounters with the official, legal and administrative system of claiming asylum.

6. The official asylum procedure - encountering the legal and administrative system and all that this entails

In this study two categories relating to entrance to a new country exist in the material. These categories are:

1) Not all refugees in this study have experienced the 'official' procedure of seeking asylum on arrival, as some were assisted by the United Nations in a border country. It was the UNHCR that decided to recognise them as legitimate refugees in need of protection and to grant asylum. Others were assisted by UN officials from refugee camps in border countries or from prison[17].

2) The other category of refugees/asylum seekers in this study, fled by paying a smuggler to assist them out of their country and to in reaching a country of destination. Some participants in this study claimed asylum on arrival to the destination country as legally required of them; others entered 'illegally' using a false passport or a tourist visa to visit relatives who already live in the country and then proceeded to claim asylum after some time in the country. Two participants in this study have claimed 'Sur Place'[18]

There are a number of ways of entering another country in order to seek a safe haven. It became apparent by listening to the stories told for this study, that the business of seeking asylum can be implemented in a number of ways by those feeling compelled to leave their country of origin. This is hardly surprising, bearing in mind the complexity of the legalities (outlined in Chapter One) involved in migration from outside the European Union. Those who entered through assistance from the United Nations may not experience the 'official' administrative procedure in the same way as those who had to seek asylum on entry. However, the participants' stories also illustrated the enormity of the transition, be it from a refugee camp or prison or from professional

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[17] The UN does not have jurisdiction over any state or territory. UNHCR recognises persons in need of protection and in co-operation with states administer refugee camps.
[18] Sur Place means an individual was not fleeing when they left their country of origin nor intending to claim asylum, but due to a change of circumstances whilst out of their country they feel they cannot return, placing them in a position of needing to claim asylum.

status, to 'safety', in a new unfamiliar country, and the categorisation processes involved in the transition.

6.1 Making the initial claim - *It didn't feel like it was me saying it*

Making the actual claim was described in some detail by most of the participants, often including long descriptions of encountering immigration officials and how this was experienced. By making the claim, a shift of space takes place. The participant has left his/her country of origin and has normally just arrived in the new country, (unless the claim was *Sur Place)*. This geographical shift of space, with the identification work involved is a new point in the process of becoming refugees. Having to ask for asylum means leaving one's 'old' life behind. This transition has profound implications for identification work. For example, many with prior political or/and professional identifications, and then in the position of helping others, find themselves in a reversed position of having to ask others for help. The participants reported that making a claim was experienced as involving loss of dignity and status. The initial reaction many had was that of 'what have I really gained?' or 'what have I lost?' through fleeing and claiming asylum in another country. The question, 'what have I done?' seemed to repeat itself time and time again. As we saw in Chapter Five, much of the conversation with me includes explanation for fleeing as something one simply had to do in order to save one's own life or those of family members. To justify one's migration is important not only to others, but above all to oneself in order to make sense of the traumatic experiences associated with the asylum seeking procedure.

Participants found themselves faced, in their countries of origin, with a decision they felt compelled to make. However, encountering the new situation and making the claim felt at times almost impossible and it appeared immediately that the asylum situation placed great limitations on the participants' sense of freedom. It led them to question what opportunities the new life situation really had to offer. The following quote illustrates the shame some experienced in asking officially for help:

> **UK3** Well er I was given instructions about the documents and that was(.) that when I was on the plane to the UK that I should destroy these documents [mm] it is to protect the people that have issued the documents (.) so I destroyed the documents on the plane [mm] when I arrived I was thinking a lot (.) about what I was going to do [yes] I really felt so ashamed of having to do this so I let everyone else in the queue go first and I was nearly the last person to get to the immigration er and er I think it was about 10:30 something like that (.) so it was not really busy [mm] it (.) was not really busy [mm] you know er and er we

got to the passport control [mm] er and er (2) they asked me er passport and er I said (2) I don't have a passport (2) [mm] er so they said your documents and I said I don't have any documents so they said how did you er then er and I said (3) er I want to claim asylum er (1) it was very hard to say this actually er to say these words (1)it didn't feel like it was me saying it

This next quote is from UK5 describing her initial encounter with immigration officers at a large international airport in England:

UK5 I had the company of the man who got the money (.) who we paid to help me escape and er I er I (.) he told me that I will have to go to the immigration office at XXXX (airport name) and that er they are going to ask me questions (1) but I was surprised (.) I wanted them to ask me (.) why don't they ask me why I'm here (2) he asked if I had any money and I told him that I had (.) he said I should use the money to buy a ticket back to Iran (.) when I heard him say Iran (.) I was shocked (.) panicking and I was shaking (.) I'm not going back (.) I'm not safe there (.) I'm an asylum seeker (.) I'm a political asylum seeker (.) I can't go back to my country

It is usual for the participants to question their decision to flee a second time when encountering the abrupt asylum system. Many draw parallels between the life of oppression they had escaped from and the treatment received when claiming asylum. The above woman went on to describe this:

I didn't know what to do everything was going through my mind (she went on to explain that the immigration officers wanted to put her in a prison cell for the night) then I said you can't take me there (.) I'm not going anywhere with you (.) by this time it must have been 3'oclock in the morning and four police officers came (.) they were very large they had big bodies and they said let's go (2) I didn't know where they were going to take me (.) to the jail (.) I thought I had got away from that I thought I was in London (.) I was safe I never er expected this (2) but they came and they forced me

Clearly, arriving in a new country with the intention of claiming asylum is a terrifying and daunting experience and some of the participants express great shame in asking for this. When making the initial claim, it is not unusual for the participants to experience being denied time and space to tell their story, and to explain the real complexity of the reasons behind their claim, as illustrated in UK5's quote above. Often, the reasons given by participants for having to leave their countries entail long, political and historical explanations and the limited format of the standardised immigration interviews does not give room for these explanations to be fully conveyed. The participants, in telling me about this during our interviews, also said that with me they were able to tell

their *whole* story uninterrupted and to go into the details they had wished to convey to the immigration authorities. Explanatory expressions, in the participants' conversations with me, as we saw in Chapter Five, involve placing emphasis on their cause for migration, for instance by referring to their political background, or by pointing out the impossible conditions of their lives after the turning point and just before migration. The asylum system places considerable demands on claimants in terms of quickly learning to handle what the system requires of them. When the participants talked about fighting for their case, their talk resembled that of a lawyer defending his or her client. The participants find themselves in a position of having to defend their flight, justify their need for protection as well as provide evidence to back up their allegations.

6.2 Entering a legal battle

> **SW5** nobody looks for this (.) asks for this to be an asylum seeker but what could I do (.) what could I do

Making an asylum claim, means then entering a legal battle. When the participants talked about this, they almost took on the position of defence counsel and self advocacy, defending their right to protection from another state. Whilst talking about the shame and the humiliation of being maligned in the process of claiming asylum, the participants characterise themselves, as hard-working persons, contributing citizens or as a competent professional, as 'good' and as someone who has 'never been in trouble', much like a lawyer defending her or his client. I suspect the entirety of the details conveyed to me by the participants, resembles the kind of information the official interview is intended to extract, such as the history of persecution, journey and documentation to prove one's identity. However, in the official interviews the opportunity was not given for participants to convey their 'virtuousness', honesty and hard-working nature. Neither was one given the opportunity to dwell on the situation after the turning point, which dominated so much of the descriptions around the narrated sequential events of refugeeship with me:

> **SW7** It isn't easy (.) I hadn't done anything wrong but you have to prove everything you are like your own lawyer (.) I met with them (UN officials) and they act like lawyers but you don't feel (.) er I didn't feel they were <u>my</u> lawyer (.) I had to be <u>my</u> lawyer it is like an interrogation" why did you come here, when did you come here" you can't remember you are under so much stress fleeing (.) really sick (.) you are really tired how are you meant to remember (.) they want details all the time I had been through <u>so</u> much many situations <u>so</u> much had happened to me why can't they understand that I couldn't

remember (.) I was away I was in hiding for almost three years (.) underground (.) on the run (.) I didn't have contact with anyone no relatives not my parents (1) do you understand the whole time you have to convince them of your case show them that you are for real (1) but anyway in the end it worked out and they accepted our case

6.2.1 A transition of identification

Having endured all that the fleeing process entails, forced migrants are then faced with the task of claiming asylum. At this stage of the narratives, when describing the claim making, a transition occurs in terms of being a person who was respected for their political or professional role in the country of origin, to finding themselves having to convince authorities that they were worthy of protection. When participants talked about themselves and their lives before the turning point the narratives included positive anticipations of the future, whereby the participants placed emphasis on life events and positive identifications before things changed. However, when describing life after the turning point a negative tone was taken and then when describing claiming asylum the narrative tone changes again, to an even more despondent mode, illustrating lack of control and a breaking down of one's sense of who one is, in being required to take up temporary expedient identifications which are not part of one's authentic self. The following quote illustrates the way many participants portrayed this transition:

> **UK10** I'm sad now because I can't work (.) I'm a doctor and can't work (.) I don't have status anymore (.) in this country I can't work (1) I'm sad to interrupt from my work for a long time because as a doctor it is very difficult to interrupt your work (1) I used to work day and night in my previous life (.) but now I spend all my time at home (.) just thinking what happened to me (.) I'm miserable if they could just let me work here because that is what I really want (.) I can't stand not working (.) because a doctor who is not working is not a doctor

This man refers to life before the turning point as "my previous life" He is clearly expressing an interruption in his narrative and therewith a changed sense of identification. He does not feel he is still a doctor if he is not practicing medicine, and he elucidates the transition in terms of the position he occupied before the turning point and the position he is ascribed as an asylum seeker.

> **SW5** There are so many sacrifices (2) the sacrifices for my family the sacrifice of leaving family there (.) the sacrifice of my work and economically

SW5 later explained:

as an asylum seeker I tried to do things which would help me forget the old life [you wanted to forget] I wanted to forget the old life because I couldn't work here and I couldn't get that life again here (2) I tried to learn Swedish (.) drank a little and slept

SW5, much like UK10, talks as if the life he had led had come to an end. SW5 called it the "old life" and UK10 the "previous life".

At the same time as the participants experienced this sense of loss of life, and loss of agency, they found themselves having to convince authorities of their need for asylum. In order to enter the asylum claim procedure forced migrants are literally stripped of previous identity by being forced to hand over identification cards, passports and other personal documents to the authorities. These identity documents are replaced with a standardised asylum seeker identity card[19]:

> **UK6** Yes so they took my papers (.) they took my passport and they er they took it and they gave me an ID er an asylum ID they call it ARC (.) they said you have to report to the police as an asylum seeker but we will make it once a month instead of once a week (2) I said ok (3) I'll tell you something actually you know (4) I almost cried (2) when they told me and they took my passport (.) and give me this ID it was like someone (3) had taken off my clothes [mm] (3) something (sighing(3))I had lost what I had worked for more than 35 years of my life [mm] (2) it is er I lost my choice (2) my er this was not my choice (.) at the same time there was no choice

UK6 takes up the position of a more reliable asylum seeker in this quote, when he explains this rather usual act of having to report to the police station, every week as an asylum seeker, he says in his case the police were more lenient and as a result he only had to report once a month. The above quote expresses the quite literal sense of losing one's life that many experienced in making an asylum claim. This man uses several metaphors to convey his experience, like a sense of nakedness and loss of life, which has taken 35 years to build, being taken away from him. This quote exemplifies moreover the conflict between feeling compelled to flee, to escape powerlessness on the one hand and the loss of agency, involved in the claim to asylum on the other.

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[19] In the UK, in official terms this identity card is called: Asylum Registration Card (ARC)

6.3 Screening interviews: a new level of abandonment and loss

I introduced in chapter Five the idea of fleeing as involving a sense of abandonment. This sense of abandonment is reinforced and deepened during the claim period; this will now be explored in more depth.

Asylum screening interviews, which are carried out to establish the identity and nationality of the applicant, are often described by the participants as something they were unprepared for in terms of being treated like a criminal, and having personal belongings removed. The participants told me that the screening interview was the first point when they started to understand the full significance of having fled and what it was going to involve. This was being tried and tested in terms of identity and nationality, and then literally to hand over this identity and nationality to migration authorities in a new country, and have it replaced with an asylum registration card. It was almost as though they were describing a new level or depth to the sense of abandonment and loss already felt through fleeing, which was reinforced by having to give up previous identification and be labelled asylum seeker. It was at this point that the participants really found themselves in a new situation, the asylum claim period, and their new identity was now one of asylum seeker until refugee status was granted, or deportation back to the country of origin as 'failed' asylum seeker was ordered.

Below we meet a participant who illustrates these descriptions of the event of claiming asylum; she is describing her screening interview. This participant's description is enriched with the positioning work many others also convey, in terms of locating themselves as a 'good' person. This quotation testifies to how terrifying these sequences of events after fleeing were. The process of stripping away one's uniqueness and personhood in this categorisation process induces great fear:

> **UK7** When I went to the screening interview they said "you are now liable to be detained because you are seeking asylum here" (.) I said I understand and when I left I took an overnight bag I didn't know where I would be staying so I just took an overnight bag you know they said "you will be detained you are not allowed to leave (3) from where we will put you"

> Oh god, (.) my dignity went (.) the first day that I arrived to the screening interview [yes] maybe because I was never one (2) to be in trouble (.) I was always a good person I was a decent person (.) I don't know what I can say but that day I lost all my dignity [mm, mm] (1) (whispering) it was terrifying (3) and er and (.) and (.) and (.) having all those questions put to you (1) you're nervous (1) you worry (.) then the

> mug shots and then finger prints and taking away all your passport (.)
> giving a statement

Here, this woman positions herself as a 'good' and 'decent' person, who was never in trouble. She is trying to make sense of why this is happening to her and even why she is experiencing it so strongly, "maybe because I was never one to be in trouble" she explains. Being a dignified person is something she obviously feels characterised her and now she experiences a loss of dignity and to some extent then, a loss of who she was and what made up her identifications. She indicates that she sensed being seen as someone who has done something wrong in needing to flee her country and she is uncomfortable with being located in such a position. The categorisation attributed to her, she is experiencing as undesirable because it does not resonate with who she feels she really is. The treatment the participants undergo during the claiming procedure was described in terms of being positioned as 'bad' or as a 'liar' and the participants often resist this position and locate themselves as 'the good one'. This is also illustrated in the way they attempt to give meaning to why they reacted to the procedure so negatively.

UK7 repeatedly talked about her experience of the screening interview and describes the shock of finding herself in this situation, being socially reduced to 'nothing' as she enters the life of an asylum seeker:

> **UK7** It was really scary Nicola, like er (1) I should have (1) I should have er (4) how could I say (.) researched it properly, er but if you research (2) these things they wouldn't have told these details (.) we had had all the screening er which was not the nice part of it (.) they took mug shots we had finger prints taken <u>again</u> but when we went to the screening interview they said we are going to take the pictures (.) we were put into a room (1) ok [mm](2) mug shots taken and the finger prints and we were issued with a card(.) I can show you the card with our finger prints on it and our passports were taken away (.) well mine was (.) and all travel documents were taken away (.) and after <u>all this</u> (.) everything (.) everything was taken away (1) we had to be screened (.), I don't know maybe I'm naive but I didn't know what I was in for [no]

The screening interview was equally drawn upon by my participants who had claimed asylum in Sweden, also expressing the dramatic entry into the asylum system and the removal of personal belongings:

> **SW6** I didn't know they were going to take photos I would have had a shave***** [**] they take away your passport (.) because I came legally if I had come illegally they couldn't take my passport sometimes I feel the wrong is good and the right is wrong here (1) they took all my

papers like my education er degree papers they take it all away because it is the first procedure in the claim to prove your identity

What does it involve for the participants to encounter and endure the official asylum system? What meaning are these individuals ascribing to this system? It seems reasonable to suspect that this is a dramatic encounter which haunts the participants and becomes part of their lived experience of refugeeship. The screening interview or the first interview with immigration officials at the airport was the point where they encountered their new life situation, and encountered feeling robbed of their familiar identifications. Having experienced loss through fleeing, they now met a new level of loss, through a categorisation process which ascribed identification to them they did not recognise. Encountering this system seems to offer little preparation for becoming refugees; on the contrary it appears to be the beginning of a process of breaking down self-esteem and confidence, locking participants into this asylum position, with little opportunity to form a sense of self and relevance in the new context. More on this will be discussed in the next chapter: *Being a refugee*.

6.3.1 Deprived of all previous identification categories with no obvious replacement

I see dispossession of nationality and citizenship as a transition in identification. This is paralleled with a lack of trust shown to asylum seekers' stories, as a transition to deprived pride and dignity. Previous citizenship is given up and replaced with something that feels 'identity-less' for the participants. They find themselves in a space of limbo, waiting, without any citizenship rights, in any country, and an identity card revealing them as an asylum seeker. This process is characterised as a restricted space without a specific identification. Not being able to work, not being able to make decisions about accommodation, not being able to travel, and in most cases, having to report to the police station, involves not being able to take up any position other than that of the asylum seeker. Every day is defined by one's position as asylum seeker, which ascribes them a position lacking in status and rights. Having been 'screened' the participants were placed into temporary accommodation.

This man describes how his everyday routine became defined by his life as an asylum seeker, living in the 'reception' centre:

UK3 Er so we arrived at the asylum centre place it was where they were putting asylum seekers (.) accommodation (1) we arrived there and there were other asylum seekers there (1) we were given a room (.) my daughter and I stayed in that room for about 2 months [ok] and er we

were actually er it was boring and we were fed chicken and chips almost everyday [oh] yeah or sausage when they wanted to give us a change** [can you eat that today or are you put off now] ***** er sometimes**** (.) well after a long time**** [***] and being a parent in this situation er there were other families but not any other children of her age so she didn't have anyone to play with er she had some grown up ladies that you know er that liked to play with her so that was fine but it was a really <u>difficult</u> (.) it was really very difficult that time (.) especially you know you don't know what to do and you have everything done for you and it is not just that it's done for you er you er you have <u>no control</u> and you don't have money and you can't answer your child's questions (1) <u>hard</u> to treat your daughter like that er but for her age I would say she understood the situation she understood a lot even though she was asking a lot (.) she knew <u>Dad</u> is still <u>Dad</u> and she knew I was her parent and even though she was asking a lot of things she understood the answer that er this was not possible and there is a reason for this (2) but for me the situation was <u>very hard</u> I was not <u>used</u> to just <u>being</u> there and not having anything to do I'm not used to that life to just <u>sit</u> there.

Being placed into group housing or an asylum centre[20] is a usual aspect of refugeeship during the claim period, which can take up to several years to be finalised. Understandably, this is a challenging situation for many asylum seekers. The above quote illustrates the continuous loss of agency, independency and sense of control over usual, everyday choices. This situation adds a new dynamic to his parenting. The following man is single at this time, as he became estranged from his family during migration; he explains the impact of moving into group housing on his identifications and sense of agency, having to live in a small space with other asylum seekers:

> **UK6** I thought it was accommodation for private people (.) it was shared for asylum seekers (.)a car comes to get you (.) the car came the driver told me where I would be living he asked do you know how many people you will be living with in your bit (.) I said <u>what</u> (2) I was on my way to share a house with four people (.) I couldn't work and I find myself for the first time in my life living in a house with people I don't know(3) I got to the house and it was a tip (2) Kurdish (.) Africans (.) there was one man a very nice man (3) he said it will be alright I will arrange something for you I was shocked er er how could they put me in this situation he showed me there were two beds in each room for sharing and one room only with one bed in it he said you can have this room (.) it was very hard to be in this situation I lived like this for two and half years I thought I was going crazy

The living conditions alone, impact on the participant's experience of refugeeship and sense of self. Being placed into group housing is

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[20] Often referred to in official terms as a reception centre

significant to the categorisation process of being an asylum seeker. Not all participants see themselves *as* asylum seekers. A classic "us" and "them" differentiation arises in the above quote, when the participant is suggesting that Kurdish and Africans are more the stereotypical category of 'asylum seeker' whereas he does not identify with the category.

This next participant described the accommodation procedure having made her initial claim:

> **UK7** So what happened is some screening women they send you to a migrant home (.) it is like a hotel (1) ok they took me there(1) drop me there (.) er I had a bed in a room I shared a bedroom with another girl and we're all in the same situation we had claimed asylum and we were now waiting to be er to be er (.) you know (1) the next move sort of thing [yes] and er I stayed there for two nights (.) on the third day a note came er a fax that I had been transferred from XXXXX to XXXXX [south England to north England] er I stayed there for 25 days it was very nice I had freedom I could go into town the staff were wonderful they helped with clothing they were just very supportive but apparently the stay with them is not more than 25 days but we were free to move around I felt much better there (1) then I got a letter saying I would be dispersed to another place I was overwhelmed I moved in with another girl in a house

Besides the impact on identification and sense of agency, the participants show how they our continuously confronted with new terminology concerning the procedures belonging to the asylum system. Just in the three quotes cited above regarding the reception centre, all of these participants had their own way of understanding where they were living: *asylum centre, shared accommodation for asylum seekers and a migrant home*, just to name the above.

6.3.2 The parameters of the system in everyday life

Lack of autonomy is a theme running through these stories. The asylum situation represents a great lack of autonomy in that asylum seekers are frequently placed into group housing or detention centres at the ouset of the claim. This situation implies that even daily choices over what to eat and when to sleep are decided for the asylum seeker. Living with strangers is all part of the experience of claiming asylum. Being placed together with other asylum seekers seems to strengthen their experience of being categorised as an asylum seeker, thus feeling even further removed from earlier identifications. Freedom of mobility is restricted during the claim period, as well as the opportunity to work.[21] This

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[21] At the time this study was conducted it was forbidden to work as an asylum seeker. A debate is currently taking place in Sweden and England which questions this principle,

restriction is an obstacle to creating new identifications, for instance by taking up previous positions in the new contexts. The new context limits one's means to organise a new life situation as an individual. There are rules and regulations to observe. Breaking these rules could jeopardise one's chances of being granted permission to stay. So, whilst experiencing a loss of identifications, the participants live with the anxiety of not 'breaking the rules' and about what the future will bring. This is a space of limbo. The participants cannot return, but have no knowledge of how long they will be able to remain:

> **UK6** Even though I wanted to work (.) I wasn't allowed to work it is prohibited [yes] er you have to follow the rules (.) it is not like coming for money coming for work (.) as a refugee you are not er you know as a refugee you are (.) it is like someone has put you in the corner [mm] a very very very bad corner (2) it is <u>very hard</u> to have your situation <u>your life your future</u> being decided for you by another person [yes] not by yourself and give you like a railway going this way(.) don't go right don't go left (1) this feels very bad very bad very confusing er that er sometimes I couldn't sleep until 4am [mm] (3) er so confusing

> **SW9** you have to take everyday as it comes (.) you can't plan anything or think about the future (.) plan things(.) those living in hiding here you know hidden asylum seekers they can't even go out

Experiencing a loss of agency, a loss of continuity in one's life story and being met with suspicion by the migration authorities, contributing to a loss of dignity, appear to be factors contributing to this theme of loss running through the data material, as well as the sense of constraint the participants express they are living with.

6.3.3 Disbelief in not being believed

In the interviews with authorities, justifying their need to migrate was something the participants found to be necessary for their claim to be successful. Common to virtually all descriptions of the claim interview was a sense of not being believed. A sense of being seen as a liar was expressed in most of the participants' experiences of claiming asylum:

> **UK3** We had an interview with an immigration officer (.)they arranged accommodation for the night and then they arranged another interview at the immigration office so we went there for the interview and during that interview er well the interviewer was someone from the from er he was black (.) he was black actually and he was really the awful one of the er I mean really very very very awful (.) that was a really bad experience that I had him as an interviewer he was horrible he even

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proposing instead the introduction of the right to take up employment as an asylum seeker.

called me a liar you know (.) things like that (.) it was a bad experience you know

UK3, a Black man himself, from Africa, explained being seen as a liar was a disparaging characteristic to be ascribed, especially form a fellow black man.

UK4 is Kurdish and fled Turkey with her husband after their village was burnt down:

> **UK4** They didn't believe us we have waited and waited we went to court but they don't believe us they told us "oh you are from Turkey there is no problem in Turkey (.) Turkey is like a European country"

In the interview with me, the participants desperately attempted to remember details such as what their prison cell looked like, in their countries of origin, or descriptions of the different methods of torture they were exposed to, sometimes apologising for not being able to remember names or places. Documents could be produced for me to see, as they talked convincingly of their situation before migration. One man rolled up his sleeve to reveal a scar resulting from being tortured. This says something about the strong identification of mistrust ascribed to these participants during official interviews. Such experiences appear difficult to shake off, even long after being granted refugee status. One man reflects back over this situation and the situation of other asylum seekers today and explains:

> **SW4** And you know all this discussion about they lie it is not important you know I lied too because you just are so afraid of not being trusted and when I came to Turkey (.) and this was the good days I just tried to remember where was the light switch for turning the light on and off in the cell (.) because my friends told me they are going to ask you about the time in prison and how it was in prison and how it looked in prison and I just tried to remember (.) shit where was it and I just couldn't remember and then they reject you because (.) because you don't know all these details (.) I can tell you now anything because I have refugee status I'm not afraid why should I lie but when you are trying to get them to believe you the system makes you lie because it is impossible after all the trauma to remember such details

SW4 emphasises that it is in fact impossible not to lie, as the system demands details one suppresses due to extreme trauma experienced as a result of torture, imprisonment or a long life in a refugee camp. The following participant who had been living in a refugee camp for the previous 18 years, since the age of six, was eventually sent to England.

He described feeling mistrusted by United Nation Officials in the interview situation at the camp:

> **UK1** They er they er it was diff:::er they are not nice (.) er (1) because they are just trying to challenge what you are saying all the time (2) they ask you a question and then after say 10 (.) 20 minutes they ask again and the interview er the interview lasts sometimes about three hours (1) and sometimes they don't give you a break (1) I think the people from the Home Office were quite fair but those people from Geneva they were speaking very harshly and very loudly so I felt like they were trying to find a way to not help us

> **SW6** "We cannot trust him" (.) that is what they are saying really (.) People have killed people in their lives and then they come here to claim asylum but I'm not like that (.) but they see you as all the same

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the ways in which people claim asylum or become refugees differs from case to case. Some flee directly to a country and ask at the port of arrival for asylum in order to enter, while others are assisted by the United Nations in their country of origin or at a border country whilst being placed in a refugee camp. Some asylum seekers enter the country illegally and after some time, claim asylum in order to stay, a so-called 'in-country' application. Regardless of entry, asking for the help, and saying the words 'I need to claim asylum' was expressed as a humiliating process for the participants in this study. Whilst experiencing a great loss in terms of identifications and agency, the participants encounter great mistrust and are positioned as dishonest, contributing to further erosion in terms of who one feels one is.

6.4 Loss of my country, citizenship and national identity: a further layer of abandonment and loss

Claiming asylum is the ultimate step taken by a citizen when his or her relationship with the state has broken down, no longer being able to expect protection from its government. Claiming asylum then, involves a rejection of his/her national government as a competent body to provide its citizens with the rights and protection a citizen can expect. Therefore, claiming asylum requires being legally prepared, once granted refugee status, to give up citizenship of the country of origin. This requires of the individual an active rejection of one's earlier citizenship, which begins to take place by deciding to flee. However, the full implications of one's decision are not apparent and do not gain meaning for the participants until the procedure of making the asylum claim is under way.

The stories about seeking asylum reveal that, while some are aware of this standpoint of rejecting one's citizenship due to disappointment with the government, it is important to point out that this was not expressed as rejecting one's country; on the contrary, the country of origin appears to mean a lot, making the flight a difficult step to take. The country of origin seems to represent ones roots and thus furnishes one with an identification framework, which includes many levels; obviously family, friends and a professional or political affiliation, but also cultural artefacts such as food, music and colours and aspects of the natural environment such as vegetation and climate, all of which make up a familiar environment. The rejection expressed is a non-acceptance of a political regime that one could not identify with, or indeed a need to flee a regime that is unable or unwilling to protect one. Many participants, whilst describing the situation of encountering migration authorities, expressed a deep sense of injustice. Not only does making the claim mean losing many of the earlier identifications, they were experiencing a loss when it came to their countries of origin also:

> **SW2** I lost my country (.) gaining this status (.) it is nothing compared to leaving my country (.)

> **SW6** I don't like that I had to leave my country [no] I didn't want to leave (.) I would have liked to stay I can't return I can't travel to my country it is out of your hands and you lose this freedom

> **UK3** Actually I loved my country but I couldn't stay

The country of origin is often talked of fondly in descriptions; it is a fear and, indeed, resentment of the government that is expressed as the problem, or wider social or political circumstances, out of one's control. While all participants fear being returned to their countries of origin, this does not prevent them from feeling the loss and the restriction of mobility entailed in making the claim. The participants realise that it is not safe to return, but understanding the full extent of the migration, can involve the fact of never being able to return. This is expressed as loss, but also as a lack of freedom in mobility, which is experienced at the same time as feeling restricted in one's asylum situation.

The following quote is long, but captures so well what many of the participants expressed in trying to make sense of the restrictions on mobility, as well as a lack of literal identity and nationality, which also becomes abruptly apparent at the outset of claiming asylum. The quote illustrates the loss and the lack of mobility. It becomes obvious in most of the participants' stories that the asylum system and then the long process before gaining full citizenship rights after being granted refugee status, puts parameters on one's capacity to feel a 'full citizen'. Rather,

they express feeling in-between, no longer a citizen of their country of origin but without full rights in the new context. This man who was moved to England through the intervention of United Nations officials, told me:

> **UK1** I don't feel like a British Citizen

I asked, what do you imagine that feels like?

> I think they have more freedom [ok] yeah (.) than for example the refugees (1) yeah (1) [in what way] maybe for example (.) if I wanted to go back to XXXX (part of Africa) I'm not allowed there (2) maybe after many years to come it might be allowed again (.) but someone British (.) with British citizenship er (1) is allowed to go there if they want (.) someone with an international passport of some kind (.) are allowed (.) but I'm not allowed that freedom no I can't move around how I want to (2) and that was the same for me in the refugee camps (.) in that sense here is better I can travel within the UK and to other European countries but other places er I have to have travel documents but to go back to my motherland I don't have that freedom [no] so being a citizen really means for me being freer for example if I travel er the refugee travelling if something would happen while I'm in another country because I only have travel documents no passport then the citizen with a passport is protected but I would not be protected [so you don't have a passport] no it's like a passport but the passport is brown this one is blue I can travel all over the world with this but I'm not allowed to travel to XXX XXX (two other countries mentioned) (2) I cannot go to my country (2) so I'm not free with this passport er like inside (in the passport) where it says nationality it normally says the country and nationality but instead of nationality it says indefinite right to remain in United Kingdom er it says name date of birth and then indefinite right to remain then there is a covering letter so if we travel we have to have both letters with us the covering letter says that the person named below is a refugee and under protection of XXXX just like as if a refugee is a criminal(.) in this country it is hard to feel part of society when the rules are like this

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the system of claiming asylum and, indeed, of being granted refugee status is experienced by the participants as coming with certain restrictions. We have witnessed that this can be in terms of the rules and regulations which come with the system for asylum seekers. It however also appears to place parameters on the participants' *sense* of 'integration' as refugees. The man quoted above eloquently points out that, whilst the system is insensitive to individual differences, it impedes feelings of belonging to society, which is arguably one of the most important aspects of 'integration', that of the subjective experience of *feeling* as if you belong to society. This aspect of making sense of the refugee label, moving away from the

restrictions of being an asylum seeker towards the rights which come with being a refugee, will be examined in the next chapter.

6.4.1 A consideration of 'limbo'

> **UK7** Will I get my passport back (.) I had such a nice passport you know because I had travelled a lot (2) and they just took it away from me (.) they won't give it back to me the solicitor told me if I get refugee status then they will give me a EU passport [ok] (2) but otherwise they said you might get your passport back with something stuck in it (.) I don't know what [no] (3) it feels so bad (.) so bad you know because when I first got to the screening interview they said can I have your passport please (.) I said oh you want my passport but I was straight and honest with everything they said ok you won't get that back (.) er but I'm dying to know what is going to happen to me because I don't know what is going to happen

Much of what characterises being an asylum seeker is living in limbo. This is literal in the sense of not being able to return to one's country of origin, without being granted the right to stay in the country of refuge and not knowing what the outcome of the claim will be. Not being able to work, and living in temporary accommodation. The participants in this study demonstrated a real capacity to adapt to the situation of being in limbo shaping up everyday routines within this space, fighting for continuity in their sense of self. During the field work I came across countless projects and activities initiated by asylum seekers which contributed to their sense of doing something for themselves to improve their own situation and indirectly that of other asylum seekers. Nevertheless, the experience of lacking autonomy placed on them by the official asylum system was strongly felt. One project they engaged in among other activities was gardening, which was seen as an opportunity to fill the days with something 'therapeutic' and 'creative'. At the same time, it meant producing fruit and vegetables, which helped them to maintain a healthy diet when their economic means were so limited. Some of those self-identifying as political refugees attempted to join activist organisations, or started new ones, introducing the asylum cause to their daily work as human rights activists. Others saw the gaps in the asylum system, such as a lack of opportunity to learn Swedish or English, setting up classes on a voluntary basis. Most of the participants in this study turned to voluntary work during their asylum seeking period, which many continued to pursue after receiving refugee status. Here is how one participant used his knowledge and work experience from his country of origin to create a meaningful undertaking within the limbo he experienced as an asylum seeker:

UK2 Well I learnt a lot about voluntary work if I couldn't get a paid job then I worked voluntary to stay sane (.) that helped me survive helping and volunteering (1) I did my volunteering in a special way because I used my agricultural background (.) I had heard that the city council allows you to rent a plot and do some growing of your own food so that gave me the idea (.) so I started the organic gardening (.) a project welcoming people (.) because this is very therapeutic I shared my skills with others and do it myself and I really enjoy it

Another asylum seeker explains what meaning voluntary work took on for him:

UK3 I think volunteering has helped me a lot and er I have through this been able to help myself as well as assist other people assisting others meant I was learning (1) also meant I got a lot of training (.) with the Red Cross and other organisations I went on a course to be an adviser (.) so all this er broadened my knowledge of the UK system

These excerpts exemplify the importance of feeling that you can help yourself as well as feel competent to reach out to others in creating a meaningful space as an asylum seeker. These participants not only take up earlier positions, such as agricultural worker in this space, they share this with fellow asylum seekers, which help them to take up a position of usefulness, initiative-taker and agency again. In addition it educates them about the new system they find themselves a part of.

6.5 Trying to understand the initial findings

The results presented in chapters Five and Six have included rich description and interpretation of the participant's talk about: earlier life, the turning point, fleeing and the initial encounters with the official asylum claim system. In Chapter Five, I introduced the finding of abandonment and two levels of abandonment were described. This chapter illustrates abandonment as multi-layered, over time and space, which intertwines with this loss of sense of agency. Three further levels of abandonment are described here.

3) A more formal experience of abandonment is experienced *after* fleeing. It becomes salient on arrival when encountering migration officials, and the awareness that claiming asylum and asking for protection in another country ultimately means giving up and 'abandoning' one's previous citizenship. Here, abandonment is defined in relation to an earlier citizenship.

4) Perhaps the most powerful sense of abandonment is realised through the gradual erosion of all previous desirable and familiar identifications on being categorised as an asylum seeker, contributing to a gradual erosion of sense of self. At the same time the participants

demonstrate the capacity to resist the eroding influences by holding on to previous identifications in their self-presentation with others. By constructing new spaces in which to take up meaningful positions and help themselves and others, through various asylum seeker projects. Resistance to being located within the discourse of 'asylum seeker as a burden' also manifests itself.

5) A social level of abandonment is experienced through 'the silent accusation' which is encountered within the asylum system. It encompasses a sense of social marginalisation by others, which contributes to the erosion of the sense of agency. Although the system does not overtly 'accuse' the asylum seeker of lying or lacking genuine ground upon which to claim asylum, 'silently' an accusation is made by the legal procedure imposed on the asylum seeker, in having to 'prove' one's case. At the same time loaded current discourse of the asylum seeker as lacking genuine reason to enter a new country contributes to the sense of a silent accusation.

6.5.1 Multi-layered abandonment

As we witnessed in Chapter Five, this multi-layered experience of involuntary abandonment begins in the country of origin after the turning point, when the abandonment or loss of life as one knew it is experienced and continues well into the refugeeship. These layers of abandonment intertwine with a lot of challenging changes in sense of self. Each layer of abandonment seems to contribute to a gradual erosion of sense of self, throughout the asylum process. The participants adopt a number of re-organisational strategies. This is illustrated in the material by how the participants re-visit previous identifications in their self presentations and also in the arguments and explanatory utterances which dominate their talk of refugeeship.

In order to understand the severity and complexity of a changing sense of self, one must see the changes include what Harré refers to as positions and positioning:

> the way persons locate themselves and others within an essentially moral space by using several categories and storylines" (2003:45)

In ordinary life most people occupy a number of positions associated with many different expectations of actions they might perform. As has been established so far, leaving one's country also means leaving many of one's previous identifications behind. But most importantly, subject positions as an asylum seeker or refugee are associated with extremely limited repertoires of possible actions. These limitations are due to the limited 'resources' available, for example in the form of positions

available to be taken up. An asylum seeker is placed in a position with certain assumptions attached to it. This position invites others to see an asylum seeker in a particular way. According to Taylor (2010) this places parameters on identity work, due to the 'established' nature of narratives surrounding certain positions ('asylum seeker as bogus'). Identifications and dis-identifications are agentic and relate to an external social category or representation. Positioning may be internal or external and it is broad in terms of discursive capacity. The participant's positioning as refugees becomes even more complicated externally often lumped together with migrants who have moved for economic reasons. The participants have to handle their own feelings of letting go of their former lives, as well as coping with other people's notions of the refugee as someone who has fled for a better life. According to Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) this is when "second order positioning" can take place. This implies that the positions occupied are questioned by others and therefore need negotiating.

In the analysed narratives participants take up, or adopt earlier positions which serve the purpose of declaring their educational backgrounds, political and professional experiences and, most importantly, their competence which contributed to their countries of origin before. In making these personal sides of their history known they resist the position imposed on them of being seen as incompetent and non-contributing due to the constraints of the asylum situation and the defamation in the asylum discourse. The process however to becoming a recognised refugee is long, often starting long before the flight takes place, and the chipping away of sense of self is challenging for the participants to avoid.

These findings relate to my first research question, which is: *What identification talk is present in the participants' stories of migration and seeking asylum?*
The following is a presentation of these key findings in the form of an analysis which draws on the theoretical perspectives employed in this thesis (see Chapter Three for more on these theories).

6.6 Erosion of Self

Self, according to the theoretical perspective employed in this thesis (Goffman, 1959, 1961, Harré and Moghaddam, 2003, James 1890/1950, Jenkins, 1996) is, put simply, constructed by using a framework which helps us define ourselves to ourselves and to others. This framework relates to everyday routines, routines of society at large and various specific cultural contexts to which we belong, and it is influenced by the actions and responses of others in our daily lives. Self in narration is distributed across different contexts and interactions according to Bruner (1990).

A typical characteristic of being a refugee is that one has felt forced to abandon one's country and forced to accept participating in a standardised asylum system, which lacks any uniqueness, for example in terms of nationality, or familiar categories with which to identify and re-construct a sense of self. Later the forced migrant can be granted asylum in a specific country and is then invited into new formal and informal affiliations. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, the refugee identity can be as difficult to live with as the identity of the asylum seeker. What is illustrated in this chapter is that this seems largely to do with the fact that the story lines available for creating new positions are often very much established as an 'accepted' narrative in the new society (Taylor, 2010), for example, the story line: Asylum seekers are unwanted and a burden. This makes it difficult for alternative story lines which may enable 'new' identity work, to become established.

A sense of self is constructed through the narratives voiced by the participants in my study, the narratives become visible in this thesis in sequences of 'identity talk', for example, through self-definitions of 'who I am' in relation to 'who I was' and by identifying the groups to which I belonged, and might belong to in the future. Thus, identity talk can be understood as a tool in identification work, whereby identity talk is expedient in fulfilling the task of constructing my identifications and revealing myself to others as well as the need to manage this erosion of self. I prefer using identification, rather than identity, as the former concept refers to a more dynamic and multi-facetted phenomenon. A sense of self, as well as identification work involves positions being taken up, adopted, located to others and resisted, all agentic contributions to creating a meaningful and acceptable image of myself for others. These positions furthermore imply taking up a particular stand in a wider discourse, which communicates something about 'who I am', and my personal and collective identifications. Positioning is a dialogical, ontological process and identification produces an agentic attachment to actual social categories and representations available to the person.

However, there are constraints in identity work; for example, a limited number of positions available to avail oneself of, this is made apparent in the stories of claiming asylum. Although self can be understood as constituting various fluid and dynamic positions, experiencing a sense of self means experiencing 'continuity', 'distinctness' and 'volition', according to James (1890/1950). In the self-presentations, which are embedded in the participants' narrative structures, this sense of continuity, distinctness and volition is clearly present in talking about earlier belonging and about taking up useful positions in the asylum space, such as volunteering. Desirable categories to belong to in life before the turning point represented for

the participants a point of reference in relation to which one could appraise the sense of who one is, across time, allowing oneself to feel a sense of uniqueness and autonomy. What is interesting is that experiencing uniqueness, autonomy and a sense of continuity referred to by James are precisely the characteristics the asylum system deprives the asylum seeker of. Experiencing the turning point, and fleeing, is the start of a trying period of transition, one part of which implies a significant circumscription of one's feeling of volition. However, it seems that the drastic loss of sense of agency (made apparent by the lack of positions available in the new context and the constraints of the asylum system) is not fully realised nor experienced until one becomes entangled in the asylum claimant procedure. At this point the categorisation process begins. Previous identifications are taken away literally. Many claimants are placed into asylum accommodation, whereby even daily, mundane choices are removed. Due to the restrictive nature of the procedure, there is little or no room for an asylum seeker to feel a sense of distinctness or individuality.

The participants' 'talk' expressed multiple positions when presenting themselves in the interview. Especially highlighted were positions they had occupied before the turning point in their lives. As the refugeeship narratives exemplify, being an asylum seeker offers very limited positions and it is reasonable to assume that the talk about earlier I-positions was a way of completing current self-presentations and managing the sense of erosion of self, through narrative construction. Moreover it is an example of second order positioning (Harré, 1999) of resisting the stereotypical asylum seeker position.

Chapters Five and Six both show the positions that the participants occupied and therefore self-identified with as well as the positions with which they dis-identified, often ones ascribed by 'Others'. Their talk shows the meaning-making processes in accounts of refugeeship. A further layer in this 'identity project' is the sense of self. The three layers: positioning work, meaning-making and sense of self are all in relation to the various aspects of refugeeship, which Chapters Five and Six are about, that is to say; life before the turning point, fleeing and claiming asylum. The term 'sense of self' is used, rather than self, because it allows us to portray the *experience* of self, and view self as dynamic and continuous rather than risk presenting 'self' as something static.

This chapter has exemplified the positions occupied by the participants in the aspect of refugeeship: claiming asylum and the repertoire of positions they perceive are available in this aspect of refugeeship. For an asylum seeker, the repertoire available is experienced as very limited and marginalised. As a result one's sense of self becomes somewhat uncertain. The participants in my study

experienced that they were questioned by the system in terms of who they are were and why they had left their countries. At the same time they were beginning to ask themselves the same questions. The decision to leave was experienced as necessary, but still this did not make the feeling of having abandoned one's political project or family members, easier. This challenge becomes even more prominent when encountering the asylum system, which ultimately questions one's motives and reasons for seeking protection.

When participants talked about who they were and their lives before the turning point, they expressed that they felt a sense of knowing who they were and what they were trying to achieve, until their circumstances changed. There was a sense of continuity coming through in their life narratives. Life after the turning point and the fleeing process were however characterised by the struggle for survival. It was not until encountering the asylum system that the participants fully experienced a change in terms of their sense of who they were now, and the conflicting feelings pertaining to the decision to flee.

6.6.1 Uncertain identifications- an example of erosion of sense of self

The positioning work in the stories serves the purpose of enriching and upgrading the participants' self-images and self-respect by drawing on earlier self-identifications and adding new ones. Also what is taking place here is an attempt to make personal sense of one's changing situation and life world as an asylum seeker and later as a person who has been granted refugee status.

The uncertainty of identifications encountered in refugeeship is to do with the asylum seeking system and the labelling process it involves. Due to the multi-layered theme of abandonment, discussed earlier in this chapter, the participants become located in a space of uncertain identification and experience an erosion of sense of self. Throughout various points in the refugeeship, one's sense of self, as a result of leaving behind collective and personal identifications, comes through as not having a familiar and comfortable framework in which to construct new collective and personal identifications. The brutal categorisation processes involved in claiming asylum and being met with great suspicion contributes to this sense of abandonment of self.

6.7 The social positioning as 'criminal'

An aspect of what appears to characterise the asylum-seeking experience is the impression of being viewed as someone suspicious, being treated as if one had committed a criminal offence, that is to say,

the way in which asylum seekers are positioned by the system. Popular discourse positions the asylum seeker as a 'social problem to be solved', in terms of a social and economic burden to society. Much of the language used in *talking* about asylum seekers and the way in which the issue of asylum migration is debated in the media as well as by migration authorities, locates the asylum seeker into a restricted space. This space is limited in as much as it does not give much room for an asylum seeker to be seen as anything other than a marginalised person in need, and at worst, as someone who has migrated under false pretences. Self-presentations, as described in Chapter Five, consist mostly of descriptions of persons who were self-sufficient and resourceful before migration, and who would help others in need, and those working to create a 'better' society. Being now seen as someone in need of help and a drain on societal resources, is a new identification which the participants in this study resist by presenting other categories with which they can position their 'self' comfortably.

Chapter Seven continues to explore the positioning and identification work of the participants, now *as* refugees.

7. *Being* a Refugee

This chapter presents life as an 'official 'refugee'. I attempt here, to illustrate what life *as* a refugee involves for the participants and highlight the category use 'refugee' as articulated by the participants in this study. Here, the second research question, regarding the categorisation 'refugee status', becomes relevant, as it plays out in the participants' talk of being granted refugee status. As for the third research question: *What identifications and positions do the participants take up when they talk of their experience* – this is examined in all four of the results chapters, relating to the various aspects of refugeeship.

7.1 The granting of refugee 'status'

A 'successful' asylum claim leads to refugee status or Humanitarian Protection, which can include temporary or permanent permission to remain[22]. It means the state accepts to protect the individual who has applied for protection. Most of the participants in this study had at the time of data collection, received refugee status, or humanitarian protection, or gained the status during the period of this study, and therewith the right to remain living in Sweden or England, either permanently or temporarily. The 'transition' from asylum seeker to refugee involves being able to live independently, being able to apply for work or study and gain entitlement to the 'rights' of the new society, in terms of welfare and protection. Full societal rights come with citizenship. However, for most refugees, citizenship cannot be applied for until after five years of permanent residency.

During the conversations I had with the participants in this study, as illustrated in Chapters Five and Six, a great deal of focus was on defending one's situation in relation to life before the turning point and at the time of the turning point itself. This was linked to defending one's motives for fleeing and claiming asylum. This argumentation remained present as well when the participants talked about being

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[22] In Sweden and England Humanitarian Protection is granted initially for three to five years, but can lead to permanent permission to remain if the reasons as to why it was granted in the first instance still remain after three to five years. HP is for those who do not qualify for asylum according to the Refugee Convention definition, but have compelling reasons for protection. (Clayton, 2006)

granted refugee status and dominated their talk of being an 'official refugee'. However, this argumentation was expressed differently as refugees, as opposed to being asylum seekers. When the participants talked about being granted refugee status, what comes through in the narratives is the 'recognition' of him or her, as a migrant with a 'real' need for protection. Central to these narratives is the way the participants express issues of legitimacy and credibility in being granted refugee status. The argumentation which remains in the conversations *as* refugees, are expressions of 'justice was met', the 'fight being won' and 'confirmation' of one's experience as something 'valid'.

When refugee status is granted, the Refugee Convention defines the legal consequences of recognition (Clayton, 2006, Diesen *et al,* 1998), and in this sense, refugee status is an official concept. Interestingly, 'status', as a theme, played out in the data material in three ways. First, the recognition gave a sense of 'status' and this status played out here as both something which came with legitimacy and with the acknowledgment to the participant from a wider state. The loss of status experienced as asylum seekers, was partially re-gained, as a competent person who in one's capacity to 'fight' one's case, won, and is now believed to be genuine. Secondly, status was experienced in relation to feeling one was a 'genuine' refugee and no longer to be thought of as a voluntary migrant, or even worse, a 'bogus' asylum seeker. This meant one had overcome the asylum seeking phase, and was no longer under suspicion from migration authorities. This also seemed to be experienced, once again, as a feeling; at least initially of being the competent person one had once been known as, in one's country of origin, expressed in self- presentations from life before the turning point. In terms of positioning work, a more relational aspect of being granted refugee status played out in a third way, in terms of gaining higher social positioning than 'asylum seeker', and therewith, higher social standing than those who remained asylum seekers.

7.1.1 Triumphant 'talk'

When the participants recalled the time they were granted refugee status[23], metaphors such as 'winning the fight' were used frequently to describe how they perceived being granted refugee status. Just as recognition from the state is central to their talk of being granted refugee status, the participants also talk about their own capacity to fight their cause for refugee status and *win.*

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[23] In this study, this varied, some of the participants had received refugee status that year, and others had been 'official' refugees for over ten years.

The following quote is from a man who was granted Humanitarian Protection during the study, that is to say he was an asylum seeker when I first met him, but later on, during the course of the study, he was granted the 'right to remain'. He was working outside his country as a diplomat when circumstances changed in his country of origin. At the same time, he was forbidden to remain living in the country in which he was working as a diplomat; neither could he return to his country of origin. He made his way, therefore, to a neighbouring country and lived there for some time before fleeing to England. He expressed his frustration in trying to convince the migration authorities as to why it was important for him to be granted protection, and the sense of pride he experienced in succeeding to argue his case and 'prove' the authorities 'wrong'.

> **UK6** Firstly I feel er er I achieved something (.) secondly (.) I (.) I gained my confidence back through this [ok yes] (4) thirdly er (2) I said what I said (1) what I wanted to say (.) I wrote it down in the letter and now I'm very happy when I read the newspaper (1) when I listen to the news on TV [mm] I think (.) that is what I was saying in 2004(.) I am very happy to let them know that (1) they didn't listen to me they were "er what (.) oh you tell lies" (1) but now after 5 years of the war they are saying the same thing as I told them in the beginning [yes]

This participant expresses a series of experiences which made up his sense of pride and helped him to take up the position as 'genuine refugee' and 'being right' in his claim for asylum. He felt a sense of achievement, retrieved confidence and had succeeded in conveying his opinions and needs. He takes on the voice of the migration authorities and the media when declaring that he had not been listened to initially, but then goes on to show a sense of victory and support, felt when 'Others' were saying the "same thing" as he was. This man demonstrates the importance of being 'believed' as something which almost takes prevalence over the fact that he was then granted the right to remain. Being granted Humanitarian Protection meant not only that he was recognised as an individual with cause for protection, but also that his story, his case as an asylum seeker, was valid and true. As we witnessed in Chapter Six, in the participants' descriptions of feeling they were seen as a liar, the asylum application process made many of the participants feel they were someone to be suspicious of. This participant drew upon his own capacity to achieve what he set out to do and convince 'them' that he was right. To be seen as a trustworthy person, and right in his claims, is significant to the meaning he gives to his right to remain. It would seem that to be recognised as in need of this protection, by the state, empowers him.

7.1.2 Transitioning from 'limbo-ness' to 'personhood'

> **UK6** It is another series of the process really (3) after four years (.) almost four years I can't say it's four years exactly (2) it is nice to get the fighting and the stress of four years well you have won (.) won the fight (.) that is like the first feeling (2) secondly now I know (3) my life at that time I didn't know my life (.) I didn't know where I was going (.) where I should take refuge

I asked participant UK6 to tell me more about how he experienced being granted Humanitarian Protection, and he explained the above. It seems that part of the experience of being granted refugee status is not only to do with being recognised as someone credible in ones' claims for asylum or 'winning the fight'. The material also includes expressions of feeling a 'real' person again, emphasising the effect of the limbo situation as asylum seeker, as a space which made it hard to feel 'whole' or 'fully functioning'.

His quote again draws on the idea of a fight being won and he emphasises the processual nature of refugeeship. First he illustrates the satisfaction, and perhaps, relief in being granted the right to remain. He then raises the issue of feeling in limbo associated with the uncertainty of having to flee and also what the claiming of asylum brings with it, he then describes a sense of 'losing' his life direction.

This next quote illustrates in some what more depth the transition from a limbo situation to striving to be seen as a 'person', "confident to live as a person". Again, much like the above participant, UK5 illustrates this transition as an important feature of gaining refugee status:

> **UK5** It's really difficult (.) there a lot of people living as asylum seekers they can't work (.) they have no work permit (.) they are without rights (1) rights to social support (.) they have been ignored for many years by the home office (.) so of course it is a big difference now (1) and you know if people can manage to pass this gap you know (.) of being an asylum seeker to becoming a refugee then of course they can struggle to then integrate into society and feel confident to live as a person (.) but when I didn't have the status and I was still an asylum seeker I couldn't see how long it was going to be and if I was ever going to have a life here

This participant said receiving refugee status involved an opportunity to "integrate into society" and "live as a person". This recognition from the state as someone in legitimate need of refugee status comes with an expression of a sense of acknowledgment to 'live' as a person again. She uses the word 'ignored' when describing the period of waiting involved in the asylum claim, and talks of "managing" to "pass the gap"

expressing a fight. Then whilst suggesting that refugee status does not automatically involve feeling a sense of integration or belonging, it does nevertheless come with a sense of acknowledgment and the right to live under less constrained conditions than those of the asylum seeker. It comes with the 'right' to integrate; even if she is saying that this can be a "struggle". This quote gives some insight into the fact that once having been granted refugee status the transition from asylum seeker to refugee is not uncomplicated. Having been granted refugee status, the work begins, in taking steps towards creating a new life.

The following excerpt picks up when SW2 had been talking about receiving refugee status and is explaining the next step, and the conflictual feelings around taking steps towards a 'new life':

> **SW2** well I need to organise myself now (.) I want to study here I want to find a job and establish a new life (1) but it's hard (.) But I'm not alone (.) millions of people like me (.) if I wanted to go back to XXX I couldn't well I could but I would be killed so I have to stay here and establish a new life (1) it's not easy but that is what I have to do

The realisation of taking concrete steps towards creating a new life situation, having been granted refugee status is a theme which will be explored in more detail, as this chapter progresses.

7.1.3 Legitimacy and acknowledgement as an aspect of refugee status

As mentioned above, legitimacy and acknowledgment is an aspect of meaning-making in the narratives of refugeeship. It occupied the participants' talk as asylum seekers to some extent. Expressions of being met with disbelief and lack of trust were present in many narratives, as well as the feeling of almost illegitimacy, when it came to finding oneself without citizenship and in some cases, stateless during the asylum claim. The claim context was an argumentative context of 'proving' one's legitimacy and asking for acknowledgment of one's unbearable situation in the country of origin. As refugees, confirmation and recognition from an official system has been granted, and this is important for the participants in being able to take the first steps away from the uncertainty and instability that life as an asylum seeker entails. It is, however, more than this; it is also an important aspect of refugeeship, in having one's story accepted and being seen as 'genuine' in one's motive for fleeing. This gave the participants a sense of legitimacy in themselves and in their ambivalent feelings towards the abandonment of their previous life projects, and people who meant a lot to them. Furthermore, it gave them the sense of confirmation that they had done the right thing.

Firstly, being granted refugee status confirms that you really did need to flee and means having the enormity of all this, in terms of loss, recognised. During the claimant period, although credibility as a concept is not part of the Refugee Convention's definition of refugee, losing your asylum case is often due to issues of credibility, that is to say the decision-maker does not find your story credible. Therefore, winning the case, having spent what can be years proving it, gives the participants a huge sense of accomplishment and acknowledgment. This is experienced as a re-positioning from being located as someone who was discredited in terms of loss of previous core identifications and the limited space which lacked autonomy, to being located as a 'genuine' refugee, with a credible story and cause for protection, and ultimately being believed. As opposed to the threat, which one lives with during the asylum claim, of being positioned as 'bogus' or a 'failed' asylum seeker, where the ultimate outcome is deportation.

In this respect, one characteristic of the transition from asylum seeker to refugee is being positioned as legitimate through the acknowledgement of the official system, but it also gives legitimacy to the life-changing 'decision' of fleeing. The talk which illustrated this sense of legitimacy and acknowledgement, experienced in being granted refugee status, can be understood as a moral dimension in refugeeship. This meaning-making, of what it involved to receive refugee status in terms of gaining back some of the lost credibility, is an example of the moral challenge involved in making the decision to flee. Through the recognition by official migration authorities, some moral value is returned to the claimant, as someone who not only needed to flee, but had the *right* to flee.

7.2 The challenges of refugee status- the 'label' as other-conferred

Legitimacy and acknowledgement from the official asylum system, seems to give some of the credibility back to the participants, that he or she felt was lost during the asylum application period. The claims have been acknowledged as 'reasonable' and 'trustworthy'. The transition of status, from asylum seeker to refugee also came with a sense of security and stability, which was impossible to experience as asylum seeker. However, the label 'refugee status' carried a negative meaning for my participants too. The refugee label was attributed a *lack* of 'status', with regard to social perceptions. There were attempts to make sense of what this label implied for identification construction:

> **UK5** but being a refugee and how the outside society is seeing you is important how they (.) how they er (3) well they see you as a refugee [do you mean the official system] the official system but also you know

people in society (.) people in society are being affected by media and everything you know [yes] so yes (2) but you know I don't really see that as their fault (.) er if they er er knew the real reason of why refugees are coming why they are coming

Participant UK5 expresses the view that the connotations surrounding the refugee status are constructed as negative in the 'outside society'. Outside, as will become clear throughout the thesis, is an expression my participants use frequently, referring to a society they do not seem to see themselves as belonging to, at all times. UK5 construes this negativity as something which is the fault of media representations.

7.2.1 A sense of permanency

As opposed to the asylum seeker label, refugee status is more permanent. The label is described as undesirable, but necessary, for the sake of protection. Having fought for the label 'refugee status' and achieved it, the stage then follows in which one begins to negotiate regarding the label and even rid oneself of it, in some cases. This was made apparent by the way in which the participants feared being seen as a refugee. Some appeared to struggle with this identification as something difficult to integrate into their previous core identifications. The participants expressed that this 'status' means one can work, study, apply for new housing conditions, and most of all, gain official papers and travel documents back. This in turn restores a sense of mobility, and an identification which does not reveal one as an asylum seeker, but, rather, as a 'regular' person again. The participants' talk about *being* a refugee, involves constantly interpreting what it means to be *seen* as a refugee. Much of this interpretation is in relation to how one feels and how one is perceived by others. The following participant talked about his perceptions of how others view refugees. UK1 gave an example of how it is difficult to 'lose' the refugee label when trying to establish a new life situation, in this case, as a student. He told me:

> **UK1** I see myself as a refugee [would you present yourself as a refugee then] depends on the situation and the person (.) to be a refugee doesn't feel good [why not] because most people call you a refugee and see you as a victim (.) it doesn't feel good I'm seen as a victim and that most people don't know anything about refugees but they read things and think they know (1)

This participant then gave me an example of his life situation as a refugee:

> I remember one time when I went to enrol at my course at the city college (.) after that I had to go to prove that I was a refugee and not an

asylum seeker (.) something like that (1) and that made me nervous and I went to the people in charge er (.) er the administrators and the principle that er(.) said er I don't want the other students or teachers or something like that knowing, [you told them that] yes (.) so when I went to the classroom (.) other students asked me where I was from and I just answered that I'm from XXX [yes] because if I had said XXX and er well if you say a country they know is having a civil war or something like that then everyone will know that you are a refugee [yes] and then people will just see me all the time as the refugee (1) [mm yes, (.) is there anything that could happen that would stop you feeling like a refugee] no, no (.) I can say that er well put it this way (.) I don't feel proud to be a refugee not to other people anyway but to myself (.) because that happened to me er (1) er I feel that I should be proud of it [you feel like that] yes (.) yes I survived this so that I can feel proud of (.) but not proud to others

Having proved one's case as an asylum seeker and the right to refugee status, UK1 finds himself in a position of having to 'prove' that he has refugee status, in order to be entitled to educational services. The procedure of having to go to the head of the college to 'prove' that he did have refugee status, reminds him that he is not seen like others. As a refugee, it is made apparent that one is treated differently. UK1 did not wish to be disclosed as a refugee and ensured this through asking the head of the college to respect his anonymity. UK1 also decided not to share with others his country of origin, because he felt this might disclose his refugee position. This illustrates the way in which the refugee 'label' is other-conferred. That is to say, in order to gain access to societal services, the way the system is set up requires of the participants, special efforts, when ascribed as 'refugee'. The above participant expressed feeling proud of surviving something terrible. However, because of the negative associations ascribed to the 'refugee label', he experienced the label as a stigma, and found himself disguising his identity as a refugee, in interaction with others.

Having to prove one's identity seems to be a continuous theme in refugeeship, both in the practical sense of having to first prove your case as an asylum seeker, and then, after this, having received refugee status, having to prove this status in order to gain entry and access to various societal services. On a more existential level, the proving is continuous, in the sense of a constant desire to be seen as a 'person' rather than as a refugee. Notice, the above participant expressed that if one's identity as a refugee is disclosed, one would always be seen as '*the*' refugee. He gives expression to a lack of belief that other students would be able to see past the label if they were to find out.

The following participant illustrated how the 'label' refugee is something other-conferred, rather than a definition taken on as identification:

UK5 I feel that I am seen as a refugee (.), but that is because society sees me as that (.) as a refugee (.) I don't want people to have to migrate somewhere and have to be <u>seen</u> as a refugee (1) I'm a human being (.) I can't see myself as this (.) I mean yes at one point I was an asylum seeker and then later I became a refugee but I have been labelled this (.) that I'm a refugee

A struggle is taking place. The way this participant talks about identification seems to convey that one is trying to create the identification, which is 'just' a human being. At the same time, expressing that the positions made available by others, in seeing one as a refugee, is in conflict with one's identification work.

7.2.2 Refugee status- a relational term

Much of what the above is illustrating consists of the relational aspects of being a refugee. That is to say, being a refugee contrasts with not being a refugee. Comparisons are constantly being made in the participants' talk. Part of this talk exemplifies the nuances found in the term asylum seeker and refugee, whereby the participants express various interpretations of the way asylum seekers and refugees may be perceived. The comparisons in their talk of being refugees and their expressions of being positioned as refugees, plays out partly in terms of the way the participants make sense of how refugees and asylum seekers are represented in their new societies:

UK3 You know I feel I need to do something er about the way er (1) to show you know that asylum seekers or refugees are not those people who come here just because er (1) just because er (1) er (1) they have fled their country just because er (2) because of er (2) they don't have a job (.) because of economical reasons [yes] (2) or er asylum seekers or refugees are those (2) well you know they don't smell (1) I want to give another picture er to show that refugees are just normal people you (.) it can happen to anyone (.) I don't wish this but every country can have this problem

Participant UK3 cited a situation which exemplified the representations of asylum seekers and refugees, when interacting with others:

One thing I want to say (.) I went to XXXXX (city in England) because that is where I had my interview so people there are used to seeing asylum seekers on arrival (.) dressed like er you know (2) neglecting themselves so one day I went there (.) I took my best suit er (3) very good tie (.) looking very good and I took my brief case (1) and when I arrived they (.) they (.) I said I have got an interview (.) they said what is your name are you here as a solicitor er (.) I said no why do you ask er (2) I said no it is me who has the interview they said "oh it is you" (1) I understood why they had asked the question (.) they were "oh

where is your client" (.) they told me they were sorry (1) so this is how you can be seen in their eyes (.) to them I couldn't be an asylum seeker because of the way I was looking (.) so it is everywhere (.) not just in the media but in the whole system as well

Encounters such as those outlined in the above quote, are common illustrations in the data, whereby the participants' understanding of how they are seen by 'Others' was informed by such experiences. The representations are seen here as not restricted to 'only' to the media, but as common to the 'whole system', thus making up the context in which refugees and asylum seekers live.

7.2.3 In relation to other refugees

The definitions of what is meant by a refugee are not only in relation to non-refugees, they are also in relation to fellow refugees. While some find a sense of belonging amongst other refugees, others express anticipation and seem apprehensive and reluctant to associate with other refugees and resist the connotations associated with the refugee position. Associating with other refugees is almost expressed as a 'risk' in terms of increasing the chances of being seen as 'even more' of a refugee, which may lead to greater marginalisation.

Part of this distancing from the label could be expressed by the participants as something achieved by disassociating with other refugees or, indeed, resisting the position of being seen as a 'typical' refugee. Some participants acknowledged the negative lay notions of the refugee and even agreed with it, positioning themselves outside this discourse, as not 'one of them'.

> **UK6** I don't like to associate with other refugees [ok, why is that] because (1) (whispering) most of them are coming here with lies and stories (2) coming here saying lies

Participant UK1 said that he tries to avoid contexts which are typically associated with refugees:

> **UK1** I avoid all this voluntary work or activities or this kind of thing to kind of avoid these communities because otherwise you will be seen even more so like a refugee mm (.) mm (1) [why] because I think I will be seen <u>even more</u> like a refugee and maybe be discriminated against or something like this (3) [mm ok] when XXX invites me to be a part of something like that then er you know a certain activity (.) I say er yeah I'm going to come (.) I'm going to come (.) but then I don't do that [no] (2) so avoiding it (.)[Can you try to explain to me more why you are avoiding it] maybe (.) er through being a part of these things(.) then people will notice more that I'm a refugee and then I will become

vulnerable (.) there is more chance of being seen as a refugee (1) if I associate with these things

However, not all my participants convey the feeling that they should 'cover up' the refugee identity. The following participant articulates how 'normal' migration is in today's era and therefore it should not be something strange to be ashamed of:

> **UK3** I am a refugee and I'm proud to say that I'm a refugee (.) I think that people need to accept that in this world there are people that are fleeing their country for reasons er and I'm one of those people (1) I'm not proud you know to be er the one that er who left my country for political reasons and for that I'm ashamed I wish er I wish er that this never happened (.) I wish that we would not have any refugees er I want to live in the world where people are able to move freely or that they can stay in their countries

Despite this participant expressing his view that one should not have to be ashamed of being a refugee, an attempt is made to understand the problems refugees face, as a result of this kind of migration. UK3 explains that one should be able to enjoy freedom of movement, but because of the legal procedure of having to claim asylum as a third-country national, means first being categorised as an asylum seeker and later as a refugee. This means there is 'such a thing' as refugees. Again, we see the relational aspect of the term in this quote. Despite the ideology conveyed in the excerpt, this participant feels ashamed of leaving his country of origin for political reasons. I suspect that this shame is something which is experienced in relation to the country of origin, and perhaps in the eyes of other refugees, feeling one may be judged for fleeing due to politics; exemplifying, a moral dimension of refugeeship.

7.3 Complexities of the 'status' in the refugee concept

The concept of 'refugee status' appears to put constraints on the participants' agency, at the same time as it legitimates status within the realm of refugees, as someone who has had their asylum claim recognised. What is interesting to consider here, is whether the participants uncritically internalise the strong discourse concerning refugee and asylum migration or rather if the stories show their capacity to position themselves away from the stigma they clearly experience that the refugee label can involve. It seems reasonable to believe that both processes of internalisation and positioning are taking place. Indicating the external positioning is as much a part of their self-concept, as is their internal positioning.

The analysis so far, gives insight into the way in which the term refugee 'status' plays out in the interview material and how the participants in this study make sense of the official term refugee status as a label. Besides one's experience of the official label, the interpretation illustrates what the term involves for those people who have, as individuals, been granted refugee status. I will continue here to unravel what kind of 'status' the refugees in this study experienced they gained, or lost, through being recognised officially, as refugees.

The examples so far show the way in which the refugees fight to receive this status at the same time as they try to free themselves from the everyday representations he/she perceived as coming with the label. Refugee status raises issues for the participants in terms of what the label represents and what it might entail in terms of one's own identification processes and ways of positioning oneself in relation to the label.

There is both an official and a personal relationship to the status. The official relationship entails safety and protection. The personal relationship involves the meaning-making processes associated with one's experience of life in the country of origin, fleeing and seeking asylum. Furthermore, it implies understanding the status one had, in relation to becoming an asylum seeker and then being categorised officially as a refugee.

The complexities surrounding the term 'status' appear to be a double-edged sword for the participants. 'Refugee status', whilst giving higher social positioning in relation to asylum seeker, as well as a sense of security, also reveals itself to be a static unchangeable term, locking the participants into this concept with its accompanying connotations and attributions. This appears to be perceived as a constraint in terms of being able to form other identifications as individuals beyond *refugeeship*. Having spent what can be years of negotiating for the status, the participants then begin a process of negotiating their position as something other than a refugee, for themselves and in their encounters with others.

7.3.1 Gaining control over the status-label: creating new status

Part of the meaning-making is in terms of gaining control over the label and managing identification as refugees. Human rights activists see the refugee status as an extension of their human rights activity that was forbidden in their countries of origin. Gaining refugee status is incorporated into their identification as activists and used to continue their life work:

SW9 Swedish migration authorities[24] were in Turkey and I was there and spoke to them and after six months they sent me to Sweden (.) so I came to Sweden and began fighting from here (.) against Islamic regimes (.) so I just continue to fight (.) all the time (.) all the time

Those refugees, in this study, who are not activists, try, through work and study, to 'normalise' their refugee status according to the mainstream society. Gaining control over the label seems to involve understanding the label. It is not uncommon for the participants to express confusion over the terminology they have come into contact with throughout their process of becoming refugees. An example of this was given in Chapter Six regarding the ways to relate to the 'reception centre'. The following participant explained to me that it was only after 20 years of moving to England that he started to make sense of *which* 'category' he belonged to, in relation to the various concepts. He explains:

UK2 actually until quite recently I was finding these terms confusing you know[yes] asylum seeker and refugee(.) an asylum seeker is when you apply for protection(.) then I think you are an asylum seeker when you are granted permission then you become a refugee [yes] yeah **I think it was only until about a year ago when I probably understood it**really [***] I didn't understand it and when they er er well yes they gave me a new definition actually (2) the permission I was given was called humanitarian rights [oh yes, humanitarian] yes yes (.) migration now(.) er the political and then there is the migrant workers so sometimes it is confusing you know er (3) er I know I needed protection (.) life circumstances created this (2)

When interviewing refugees in this study about their experience of migration, and their situation as refugees, it is interesting to observe the difference in the positions they take up when talking about themselves *as* refugees. Experiences of refugeeship are partly influenced by the situation from which one fled but also by the explanation given to the flight, as presented in Chapter Five. Some of the participants construct meaning through the use of positions such as 'political activist' whereas others dis-identify with activism. However, they still draw on political events in giving an explanation to the migration. There seems to be a range of identifications in relation to the 'political refugee concept'. These positions can be taken up in their self-presentations, and the refugee concept takes on various meanings for the participants in their talk, and how they make sense of the concept's content. This plays out in particular in different contexts, between refugees, for example by sharing their experiences as activist or by blaming politics for their migration. In this sense, the participants' talk revealed two broad

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[24] In Swedish: Migrationsverket

identifications, in relation to the positions taken up as refugees: those who self-identified with the political aspects of refugeeship as something they were active in, and those who resisted the political dimensions present in the concept 'political refugee', and as something they had not been active in. Regardless of whether the participant expressed the migration as a result of their own political commitment or if they drew upon a wider political framework in the country of origin to explain the migration, they all experienced the migration as something they did not desire.

The political dimension in their conversations with me seemed to provide a tool of explanation, as to why they had fled, and also as to why they had positioned themselves as the 'type' of refugee they were. The following quotes illustrate the way in which the political dimension is drawn upon by the participants and the way in which they position themselves quite differently in relation to the politics. The following man resists the position as 'political' and describes it as a negative identification. Resisting the political dimension of the refugeeship is for him, a way to prove his point that the migration was not a choice; rather, he was a victim of wider circumstances:

> **UK1**…like (.) being a refugee (.) people see you as if you have caused it yourself (.) like you are one of those political leader types that have caused it themselves (.) I did not wake up one morning and decide and say you know(.) er my mum didn't wake up one morning and say lets go to XXXX (.) no (1) it wasn't our choice

However, this next participant positions himself quite differently in relation to the political aspects. He draws on the concept of 'political refugee' to illustrate the 'type' of refugee, he regards himself to be. However, similar to the above man, he uses the political dimension to account for his lack of choice in having to flee:

> **SW3** Those that intend to er have expectations of moving and have fought to come here, they have expectations (.) those that (.) you know come for a better life(1) but I didn't have any expectations because I didn't want to er (1)we came through UN…I am a quota refugee (.) directly from UN (.) then you are a quota refugee (.) I am a political refugee (1) I didn't choose this

The two refugee positions which have emerged empirically are characterised by those who strongly self-identify as political activists, and those who strongly dis-identify and disassociate themselves from the notion of political activism. What I want to achieve by introducing these categorisations, since it is a large part of the material, (1) the way in which the participants either take on the position 'political refugee', or resist it; it feels important to explore this positional movement; (2)

further, these positions say something about the participants' meaning-making processes of 'being' a refugee. The first 'identification category', those who self-identify as political activists, see their need for migration as something grounded in political commitment or belonging to a political organisation or party. The latter group see migration as something that is the result of wider political circumstances. However, despite, this distinction being identified in the data, and whether the participants identify themselves as politically committed or not, the notion of the migration as something 'political' is commonly drawn upon. Raising political circumstances or political engagement appears to give the participants the opportunity to position themselves in relation to the political dimension of refugeeship. That is to say, the 'political' is raised by most of the participants in some shape or form. This is either to present their own political engagement, or to describe the political circumstances from which they fled, to position themselves as a political activist or to position themselves against political activism. By positioning themselves as politically engaged or, indeed, as not politically engaged, is grounded, partly, in a sense of the migration as something which was neither their fault, nor their choice, but rather, the outcome of a set of political circumstances forced upon them. Another aspect of what is taking place here, rhetorically, is the way in which they draw on the lay notions of the non-political refugee as 'fake', and use the political dimension of the migration differently to position themselves as 'real'. 'I'm real, because I was politically engaged' or by saying 'I'm real, because I did not do anything wrong, this wasn't my fault, I was not politically committed, and therefore disobeying a regime'.

Already we are seeing the nuances and some of the complexities the participants give to the concept of 'refugee'. This appears to include a multitude of experiences and processes that the participants relate to in order to position themselves within the social category 'refugee', and hence to make sense of what the concept of refugee can represent for them in terms of opportunity or constraint, among other things with regard to the social perception of who a refugee is. In doing so, they relate to the 'external' representations of what it means to be a 'refugee' and they draw on the political aspects to make sense of their situation, and how they view themselves in relation to different categories of 'refugee'. These different categories of 'refugee' are constructed in various genres, such as the media, whereby terms are created, and appear to inform the participant's way of talking about such issues.

The construction of the 'refugee' is not only about how others construct who the refugee is. There is also construction taking place within refugee communities, which invites others to see them in a particular way, as political or otherwise. As we have seen, the

participants in their accounts of who they were, and are today, position themselves, amongst other things, as: professional, political, and also in terms of the 'kind' of refugee they are, for example, a 'real' refugee, a 'political' refugee, or indeed a non-political refugee. Moral value is introduced here, in terms of being a deserving refugee or by positioning themselves as political activists.

7.3.2 Space for a new life

Having refugee status is a step further into the process of creating a new life situation, in safety, but it is also a step further away from what many felt they had abandoned. Trying to find new opportunities so that their earlier experience, educational competence or political work can become part of their lives again is a large part of their situations as refugees. Moreover, one may also look for a chance to fulfil dreams which had not felt possible in one's country of origin.

When the participants talked about receiving refugee status, they gave descriptions of what the new living conditions involved. These descriptions include learning to 'transfer' from the great lack of autonomy which was so apparent as asylum seeker, to re-gaining some autonomy as refugees. This autonomy was expressed by the participants, as coming with independence and responsibility. The new living conditions involved new housing, permission to work or study, the protection of a state, access to the welfare system and mobility (including travel documents) and rights and benefits one was denied during the asylum application period. No longer having to navigate around the asylum application process, participants find themselves part of a new societal system in which to navigate. This means learning their rights and obligations and independently looking for work or accommodation. Red Cross drop-in-centres[25], which primarily assist asylum seekers, may also be visited by those who had recently become refugees, who felt they needed help in understanding how the new society worked. Having felt the initial relief of being granted refugee status, a new time of anxiety can be experienced, enhanced by a feeling of responsibility in becoming a 'contributing' member of society again. I got the impression that many of my participants longed to be granted refugee status and believed that if they only had that status, they would be able to independently create a good life for themselves and their families. However a lot of frustration is expressed by the participants, as refugees, in trying to find a way which would lead to independence:

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[25] Part of the field work carried out for this study took place at two different Red Cross refugee drop-in-centres, one in Sweden and one in the UK. Through observations, interviews with refugees, as well as members of staff, the challenges emerging in transitioning from asylum seeker to refugee were made apparent

UK6 Feeling of freedom exists here (.) but not as a refugee (.) as a refugee you have to fight quite hard here to get chance but at the same time I owe this country it gave me safety (.) shelter (.) money I would like to do something back for this country to help people to return the kindness (.) I try my best to help (.) become part of society and I feel that I have something to offer I can help others and be part of this society

This excerpt illustrates what many in the study expressed, a feeling that they had left oppression for oppression, in terms of the lack of rights experienced *as* refugees. Many expressed, that the asylum system resembled the kind of oppression experienced in their countries of origin, after the turning point. This feeling of constraint in the new situation was also expressed as something which followed them into the refugee situation. It was common for the participants to express to me a conflict between feeling that they were grateful for the 'permission' to remain on the one hand, and on the other, resentment over lack of opportunity available to them as refugees.

The following woman expressed her disappointment over trying to create a life in the new context. She felt constantly confronted with representations of 'the refugee' as someone with less competence:

SW7 I gained refugee status and I thought I will begin studying at a school for training a particular skill (.) I was at this school for a year and everyone said I was really clever I said I would like to work I would like to work with day-care for children (.) I love children (.) I felt I was young and full of energy and I would like to work with children (1) start working you know (.) but all I was told was no(.) you can't (.) you should learn the language more (.) so I said ok (1) and I <u>tried</u> and I <u>tried</u> and I <u>tried</u> in the end they gave me a chance (1) I got a 6 month placement (.) a placement for 6 months and I worked and during this time the contact I had with my colleagues wasn't more than hello and goodbye they said <u>nothing</u> to me and it felt <u>really really awful I thought why are they doing this why are they so cold towards me</u> sometimes they were <u>really</u> insulting "do you know anything about computers" "do you know how to do this" you know really really usual things and they wondered if I knew how to do it (.) you know you don't think it will be like this you just want to make a life

Having fought for the right to remain in the country of asylum, the participants describe gaining refugee status as an opportunity to 'give back' to the society, and an opportunity to start building a 'new' life. However, frustration is expressed in activating this. Part of the explanation given by the participants, as to why this was the case, was due to a lack of 'rights' *as* refugees. For example participant UK6 acknowledges there is some freedom in England, but sees it as difficult to utilise as a refugee. Participant SW7, in a similar way, expresses the challenges of building a new life as something which was made

difficult due to 'common sense' perceptions of the refugee as less competent, or even worse, as less developed. What many of the participants expressed as a difficulty was finding access to spaces which could offer the opportunity to build a new and independent life, which would make use of their knowledge and skill sets.

7.4 Refugee Domain

Chapters Five and Six showed that one way the participants managed this orientation process into the new system was by drawing on previous identifications, such as political activist or human rights lawyer. As refugees they said they were hoping to find work, which meant they could take up their professions or political activism once again. However, having transferred from asylum seeker to refugee, many struggled to find work which corresponded to their educational qualifications. For many of the participants, this meant they found themselves a part of contexts which were typically dominated by refugees and asylum seekers who were working with refugee projects. These contexts could be political refugee organisations, voluntary organisations and NGO's. These were contexts in which my participants found a space where they could establish a degree of belonging, and a space in which they could feel they were contributing with their previous experience. What was striking about these contexts was the level of involvement the participants had in them, and not *as* a refugee, but as someone using one's political, professional or educational background in some way to help other refugees, asylum seekers, sometimes even to assist in running the organisation itself. I coin this context the *refugee domain.* While it is a space comprising refugees, it nevertheless encompasses an opportunity structure, enabling the participant to take up the position of 'expert' or 'adviser' again. To follow, are some quotes which illustrate the kinds of positions taken up in the refugee domain. These include positions that incorporate the previous identifications, before the turning point, in their new situation as refugees, contributing to the process of building new self-presentations:

> **UK5** I couldn't stop the political the human rights er activity because it is the only thing er the only reason I think I can be happy you know it is er it has really become part of my life now you know because since I started to be an activist in human rights and er politically because I believe in my ideology I can't separate it (.) er from who I am and what is the political bit or the refugee bit or the womens' rights bit it is a combination of those sides that I believe in

By combining ideology with one's identity as human rights activist and, indeed, refugee, a new meaningful position was created in the refugee domain.

The following man worked as a lawyer in his country of origin, before the turning point. He found his 'niche' as a 'political refugee' and 'legal expert', which involved taking on the position as adviser to newcomers, he told me:

> **SW2** Many friends come to me now for advice when they get rejected and not just er that (.) not just friends (.) many refugees that I have helped (.) sometimes I don't know who they are (.) they call and say "oh er please please help me I know you are a lawyer <u>and</u> a political refugee" they say "I have a friend and he has an appointment and he wants to meet you so you can teach him what to say to his lawyer" (.) he was very worried and he asked me to go with him (.) so I did

The above excerpt illustrates the importance of combining the experience of being a refugee, with the professional and educational background in finding new, meaningful positions in the refugee domain. This gained added value in being able to help others, and it almost seemed to give them higher status in the eyes of those they helped. The above quote shows that it was not only the legal expertise, which was valued, but indeed the fact that SW2 was also a 'political' refugee.

It is a context worth exploring to gain a deeper understanding of refugeeship, and indeed it was a context of which I became a part during the field work. My participants took up the position as 'expert' or 'adviser', and in doing so they often drew on their specialist experience as, for example, 'human rights lawyer' as well as on their previous experience, shared by others, as an asylum seeker. This domain then, describes something 'in-between', if you like, not quite the 'human rights lawyer' or 'diplomat' they once could call themselves, but still not 'just' a refugee. What seems apparent here, through looking closer at what is embedded in the descriptions, is the taking up of new positions other than 'just' refugee. This represents an attempt at broadening one's repertoire of identifications through finding new positions in the refugee domain. Broadening this repertoire is one way of re-gaining a sense of self-worth, which was jeopardised through the feeling of dis-empowerment and lack of autonomy felt throughout the asylum procedure. As refugees, the participants have some control over their destinies. However when their attempts at finding employment fail, in-between positions are created in the refugee domain.

Political activists find membership to an organisation which represents their own particular political standpoint. The refugee

situation then acquires meaning that makes it resemble an extension of life before the turning point, which was largely about, working politically for reform of some kind. Voluntary NGO organisations can come to be part of the refugee domain for those who perhaps did not take up a clear political position. By becoming a volunteer, with an NGO, would mean one becomes involved in advising others and working alongside other 'non-refugees'. This provided an opportunity for those who were not politically active, before the turning point, to become interested in questions of human rights, thus making sense out of their own experience of becoming refugees. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some people actively seek to avoid being identified as a refugee. Instead, these participants try to find opportunity to become what they call, a 'normal' person.

7.4.1 Gaining independence and being *less* of a refugee

A significant part of the construction of the refugee domain lies in creating a space in which participants can find belonging, and resources for building identifications other than that of 'just' refugee. The refugee domain refers to a context constructed by refugees in which refugees may have a 'natural' place among others with whom they share similar experiences, political or professional. That is to say, ultimately many of the participants desire the opportunity to practice again as a lawyer or a doctor. When however this is not possible, helping out in voluntary roles, as 'expert' is favoured over doing nothing.

The existence of this domain became apparent to me, in the way the participants describe various contexts, which offer a sense of inclusion. When talking about themselves as part of the refugee domain, the position of 'voluntary worker' or 'expert' is taken up. As I see it, this is to do with the limited number of positions available to them through which to identify as someone other than merely a refugee. Being categorised as refugee or asylum seeker involves being positioned as something one is not fully comfortable with. This position is a limiting one, especially as asylum seeker where rights and duties are highly limited whilst waiting for a decision on status. However, space is even limited for those who have been given refugee status, often due to the lack of opportunity available for refugees. This is an undesirable position and therefore it is hardly surprising that the participants in the study are continuously looking for opportunities to broaden their position repertoire.

The next participant illustrates this limited repertoire. He talks about 'being a refugee', and goes on to describe how important his position as a voluntary worker at the Red Cross, is to him today. This participant likens being a refugee to being a sick person and uses metaphors such

as 'heart attack' to emphasise how he feels about his situation as a refugee. He explains:

> **SW5** I don't like this word [refugee] mm because it is like being a sick person er (1) I just want to help people and then I feel less of a refugee (.) [when you are helping people] yes (.) but when I make the comparison to my life before usch (2) I feel it is difficult to explain to you this hard feeling er it is like er (2) a heart attack (.) I feel <u>hurt</u> I feel hurt (.) it is like a pain it is difficult to explain or describe (.)making the comparison is er well from professor to hell (.) er I was decision maker (.) but now when I go to the Red Cross even though I respect they gave me this opportunity er there is only so much I can do to help them er it's a big difference

This quote is partly an illustration of the limited repertoire that I am attempting to demonstrate here. It exemplifies the current lack of status experienced and the loss of status, as he compares his earlier position as a professor, and his present position today in the refugee domain. Not having the opportunity to position himself fully as professor or decision-maker any more, involves finding new openings within the repertoire available. In this particular case re-positioning entails taking up the position as 'helper' at the Red Cross. This does not compare to previous identifications, but it appears to make him feel at least partly useful. Coming through in this quote is the desperate feeling of wanting to stop being a refugee. Here the refugee domain seems to contribute to his feeling 'less' of a refugee.

It also serves as a substitute, if you like, to not finding opportunities through paid work. The following excerpt is from a man who has been living in England for over 20 years, he gives his explanation for the voluntary work, taken up in the refugee domain:

> **UK2** I'm still a volunteer er (1) talking to you now (.) you know (.) I'm not paid to do a job trying to find a paid job has been pretty tough er I can't explain why (.) I can only think (.) guess why (1) it can be discrimination (.) but I can't say (.) it could be some people see your surname on the application er that your application won't be considered in the end you think well I have no choice (.) I'm stuck now in voluntary work (2) even though the voluntary work has helped me a lot you know

The data exemplified through the above two quotes, illustrates the participants' attempts to gain back some self-worth and their need to feel less of a refugee in the new country, and rather as someone who came with something which could be utilised in the new society. The participants express that taking up these positions make them feel 'less of a refugee', a person who is typically understood as a deficit according to popular discourse. Positions in the refugee domain serve

the purpose of helping the participants to feel more like an 'ordinary' person. However, this voluntary role is also described as second-best, and something the participants became locked into due to lack of other opportunity.

7.4.2 Striving for something 'ordinary'

> **UK3** I know that there are asylum seekers and refugees with problems and those who are vulnerable (.) but I mean they still want to be treated as <u>normal</u> people (.) people with rights

A characteristic of refugeeship is the constant strive to a life which works, and does not include injustice, war, insecurity and other challenges which turn everyday living into a constant struggle. Having accomplished a flight from persecution, the participants strive for refugee status, and when that is achieved, they strive for acceptance into 'ordinary' life. Much of what seems to characterise refugeeship is the 'ongoing-ness' of the experience. The refugee domain, whilst offering new positions beyond being 'just' a refugee, also illustrates the conditions and constraints that the refugee situation seems to hold. Having proved their case as persons in 'genuine' need of protection, many find themselves fighting to prove that as refugees they have something to offer their new country, and the refugee domain is a context where some acceptance and recognition of experience and skill may be found. Much of the constraints accompanying the labels 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee', come from the categorisations defined in migration systems, such as migrant worker or asylum seeker. Being categorised first as an asylum seeker, and then, if 'lucky', being labelled 'refugee', places the participants, I would argue, into a corner, with little on offer when it comes to taking up other positions and integrating their identifications, both previous and new, into the new country. Certainly many refugees are seen by others and see themselves as integrated, and as having succeeded in integrating their identifications. However, these cases were rare in my study. Most of my participants struggled to 'feel part of 'mainstream' society, largely due to the limited repertoire available to them to create new opportunities in their present circumstances. This is not to say, however, that a sense of integration through the fact they may work and pay taxes is not found. This may give a feeling of integration on a kind of objective level, but it does not mean, however, they experience integration in terms of 'feeling a part of' society. The participants in this study talk of 'ordinary' or 'normal' life; I would suggest, namely, everyday contexts which seem to represent 'ordinary' life. However,

they did say that the 'ordinary' life was not constructed for 'them' and here a sense of exclusion is conveyed in their narratives.

As we move forward in this analysis, we shall see that many find ways to move away from the refugee domain, yet they do not find themselves fully part of 'ordinary' life; rather, somewhere in-between the refugee domain and 'ordinary' life. This suggests that refugeeship is an ongoing process which does not necessarily 'stop', once granted refugee status. We see the participants appear to strive to create a new 'successful' space, with which to identify. Becoming a lawyer again is the ultimate goal, for one who had previously worked as a lawyer. To achieve this objective means being accepted into 'ordinary' life. 'Ordinary' life consists of study contexts, such as going to college and being on a course which enrolled students are usually non-refugees. Being a part of 'ordinary' life may involve working in a non-refugee context in a capacity which resonates with the participants' educational and professional identifications.

When the participants talked about 'success' in the new context, it was not unusual for them to talk as though ultimate success is to be a part of 'ordinary' life. The 'inner circle' acceptance was talked about as acceptance from 'normal' people and that this was 'normal' life. They expressed that achieving acceptance from those who were not themselves refugees, was hard to achieve for a 'refugee':

> **UK6** I'm just looking for the normal life now [what would that look like] (1) well the reality is how can I have any relationship (.) my life even my character has changed it has affected me very hard (.) I miss people (.) I'm used to being responsible for myself (.) I want to have relationships with quality (.) educated people so we can have a basic connection (.) but how can I have that as a refugee (.) But I look to the future maybe I will get a job (.) a (.) car (.) I will get a driving licence (.) this is normal life

This 'ordinary' life relates to what participants perceive as the 'norm' in their new countries and it is talked about as something distant and outside of their space as refugees. Belonging to the refugee domain offers a space where support and understanding of their experiences can be found amongst people with similar experiences. However, at the same time, I got the impression that the participants felt locked into the refugee domain as the possibility to be part of 'ordinary' life was not always on offer. Incorporating the needs of asylum seekers into their role as advisers or experts creates a new position within the refugee domain, not as one of 'them' but as someone who helps 'them'. This 'helping' role allows the participants to take up a position beyond the constraints of the refugee position placed on them. It gives them back some autonomy, which enables them to position themselves, rather than

being positioned by others. Is this due to a lack of opportunity in the 'ordinary' life?

This man explained to me that when he had lived in Sweden for some time, he began to become aware of himself as a "minority"; this is partly what he had fled from, as a Kurdish political activist, he explained:

> **SW3** I started to feel like a minority (.) I felt pressured and I thought bloody hell (.) I asked myself <u>when</u> (.) <u>where</u> (.) can I begin to be enough (.) feel good and not have to feel on the outside (.) not have people against me

Participant SW3 expresses frustration at the realisation of finding himself 'outside'.

To follow is an example of meaning-making that some of my participants illustrated when talking about positions they took up in the refugee domain, and when explaining the challenges involved in trying to find a space in 'ordinary' life:

> **UK2** Sometimes er a vacancy comes up er you apply for it and you are told er you are not accepted so that means individuals try to do <u>something</u> and survive like this so there is that side of it(.) but they (.) these activities really fulfil a really good function and there is an integration process but well on the other hand this has been a necessity for groups like ours to take this route to be able to get out there (.) and meet and that is how I spend my days actually

The refugee domain fulfilled a function, as this man expressed it is a "route" many take. Many participants assert that this is a necessary "route", to find a sense of participation, because it is difficult to find belonging in contexts which are outside of the refugee domain. Many participants, however, did have personal experience of 'ordinary' life. In their stories there was a dimension of 'passing' to use Goffman's phrase, of trying to create a new life in various other contexts.

7.5 The challenges of the 'ordinary' life

The 'ordinary' life, although talked of, partly, in desirable terms, also represented a complicated and conflictual space for many. My participants express that belonging to the 'ordinary' life is sometimes challenging, both in terms of gaining 'entrance' as well as in 'passing' which is sometimes involved.

The challenge lies in the fact that their migration narrative entails more than the usual geographical and psychological upheaval associated with other types of migration. Many of the participants' stories encapsulate the experiences of persecution, prison and torture. In

some cases, migrating to a 'safer' environment is something that is obviously embroiled in conflict. Some participants express that becoming part of 'ordinary' life made it even more apparent to them that their experience of torture, imprisonment and persecution was in fact everything but ordinary. The fact that the new situation provided a space in which to begin to 'feel' safe involved a realisation that becoming free from the burden of prison and torture is a new process in refugeeship. Receiving refugee status, and access to an everyday structure, came with a sense of stability, but not necessarily a sense of security. That is to say, the knowledge that one is now protected by their new country, no longer living under the threat of persecution or risk of deportation, comes with a great sense of relief. However, this sense of relief implied new challenges, and was thus the start of a new phase of refugeeship.

Having reached this point the participants now enjoyed a new 'safe' space in which to reflect over their life situation. Their fight to survive, and win the asylum claim had been victorious.

The following quote exemplifies this aspect of refugeeship and the process many participants found themselves in at this stage; now as an individual trying to create something new in the refugeeship and become part of 'ordinary' life. This quote is long and illustrative. However, it is representative of many of the participants in this study. It highlights the processual aspects of refugeeship, beginning with life in the country of origin, coming to the turning point, moving on to receiving refugee status and then, finally, facing the challenges of finding acceptance in 'ordinary' life:

> **SW8** One thing was that you live every minute in fear (.) every minute you are looking over your shoulder (.) you never know what's going to happen or when you are going to be called to an interrogation (.) you just want to feel secure and safe

SW8 went on to explain:

> I've always had a strong will (1) that doesn't mean I didn't feel sad (.) but I've always been strong (.) and talking about this time er (1) these years were really tough years of being unsafe (.) insecurity and war (.) but I never felt like giving up (.) but it came first when I came to Sweden (1) when I had a chance to think about it all (.) but before that it was all about survival as well as the fact that you are surrounded by people in the same situation (.) those that maybe even had it worse than you (.) one of the things that keeps you going is that others might have it worse so I have to manage this (.) when it got tough I thought (.) no (.) some have it worse than me (.) that is (.) what was tough became normal (2) when I came to Sweden that normality was gone and it's then you start to think er (1) well when you <u>first</u> come here then there is

a lot as well (.) insecurity (.) proving your papers are real and all that (.) so your nerves are still er well it is still a lot to deal with but <u>suddenly</u> (.) once I had got refugee status (1) yes <u>suddenly</u> I got a bit of time to think about (.) I started to think about my situation and I felt so bad and I could go to the forest and just scream and I felt such anxiety (.) but I still thought I'm not going to give up I started applying for work but I was so sad all the time the first 2 -3 years were really (.) really difficult you have no job, no papers, you can't speak the language no money and <u>everything</u> is so different (.) at the same time you have this heavy (.) heavy baggage with you (.) you have to find a balance between this heavy baggage and creating a <u>new</u> life (.) it is a new crises another phase of insecurity (.) you don't have to be afraid anymore but you are (.) I was afraid every time someone rang the door bell in the beginning (.) the other thing was letters(.) when I opened a letter and feeling like you don't understand er (1) but then it starts to <u>pass (.)</u> to go over to feeling a bit better about everything at the same time a feeling of emptiness comes and I felt how shall I fill this feeling of emptiness (1) this new feeling of insecurity was almost worse than in my country because I had learnt to handle that but the new (.) you are not use to it (.) you don't have the tools to deal with it (2) you have to find new skills in order to pass over to the new situation

Much like many of the participants (UK6 gave a similar example at the beginning of this chapter), this participant describes the process of migration and asylum procedure in becoming a refugee in transitional terms. She uses the expression 'passing over to' and 'pass', 'to go over', when describing the various aspects of refugeeship. She also characterises refugeeship as a process of insecurity. She talks about these various aspects of insecurity as 'phases' and it appears that the refugeeship encompasses so many phases, and entering a 'safe' space in which to 'feel', is a new transition in the refugeeship. The challenge involves learning "new skills" in which to tackle the existential aspects of the migration. As she points out, the difficult circumstances in the country of origin, despite everything, represented "normality". The new context is extremely new, and one particular feature of it is learning new skills to deal with the emotional aspects of this experience. These were not part of her life situation before migration. Daily life was much more about physical survival. Leaving behind the struggle for survival, which had become an integral part of life, is not uncomplicated. This next quote describes these transitional aspects, which became more apparent as a refugee entering 'ordinary' life:

SW4 Then I came to Sweden (1) you know it is like a screen (1) when you are under pressure you just don't <u>feel</u> (.) you just cope (.) you <u>cope</u>(.) you <u>cope</u>(.) When this screen er it opens then you feel insecurity (.) this probably goes for me (.) When I came to Sweden different screens opened (1) you know (.) long after that I was released from prison (.) you know

Participant SW4 described this aspect of the refugeeship as the point at which 'different screens went up'. These screens had served to protect him before, when he was under so much pressure. During the asylum application, the skills required to keep fighting followed some of the participants from their countries of origin and were a resource in helping them to manage the new uncertainties they met when they encountered the asylum procedure. However, the shift to becoming a refugee is highly significant. A new 'normality' is encountered and the challenges which come with it generate feelings on the outside of this 'normality' because of the nature of their own experiences. This is especially evident in the cases of experience of torture and imprisonment, which are not typical experiences in 'ordinary' life.

7.5.1 'Passing' in 'ordinary' life

Self-presentations become prevalent in 'ordinary' life, a space to which the participants expressed a desire to belong. At the same time, this space was described by the participants as lacking in understanding of their previous life experiences, as well as enhancing their experiences as being 'out of the ordinary'. These descriptions not only illustrate the stigmatisation some participants associate with being seen as a refugee, but also how they feel about the label 'refugee' and what they believe the label portrays to others. This became an issue for their self-presentations in these settings. Many of the participants shared with me the difficulties they faced in conveying past experience, and that they felt they did not 'fit into' 'ordinary' life:

> **SW4** Like what do you say in a job interview (.) how do you fill in the gaps where you might have been in prison as a teenager

Their previous experiences felt difficult to incorporate into 'ordinary' life as these experiences were so different from common experiences in the 'ordinary' context. The refugee label places restrictions on the participants in terms of how they perceive that others see them and the parameters the label places on them in terms of gaining employment, building relationships and being seen as 'normal'. The main concern for the participants seems to be how others view them. Some of the participants in this study were not only concerned with presenting themselves as a refugee, but relationships with work colleagues for example could lead to questions about the past:

> **SW4** Being down the pub and being asked about childhood is er well what do you say oh I was put in prison for my opinion when I was 15 er no-one would understand so you are constantly finding ways to answer

Many of the participants when attempting to create new relationships, talk about the challenges of attempting to be seen as 'normal', and the possibility of creating a 'normal' life for themselves. A problem mentioned by several participants was how to introduce oneself. This relational aspect of the stories is about social perception. The participant sees him/herself as being positioned in a particular way as a refugee. This relates not only to being negatively positioned, it also relates to a feeling that others who do not share the experience of the refugee situation, would not be able to understand or identify with them.

> **UK1** Actually I don't like to start new relationships because when I say my name they ask where are you from and as soon as you say (1) and sometimes I just make something up because I don't want to say XXX[and why is that] (.) because maybe people just er well XXX has been so open to the world and people form ideas about it and saying you from XXX or XXX must be refugees

> **UK6** It is hard work (.) er I'm mean especially if you don't know these people or it is a group of people and you have to introduce yourself (.) I know they are seeing refugees as one thing

In terms of forming long-term relationships, the following participant expresses the constraints of being a refugee and political activist in terms of being able to find a partner outside the refugee domain:

> **SW4** But it is also a lot to do with your background (.) it is (.) it is er hard to live with someone (.) someone who can understand (.) you know (.) and you know in normal life what people want is good cars or a good house how can we find someone who doesn't er care er just does politics (.) politics for nothing you know er so er you are just within your group that is why this happens a lot (.) er it becomes sort of like a sect (.) you are just within your community (.) you will only be able to find someone within this network because normal people you know (.) well how are they going to want to live with me

Here we witness not only the stigma attached to the social perception of refugees and the participants' challenges of how to introduce themselves and build new relationships. We also witness the constraints this participant expresses in the refugee domain, which appears to place parameters on building relationships with people he perceives as belonging to the 'normal life'. The excerpts characterise a feeling of disconnection from 'normal life'. They express a desire to meet more people in 'ordinary' life, but they do not see the possibility of forming relationships outside of the refugee domain with someone other than a

refugee. At the same time, many express the value of meeting other refugees who understand their situation, and can relate to it.

7.5.2 Lack of solidarity in 'ordinary' life

Participant SW4 went on to explain that one of the feelings he experienced in 'ordinary' life was a lack of solidarity, which he had found and appreciated in prison. Now, as a refugee, he could feel safe, but he lacked understanding from people outside the refugee domain. This, he explained was something painful and something he doubted could be found in 'ordinary' life.

He began by telling me about his encounters with a Swedish psychologist and the therapy group which was available to support refugees with experience of imprisonment and torture:

> **SW4** You know because it is their job (.) I hate this when they look at their watch (.) she looked at her watch and I just I just couldn't talk anymore (.) you know she just couldn't understand I'm not an object I need some even if not understanding (.) sympathy

He went on to explain a sense of lack of solidarity:

> In prison you are many in a cell together (.) and you are tortured everyday sometimes together (.) sometimes alone (.) we didn't know when they would come [no hmm] and you don't know when your body will give in (1) we would see our friends die (whispers) (3) but you know we helped each other and together it became about surviving another day and another day (1) but then I was free I am not a part of these people anymore (.) we understood each other and I'm not a part of this now and this experience follows you (.) you get scared of authority and scared of the police (.) so you are free but not free from the past experience and the difficult memories. In prison you are part of a relationship you have a community feeling in prison but of course it feels safer here (.) you have control over your life (2) but the thing is how to build a new life

Another participant who had no experience of prison did however live in the restricted space of a refugee camp for 18 years. He explained a lack of solidarity in 'ordinary' life, of the kind which he had experienced in the refugee camp:

> **UK1** There was solidarity (.) I miss my friends on the camp (.) actually I can say that although the life was difficult on the camp (.) it was a society where you know you played together like brothers [yes] but here you can't see that (.) I miss that side of the camp (.) the camp er the camp er in the camp if there was a problem then people were like "we er we can help er we can help" but it is not like that here people are thinking of themselves here rather than other people

7.6 Unpacking refugee 'status'- a summary so far

The findings of this chapter relate to themes of recognition, justification and the fight for new opportunities. I have attempted to 'unpack' what meaning refugee 'status' holds for my participants. Refugee status is of course an official classification, but it also holds other meanings for my participants. 'Status' as an experienced position, beyond the official denotation, revealed itself to be a double-edged sword. That is to say, a shift in 'status' from 'asylum seeker' to 'refugee' is experienced, in terms of legitimacy and moral value. However, the label 'refugee status', was still experienced as a discourse-filled label, a label placing constraints on the participants in terms of 'risk': (1) risk of discrimination; (2) risk of being perceived in a narrow way by 'Others', often associated with negative categories, according to the participants, and; (3) the risk of becoming locked into the discourse filled label, and in terms of creating new opportunity. Having begun to understand the complexities of the label, such as this risk dimension, the participants then sought ways to handle these complexities. First, it seemed to place parameters on the participants' interaction with 'Others'. Some of the participants were careful not to be associated with 'typical' refugee domains, whilst others found a sense of belonging in certain refugee groups. Regardless of how the 'risk' dimension was handled, manoeuvring, to avoid certain social perceptions, or to reinforce other perceptions, was clearly a condition of their life situations as refugees. Here, I turn to the work of Goffman (1961) and more specifically to the concept 'total institution'. Goffman coined the concept (1961) 'total institution' referring to closed communities, such as psychiatric departments. A total institution can be defined as a place of residency, which involves abnormal living conditions, under strict control, regarding most aspects of how one would 'normally' go about one's everyday life. Examples of total institutions are prisons, boarding schools, monasteries and military camps. Goffman talks about the constraints of self formation placed in contexts of 'total institution', pointing out that when it comes to whatever the 'total institution' can impose on sense of self, it contrasts significantly with the rights and freedoms benefited in society at large. In this study, it became apparent that as refugees, the participants experience a lack of 'full' citizenship, in the sense that they are perceived as 'refugees'. They refer to their conditions as being different from 'non-refugees'. As we saw in one of the examples in this chapter, UK1 had to prove his identification as a refugee. No longer an asylum seeker, he needed to prove that he had received refugee status in order to gain access to educational services.

This chapter has been concerned with being categorised *as* a refugee. It has illustrated the complexities and challenging aspects of refugee status. These complexities and challenges played out in the data material in various ways. The refugee status was positive in a number of ways, such as legitimacy, recognition and the right to build a new life. However, negative attributes were also assigned refugee status. The refugee status, on the one hand was a discourse loaded label, and gave room to feeling the enormity of all previous experiences of fighting for survival, prison, war, torture. One way of dealing with the situation of receiving refugee status was by trying to find opportunities which would ultimately lead to the feeling of being a part of the new society. Many find themselves restricted to certain spaces, which I coin, the refugee domain. Those who had experience of life 'outside' of the refugee domain, the so called 'ordinary' life, spoke about the challenges involved and the processes in finding belonging.

The narratives also include reflections about the social perceptions surrounding the refugee label and how they perceive that this influenced their opportunities to create a new and meaningful life. When talking about their situation as refugees, the participants expressed a desire to be seen as 'normal' or feel 'normal' again. They stated that they thought one way to achieve this was by associating with 'normal' people. At the same time, several of the participants illustrated the complexities of the label, when they explained that it was something they were proud of in their private thoughts, but ashamed of socially.

7.6.1 Entanglement of 'social' and 'personal' identification

The theoretical point of departure, outlined in Chapter Three, suggested the difficulties of distinguishing between personal and social identifications. The results of Chapter Seven when it comes to the refugee identity work show that the participants in their talk are largely relating to the social perceptions of refugees found in public debate and migration policy, and in their talk they responded to this debate and policy. This took the form of two things, (1) as an interpretation process, present in their narratives, whereby the participants' meaning-making shows an attempt to understand the 'label' solving the 'challenges' the label generates in terms of identity work and (2) as an action of performative positioning, whereby responding either by agreeing for example, or disagreeing, are both acts of resistance. Such positioning work is dominant in their life situations as refugees and it is expressed in their talk of being refugees.

7.7 The moral dimension in refugeeship

The dominating positioning work referred to above is a significant aspect of refugeeship. Refugeeship seems to have a thread of constantly 'justifying' and 'putting right' one's actions, running through it, as a response to the constraints placed through refugeeship. For some, this undertaking began when they were political activists in their countries of origin. For my Kurdish participants it began with an awareness of the oppression and the explicit questioning in relation to them as 'minorities'. For others it began with the notion of proving their need to flee both to themselves, and to others in their countries of origins, and later in neighbouring countries, whilst living in refugee camps. In Chapter Six, justification became apparent when encountering the asylum system. In this chapter, I illustrate the way that the participants embark on talk of refugee status as a 'label' and of their representations over what the 'status' may hold for them as refugees. In this chapter we see the way this moral dimension unravels. First the participants draw on the meaning that being recognised officially as a refugee had for them in terms of 'proving' they were genuine refugees, to others, but also to themselves. This talk became incorporated into new self-presentations as a refugee in genuine need, and here the participants gained support in their attempts to position themselves away from categories such as 'bogus' or economic through the official recognition of their refugee status, and instead took on the category of someone who really needed this protection. In summary, we see that the participants worked their way through a moral career, with repeated more or less implicit questions of their right to flee their countries of origin and to start a new life, which resulted in a continuous feeling of having to justify oneself, and one's actions. Moral career is an expression borrowed from Ervin Goffman's analysis of the processes experienced by a person who is admitted to a psychiatric hospital and the term career refers to a sequence of experiential phases, in this case a series of moral challenges experienced by the participants and expressed in their stories. Harré, in his writings about *Individual lives as social trajectories* draws on the work of Goffman and defines moral career in the following way:

> A moral career, then, is a history of an individual person with respect to the attitudes and beliefs that others have, and the attitude to and beliefs about oneself that are formed on the basis of one's readings of the attitudes and beliefs of others (1993: 206)

Goffman coined the expression 'moral career' in analysing the daily experiences of psychiatric in-patients in a hospital in the United States in the 1950s. He found a process consisting of three stages:

> The career of the mental patent falls popularly and naturalistically into three main phases: the period prior to entering the hospital, which I shall call the pre-patient phase; the period in the hospital, the inpatient phase; the period after discharge from the hospital, should this occur, namely, the ex-patient phase (1961:122)

The three phases described by Goffman, can be seen in refugeeship: the period prior to entering the asylum procedure, the period as asylum seeker and the period after the asylum phase- on being granted refugee status – should this take place.

This moral dimension seems to be a continuous characteristic of refugeeship. In the examples given, we saw the way the participants could express their awareness that refugees in media were being portrayed in ways which seemed to give cause for the participants to feel that they needed to 'prove' their 'goodness' or 'hardworking' nature. The themes of hardworking and contributing citizen are clearly present. Thus the participants position themselves as someone who has always tried to find ways to contribute to their new society, even when opportunities for paid work were few. Many participants were eager to express the work and projects they were engaged in as volunteers.

7.8 Locked in the discourse-filled label

Refugee status is a discourse-loaded label and it clearly seems to place constraints on the participants, both in terms of their private spheres, such as starting new relationships, and in the public sphere. The latter encompasses their interaction with authorities and with superiors at work places. The participants express the refugee label not only contributes to how they are perceived by 'Others', but also how they are treated by others.

In the narratives refugee status is referred to in a paradoxical way. Participants talk about it as giving a sense of freedom to work, study, apply for housing and being permitted to travel, while at the same time, it is presented as putting limits on freedom. Both the sense of freedom and the sense of limited freedom are expressed in terms of how they are viewed by others. The participants themselves tend first of all to stress their new freedom gained through refugee status. As I have mentioned previously, some see themselves as refugees, but say that this is due to the socially defined label itself, others are more active in their attempt not to define themselves in that way but, at the same time feel that they are often categorised by 'Others' in a particular way as a refugee.

An interpretation as to why some of the participants express their reluctance to associate with other refugees may be that they want to free themselves from the refugee label, and the loaded discourse associated with this label. They do not want to be seen as the stereotypical refugee

and become locked in the discourses they perceive as surrounding this label. The participants express the notion that the label is full of representations that they do not wish to be associated with. The participants want to use their new situation, as refugees, to focus on things which mean something to them, rather than simply become locked into negative discourses and it's repertoire of stereotypical meanings and behaviour.

The approach taken by some of the participants was to dis-identify in order to not risk being associated with the refugee label in everyday interactions. They were aware that the label 'refugee' is something to which they might have to relate to, however, in terms of societal categorisations, refugee is avoided and thereby the refugee status as an identity is not either fully taken on board. This sometimes required the participants to find new ways to present her/himself in various contexts, so as to avoid the categorisation 'refugee'. However, again, the stories told by the participants gave nuanced descriptions of their experiences and how they approached the new life conditions which came with refugee status. It was not unusual for the participants to both express pride over the actual act of surviving forced migration, and being granted permission to remain as a refugee, and at the same time, they reject other meanings of being a refugee. Thus, the participants in this study demonstrate their capacity to take up the position as refugee in some situations, while they, at the same time, reject the label 'refugee' in many other situations.

The theoretical framework employed in this thesis not only recognises a relationship between two levels of identification, the personal and the collective (social), but also the fact that these two identifications are hard to distinguish between.

Harré writes:

> The self is a location, not a substance or an attribute. The sense of self is the sense of being located at a point in space, of having a perspective in time and of having a variety of positions in local moral orders. (1993:4)

Harré points out that the public-social self concept, becomes a 'model' for the private-individual self.

Chapter Five and Six suggest that the participants experienced not only a literal flight, but a flight from themselves. This chapter, Chapter Seven, illustrates that gaining refugee status gives a sense of legitimacy and a more valued social position than asylum seeker, but it is still limited in terms of position repertoire. In Harré's terms, the refugee is both located in a more recognised social position as a person who is accepted in the new country, as someone who has the right to remain because of humanitarian reasons. This means that the refugee is offered

several different locations for identifications by 'Others' in the new country. As a result of the influence of social categorisations and identifications on a personal sense of self, the refugees themselves also seem to locate themselves as both being and not being refugees, in different senses of the word. This way of constructing multiple belongings and identifications, in fact, seemed to constitute one of the few possible ways to reach beyond the limitations of the discourse loaded categorisation of being a refugee. Another way of saying this is to focus on the social repertoires associated with belonging to specific social categories. The one-dimensional refugee label that many of the participants tried to rid themselves of, was associated with expectations that refugees are strangers and victims, who might become dependent on, or be a burden to, the new society. Many of the participants in my study felt uncomfortable with these expectations ascribed to them, giving cause to develop new I-positions which offered an alternative to the refugee position. However some of my participants self-identified as refugees, illustrating another meaning of being a refugee, which stressed the community and solidarity found between refugees who are threatened by exclusion in their new countries, as well as experienced difficulty in finding understanding in 'ordinary' life for their past of oppression and the real challenges associated with being a refugee. Thus, the flight from oneself, experienced by many of the participants, forced them into a long-lasting search for new identifications. However the lost identifications and belongings were not necessarily replaced by new ones, even if many of the participants seemed to have tried to do so at first, but rather replaced by a mix of identifications and belongings, of which some appeared to be contradictory but seemed possible for the participants to include in a new, dynamic sense of self. This will be returned to in the final chapter, Chapter Nine.

8. Constructing continuity and discontinuity in the stories of 'beyond' being a refugee

Summary of analysis

So far, my analysis of the participants' stories has made visible certain aspects of refugeeship. The narratives illustrate (1) events of refugeeship in a time line; (2) identification work associated with each event; (3) the identifications and events as dimensions of refugeeship, constitute the moral career, as introduced in Chapter Seven.

These narrative layers contribute to the understanding of refugeeship as a process, which involves a fight for recognition through justification work. A crucial part of the stories describe the participants' versions of a life beyond *just* being a refugee, illustrating a project of intersecting various positions in order to create something new and beyond the refugee position alone. This will be explored in this chapter. Chapters Five, Six and Seven illustrate a central storyline of *justification*, running through and piecing together the various narrative themes. Justification is dominant throughout the various events of refugeeship: the turning point, escaping, fleeing, and abandonment, encountering the legal and administrative system of claiming asylum and being granted refugee status. When making the claim the I-position of self-advocacy becomes salient in having to justify one's position as an asylum seeker, in need of protection. The narrative themes introduced in Chapter Seven have a story line of *recognition*, described through 'triumphant talk', 'winning the fight', the legitimatisation experienced in being granted refugee status and transitioning from a 'limbo' position to transcending this position and beginning a new life, described by the participants as 'feeling a person again'. However, the story line of justification becomes apparent again in the narrative themes relating to the challenges of the refugee status. My participants found themselves battling with the conception of 'status' in refugee status, contra the lack of real 'status', the label brought with it. Here a need for justification became apparent again, largely in relation to justifying one's worth in the new context, and to be seen beyond the stereotypical view of 'refugee'.

In this chapter, I discuss the way in which participants projected their talk to future constructions of their view on what life might hold

for them. The material is interpreted as talk about 'beyond' being *only* a refugee, a step further if you like from talking about fleeing, claiming asylum and being granted refugee status. Rather this talk is more about making sense of the various new and old identifications. It is about how continuity and even discontinuity of the new and old identifications are constructed and combined, for the purpose of creating something beyond.

8.1 What constitutes moving 'beyond'

So what constitutes moving beyond or forward? Briefly moving beyond does not entail a rejection of the refugee status as an identity, and therefore I try to make clear here that the identification and positioning work is more about creating *other* complementary or additional positions and identities, than that of *only* refugee. Being seen as *just* a refugee is expressed as limiting one's means of taking up positions other than *refugee.* The participants talked about this as being due to the way they are seen as refugees and the obstacles encountered when intending to 'move forward'. The participants' talk projects the 'continuity' of refugeeship forward, and seeks its end, in terms of moving beyond being *just* a refugee. Again this does not necessarily mean that the participant's aim is to *stop* being a refugee; rather, it is about wanting to take up other meaningful positions *besides* being a refugee. This chapter is concerned with shedding light on how continuity and discontinuity played out in the narratives of refugeeship, at a time where the participants represent their new lives and take up I-positions, as well as resist 'Other' social positioning, within the new societal space.

Three broad themes which have been identified in the participants' narratives of *beyond* are: (1) Identity work for moving forward-struggle for recognition; (2) Meaning-making: past to future; (3) the dilemma of political activism and being a refugee contra 'ordinary' life. Can the various positions be combined?

From the perspective of fleeing one's country and coming to a new one, being granted refugee status marks an important event in the narratives. One can say that the process of fleeing has come to an end and now it is time to start a new life. As we saw in Chapter Seven, it was not unusual for participants to talk about this aspect as overwhelming, when coming to realise the enormity of one's past experience, of creating a new life and trying to actualise ambitions to study or work within a particular field.

Reflections over the future played out in two ways in the narratives of refugeeship, as told by the participants: (1) some shared their reflections over life today, having been refugees for some time and what this has entailed for identification and positioning work; (2) others

reflected more on how he or she anticipated life would be, having lived in the new context for some time. In some cases, the participants presented both sorts of reflections.

This 'future' talk was not conveyed in a straightforward or linear or explicit manner in the narratives, as a new 'phase' or as an aspect in the moral career of refugeeship. It was, rather, entangled in the narratives, whereby talk of the past, present and future became intertwined. Sometimes, reflections and memories from the past were constructed as projections into the future. How the participants 'evaluated' their experience of refugeeship assisted them in visualising the future. Although talk of the past and present is a representation, constructed in conversation with me, the 'future' talk is a 'projection', whereby participants express beliefs about how life will continue or what can be hoped for, on which they draw on past and current events. However, some participants reflect back on a long time of being a refugee without seeing signs of progression towards the life they hoped to make for themselves. The talk was not only characterised as talk of 'beyond' being a refugee, through forward looking projections, the talk also gave insights into everyday life of people trying to move forward and re-create another kind of life and the continuous struggle for recognition.

Of the ten participants from England and the nine from Sweden, not all had received refugee status at the time of the data collection. I learned that two were refused asylum, one from Sweden, who subsequently went into hiding, and one from England who was soon thereafter deported. The data upon which the findings of this chapter are based, include, interpretation of the talk of those who had received refugee status[26]. Some participants had recently received the status; others had been refugees for some time, in certain cases up to 25 years.

This is not a quantitative study and therefore I make no claims to statistical correlations between length of time in the new context and building a new life in a way which constitutes a sense of beyond refugeeship. In fact, the material is far more complex, showing that peoples' stories, as well as covering past and present circumstances, can differ significantly and thus can affect how one talks about these experiences. This chapter aims at showing the construction of future projections in talk and the discursive work used to construct a 'forward' narrative as refugees. An interesting finding here is that those who have had refugee status for a long period of time still project their talk of a meaningful future forward. This indicates that many still have not

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[26] An analysis of the two participants who were refused asylum would of course give important insight into the uncertainty with regards to the 'future' that asylum seekers live with. However, this was not the aim of this particular chapter. An analysis of asylum seeking *talk* can be found in Chapter Five.

found opportunities but continue to look for openings and manifest a continuous theme of hope.

8.2 Identity work for moving forward

The aspect of refugeeship on which I try to shed light here, is the point where participants have moved beyond their situation as persons who are still very much in the midst of getting to grips with the official recognition of 'refugee status'. Instead, the participants are now living in their own housing, no longer having to share space with strangers. Some may have enrolled on a college course others have started work, and so on. Some of the participants have been in this situation for years, in some cases 10, 15 or up to 25 years, while others have been granted refugee status more recently, over the past few years. Besides the practical aspects involved in creating a new life situation and moving 'beyond', what is evident in the data material, and illustrated in Chapter Seven, is the concern to free oneself of the discourse-filled label, associated with *only* being a refugee. Many illustrated the search for strategies to do this, and to re-create an image in the eyes of others and self of who one was and who one is.

8.2.1 Ridding oneself of the refugee 'bit'

> **SW5** There is no comparison (.) what I was and who I am now but now I try to remove the refugee to get rid of the refugee bit I don't like to see the refugee in me (.) I think if I succeed in my work the refugee bit will go by itself if I started to work then I would forget I'm a refugee but if I don't succeed then I'm still a refugee

A discontinuity of what one 'was' is expressed here. This participant worked as a professor and researcher before being compelled to flee. 'What' one 'was' is in relation to a sense of losing the core identification, as professor, and feeling that it was replaced by the dis-identification, refugee. Here the refugee 'bit' is represented as 'unsuccessful'; that is to say, this participant saw succeeding in work as a strategy for 'getting rid of' the refugee 'bit'. Further on, I discovered that this was only a first step towards finding a way to move beyond being *just* a refugee. The first step often seemed to consist of trying to discard or deny being a refugee altogether. Failing in this, occasioned disappointment and so participants tried other strategies for moving forward. A common strategy, already illustrated in Chapter Seven, was turning to voluntary work or political organisations to feel *less* of a refugee. This strategy was resumed when participants discovered how difficult (or impossible) it was to 'get rid of' the refugee stamp.

The next participant illustrates the journey to moving beyond being *only* a refugee through education:

> **SW8** You feel the pressure to <u>become</u> something now (.) in this new situation (1)when I was finished with my Swedish course I found out that I had to re-do some parts of my education from my home country I did this but then the problems began I sent in my papers to different universities and nobody wanted me(.) for me this was a (.) a (.) a (.) well very chaotic feeling (.) feeling I had to do this education (.) feeling you have not got time you have to do this now you are getting older and doing it then being told something else (.) I felt like there is no communication between different departments but I thought I won't give up it felt inhumane that they had done this that they didn't give me this chance

Participant SW8 shows another way of casting off the refugee label by completing her education aspiring to a future job and a possible new life. The never-ending character of new challenges in this moral career is illustrated when SW8 finds herself drawn into a new justification struggle, this time in order to have her earlier and new education recognised as a whole.

As we saw in Chapter Seven, most participants expressed feeling uncomfortable about being *seen as* a refugee, despite the fact that one could personally be quite proud of the fact that one was a refugee, as someone who had survived. Part of the participant's concern was to do with the feeling of permanency experienced in being labelled 'refugee'; and again, how to move beyond being *only* a refugee. The participant's talk about how they anticipated that life would unfold as a refugee was elicited by the question 'can I ever stop being *only* a refugee?' I introduced the idea of the refugee status as a discourse filled label in Chapter Six. The discourse of refugees is also drawn on in the participants' talk, of future identification. This next quote shows the way discourse of the label as 'permanent' can be constructed:

> **UK1** I remember a friend of mine told me two weeks ago that if you come to this country as a refugee (.) even if you live for years to come (.) you will be seen as someone that just arrived that morning (.) I keep asking him now why did you say this to me and he says to me because otherwise you are just lying to yourself because in this country after 10,20, 50, 100 years to come it is just a fact that you will be seen as if you came in the morning (.) for me I think I can say I support what he says [you don't feel accepted] no no I can't say I feel accepted (.) the people er I am always the new person all the time I don't feel accepted

UK1 expresses the difficulty in ridding oneself of the label and articulates the notion that one will always be seen as a refugee, and not recognised as anything other than a stranger. The label is perceived as a

static identity, marking another important dimension of the moral career of the refugeeship. The following participant draws an analogy with disability when describing this, and again the story line of recognition is illustrated:

> **SW5** Being a refugee is like a social handicap someone who can't do everything because of the handicap (.) I have all this competence but as a refugee I can't use it and a handicap maybe happens by accident and what happened to me was not a choice (.) becoming a refugee is like an accident has happened and now I'm socially handicapped

Here, the refugee label is constructed as a hindrance to moving forward, a handicap. Participant SW5 talks about all the competence he has to offer, but he feels that his contribution will not be utilised because he is a refugee. Again the power of the discursive practices surrounding refugees is exemplified. The difficulties of moving forward seem largely to do with the labelling process involved in becoming and being a refugee.

8.2.2 Fluid positioning: a strategy of identity work

The examples so far illustrate the challenges of identity work when one feels the lack of a broader repertoire for taking up new positions (other than *only* refugee). However, some participants have moved beyond this in their refugeeship, discovering that moving on was not really a question of 'getting rid of' one's refugee identity, but rather about finding a way to combine the refugee position with new positions. This means not giving up being a refugee altogether, nor about becoming completely British or Swedish:

> **UK3** integration isn't becoming completely British you don't have to do that to be integrated you just (.)need to <u>feel</u> part of the society so for example I have integrated into this society because I have been accepted er well not just accepted (.) but I am also respected and that is all I want [yes] I want to be respected and others to be respected er I'm fully integrated also because I know (.) well not everything but almost everything about XXXXX (place of residence) so I would say I have integrated

There is a sense of progression in this excerpt, when this man says that he 'knows almost everything' about his new society now, and he feels respected today. This was something he did not express when he talked about making the asylum claim. Several I-positions are taken up, whereas others are resisted: I- as a successful integrator, I- as a respected member of the community, I- as a knowledgeable citizen. He resists however I- as a 'full' British citizen. What is interesting is the

identity work of those participants who express a sense of agency in becoming a successful 'part' of society. In these cases it seems to be about combining different positions, whereas those who still feel on the 'outside' are more concerned with 'ridding' themselves of being seen as a refugee. The sense of beyondness seems to lie in reaching the point where the identity work has become about agency in negotiating which positions to take up and which to resist, rather than dwelling on wishful thinking about reinstating who one *was*, or 'getting rid of' the refugee position.

Much of the talk around integration is related to inclusion and a sense of participation. For my participants integration is a 'feeling' of participation in the new society, and not a case of assimilation. Feeling a sense of inclusion, sometimes expressed by the participants as 'integration', or feeling 'part of society', is articulated as something which can be found in spaces of common interest with others. Participation is according to what interests the participants, and therefore participation is on their own terms and conditions.

The following participant has lived in England for more than 20 years, and despite his descriptions of constantly striving to make use of his knowledge and competence, he has never found opportunity in the way of paid work. He has, however, been very active in local and international development projects and this has contributed to his feeling himself to be a part of society:

> **UK2** I feel part of society (.) I do (.) I do (1) there was a science competition er collaboration and you could join in and there were lots of people there (.) it was good (1) it was like being in a community (2) of course you meet certain individuals who say things to you but personally I don't care about that er:::er some peo::ple (.) there are many sick people you know (.) sick people are saying these things (.) even my wife has experienced this recently (.) one lady called her er you know er Black and so on (.) er well really this is er well not everyone does this and I <u>do </u>think these activities they er do make us part of society I don't think it is like we are being smashed or fought against

Participant UK2 explained that he found a sense of community in contexts which were meaningful to him and familiar in terms of his training and experience. This gave a sense of inclusion.

> I do think these activities make <u>us</u> part of society

There is a struggle described in this excerpt, between on the one hand, feeling a part of society, in this case through a science collaboration and on the other, of being reminded occasionally that there are people who may not want 'them' there. He expresses the conflict of being positioned

as 'an outsider', despite his own attempts to position himself on the 'inside'.

8.2.3 Hindrances to identity work

In the talk of what it would take to feel acceptance and belonging, as well as feeling that one can take up positions other than that of *only* refugee, participants sought to understand what stood in the way of feeling fully included.

Participant UK1 in this next quote refers to how long he has lived in limbo, for example, before being granted refugee status:

> **UK1** I think because the life to being a refugee has been so long (.) so difficult (4) I am British on paper, but I don't feel that, er I feel that I'm still that person (.) the person I was 8 (.) 10 years ago(.) I'm still that person (2)

This participant lived in a refugee camp for 18 years before UN officials and the British Home Office finally made it possible for him to move to England. He spent his childhood and adolescent years living in the camp. Officials from the UN and Home Office made several visits to the camp over the 18 years, before UK1 and his mother and sister were finally 'chosen'. This long and drawn out wait to be granted refugee status, is expressed as putting parameters on being able to move forward, because the wait to being 'chosen' as a quota refugee, had been so long.

This next participant who talked about the difficulties in finding solidarity presented in Chapter Seven, with a past experience of prison and torture and now living in a 'normal' context, he feels that 'Others' in 'ordinary' life can never understand his past situation. He explained:

> **SW4** I talk to a friend(.) or you and it helps me more than going to the psychotherapist because I see that when I talk to a friend who has been through this too that er the eyes are full of tears because of something I said about torture or something I know that you care (.) feel(.) you know I can just go to XXXXX (friends name) and talk for 4 or 5 hours about our past and it really helps you know because he understands me and I understand him. The psychotherapists they don't know how to deal with it (.) with what they are being told it is just a chock I don't blame them they can't understand and it's not their problem

So when I asked him how he copes with not finding understanding outside the refugee domain, he explained that he draws on wider ideology:

SW4 These coping strategies (.) well I guess they have their ground in that I identified myself with a larger societal movement because you know as a political refugee a leftist political refugee you see the world (.) not your country as a scene for class struggle so for example right from the beginning I found an organisation XXXXX (name of organisation) and I had my new friends no matter which part of the world I was from

This excerpt is an example of identification work through combining various positions as a strategy to move 'beyond'. This involves taking up multiple I-positions. Such as: political refugee, leftist political activist and as a member of an organisation. Combining these positions provides a sense of belonging and an opportunity to move beyond the trauma of torture and imprisonment. The I-position of I- the veteran appeared frequently throughout the narratives of refugeeship, often starting with stories relating to the time after the turning point and onwards. The participants position themselves as experienced in coping with all the difficulties thrown at them and experienced in being able to help other new refugees and asylum seekers through the system. By doing so they created a meaningful space in the limited life situation, and gave justification to their position as refugees. This position is also taken up when the participants talk about how they 'cope with' moving beyond.

8.2.4 Intersecting positions of belonging with positions on the outside

Finding a new context with which to identify becomes a way of feeling on the 'inside' again. A new political organisation or joining refugee organisations becomes important for the identification processes in a space in which one does not feel naturally included. The need for participation and belonging shines through in these stories and for those who had a professional or political background, this belonging and participation is crucial to their sense of feeling competent again. The participants, however, find this 'ordinary' context (see Chapter Seven) difficult to 'enter'. Those who do not feel part of society today, express that they would like to be part of British or Swedish society, but it seems that there is a 'glass ceiling'[27], which acts as a barrier to gaining 'full entry' to 'normal life'. This notion of a 'glass ceiling' came through implicitly when the participants talked about participating in society, for example through voluntary work, but then hitting a wall in

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[27] The concept glass ceiling was coined originally within the discipline of economics referring to limitations of advancement within organisations due to some form of discrimination. It originally referred to gender gaps, later to racism and, more recently the term has been applied to studies of disability and age.

being unable to find new positions which represented their educational or working history. Some of my participants expressed the closest to being part of something 'ordinary', was by participating in helping in refugee voluntary organisations:

> **UK6** I would prefer to get into British society you can meet very nice people at the Red Cross (.) I have contact with them (.) they have been very helpful (.) but the sort of people coming in I don't want to know them (.) The Red Cross has given me a sort of temporary position helping out there (1) I'm looking for the normal life now

So, it would seem that attempting to find belonging in a context that represents some kind of 'normality', of which to be a part, is a usual aspect in refugeeship, once the practicalities of transitioning from asylum seeker to refugee is complete, and one has come to terms with the refugee label. It does encompass some existential dimensions which are not about looking for work, housing or social belonging. Rather, participants relate to a new space in the refugee situation that of supplying time to reflect on one's experiences and who one is today. Survival was the priority before migration, and the asylum procedure was shadowed by a new fight for being allowed to stay and prove one's case.

The next quote is an example of some of the identity work which was present in the participants' narratives, showing the way the participants could try to make sense of their multiple I-positions and almost arrange them in some sort of hierarchical order:

> **SW8** First I'm XXXXX (previous citizenship) yes I would say first I'm XXXX but I'm a refugee (1) I will always be a refugee but that doesn't mean I'm not other things(.) I mean er my children er being a mother is very important to me that is what I'm most proud of (.) my children I'm very proud of my children (2) then of course there is my professional status that is very important of course er who I am (.) er I'm XXXX I'm a mother and then er other things

8.3 Meaning-making: past to future

Intersecting previous experience with new experience, involves the participants in having to make repeated comparisons between her or his situation as a refugee with that of non-refugees, and comparing the 'old' country with the 'new'. The meaning-making involved in these comparisons seems to be about trying to understand why it is so difficult to 'move on' from the feeling of being 'only a refugee'. The meaning-making work seems to be about the participants' hopes of 'moving on' in the new country. This 'moving on' project entails the realisation that everything that was impossible after the turning point in the country of origin and of not being able to complete the project of

building democracy or follow other career paths and then encountering a lack of opportunity in new country, seems to produce a deep sense of disappointment, which characterises refugeeship.

One example of the way the participants made sense of why they 'still' felt like a refugee, was through constructing notions of democracy in the new country:

> **UK1** For example democracy in this country er I'm not allowed to vote I'm not allowed to participate in any political activity mm I mean like if I wanted to become a MP or council or something then I'm not allowed and after I have applied for a British passport I would be allowed [do you feel that is undemocratic then?] mm no maybe not but it is an example of why I still feel like a refugee here in this country (3) even after this moment and when I get a passport I will still feel a refugee [so do you think you will feel a refugee with a British passport?] yeah yeah other people may think I'm British then (.) but for me myself (.) what it means to me won't change

Participant UK6 brought up notions of 'democracy', in reflecting on his life situation as a refugee and trying to move beyond the feeling of 'only' being a refugee:

> **UK6** I try to read (.) now I have got my own computer I can work (.) I like to work on my own or I go to the library and borrow books or read newspapers using the computer (1) these are things you can do to help yourself (.) a lot of things in this country are very very good (.) very nice (.) I'm not just coming here to get money (.) I have been here four years now (.) been on my own for four years (.) at the same time if you look at democracy (.) there is a sort of democracy (.) but er (5) but I can't say it is how I would like it to be (.) you are allowed to say what you want (.) freedom of speech is something they say exists but it is not really like that they use it like a sword with two edges

There is quite a lot being said in this quote. The activities participant UK6 describes such as reading, going to the library and using the computer are expressed as things he does to 'help himself' as he has been in England for four years now, and has not had the opportunity to start work. He mentions that he has been on his own now during these four years (this participant became estranged from his family, during the fleeing process). Whilst expressing the value of services such as the library, he reiterates that he has not come for money, something this participant told me repeatedly throughout the interview, as did most of the participants. He raised the subject of democracy, and seemed hesitant to see his new context as fully democratic. What seems to be expressed here is the limitations experienced in the new situation. At

the same time, this participant, as many others, was keen to give positive examples from the new country also.

The conflict present in the participants' talk of being a refugee in these societies, as well as thoughts about democracy, was common. Many of the participants told me that it was not until having lived some years in England or Sweden that one begins to reflect on one's impressions of democracy:

> **SW7** when you think about it (.) this society (.) you can't compare to XXX (country of origin) but it's not paradise here (.) it can be hell here (.) and the people too (.) some people (1) some people have lots of money and others have nothing and this is just accepted there is inequality here too(1) terrible things happen here too (.) it was a slow process to realising this about Sweden (.) before you become part of society you can't see it anyway you think oh so nice my child has a good life here (.) but eventually when you get into society and there is (.) injustice (.) inequality (.) and you really have to fight all the time (1) the surface is painted nicely (.) but when you go a little deeper it's terrible

The way in which this participant talks about democracy and the new society was as though it was something that she 'discovered' once she had become 'part of society'. This was a common feature expressed by many of the participants when talking about the new societies.

Reflections about the future were often linked to memories of the past and reflections directed at the future often resembled a 'summary' of one's 'moral career' of refugeeship. The following participant expressed her journey through refugeeship as a traumatic experience, which she acknowledges as part of her present life, but has learnt "to cope with". She expresses that her experience will always be a prominent part of her life narrative, even when she is "old and grey" and has grandchildren:

> **UK8** I lived a nightmare (.) a nightmare and (.) I'm glad I can cope today (.) I know how to deal with it (1) I can come out of my dreams when they become nightmares [mm] but in the middle of it I really believe it (.) that he is here and he wants to kill me so it really is a horror and I know I will be still talking about it when I'm old and grey ***to the grandchildren but I'm glad of where I am and I am pleased for the people who helped me because if I hadn't have had help (.) then I would never have been here today

Participant UK8 begins with the past, describing life after the turning point as a 'nightmare', and then goes on to her present situation speaking about how she 'copes' and 'deals with it' today. Thereafter, she projects into the future and ends by returning to the past.

A similar construction takes place in the next excerpt, where participant UK2 explains that he has paid the price of refugeeship, something he experiences as having consequences for his life. However he constructs a sense of continuity in saying that he will continue to make a life for himself and not give up. Again, there is a 'summing up' of the consequences of refugeeship taking place:

> **UK2** like I said (.) I have paid for this (.) but I'm not going to give up (.) I will make my own way and I have my faith

The data may be characterised as comprising of a number of metaphors, which describe the various phases constituting the moral career of refugeeship. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, it was not unusual for participants who had received refugee status, to describe this as 'winning the fight'. The 'Fight is over', 'struggle' and 'hard work' are all expressions appearing throughout the participants' narratives. These expressions occur when constructing continuity in refugeeship. I-positions of I- the optimistic-survivor are prevalent in the participants' talk about *fighting on*, *moving on*, *never giving up*, and as someone who helps themselves. Just as we have witnessed in previous chapters, it is important for the participants to position themselves as independent active persons, not as a burden to society, capable of creating a successful life.

> **UK2**: so you just carry on with the voluntary work and look for a job at the same time as you get old er in the meantime (.) and the criteria for rejection er rejection comes one after the other (2) er (1) so there are new crises all the time you know (.) you know you can stay but then you meet new problems so this is what life is anyway (.) struggling (.) being hopeful (.) aiming for something better (.) this is important (.) very important to be strong

He says "aiming for something better", thus projecting his talk to the future, but also 'predicting' the struggle he anticipates will continue.

The notion of having to find ways 'to cope' or 'be strong' in order to be able to move beyond and continue to move forward, appears frequently in many of the participant's 'futuristic' expressions. UK8 explained at the beginning of this chapter that 'coping' was a necessity in order to function and manage her life situation today. The following participant, SW8, also expressed this moving forward talk, as a refugee, and as someone who wants to build a new life for herself:

> **SW8** it's like having to find a new system to arrange all your thoughts and you think all the time about what has happened all these thoughts you try to arrange them

> You have to find a way to manage the baggage of what has happened at the same time create a new life but the feeling (.) the process to becoming secure hasn't been easy (.) it has been a big fight and er (2) at the same time you can feel discriminated against and even if there are laws against this how are you to prove it

I asked more about this experience of discrimination, and the notion of moving forward was raised again:

> I have experienced discrimination but it is hard to prove and it is a bit like well also how much you want to care about it you can fight against it all your life but er for me it is important to move forward too (.) it is about a process to going forward

Making sense of the past and organising past experiences are looked upon as strategies for moving forward. Knock-backs or hindrances encountered in the current situation are also outlined as obstacles in talk of 'moving forward'. Organising past events and their meaning was described by participant SW8 as something she needed to do in order to create a new life. Coming to terms with what one has experienced and finding a way to move 'beyond' these experiences also appeared in Chapter Seven. When reflecting back on the time after receiving the refugee status participants observed that this gave 'time to reflect' on the enormity of one's experience. So strategies may be perceived, in the participants' talk, as tools for 'moving forward'.

Part of this 'beyond' aspect in refugeeship seems to involve a great deal of reflection on where one was and where one finds oneself today.

8.3.1 Intersecting the 'old' country and the 'new' country

In participants' talk of how one hopes to continue with life plans in the future, it is not uncommon to refer to projects one had to flee from, or that one had planned to carry out:

> **UK2** I would like to make connections possible you know (.) development (1) I would like to do that (.) I would like to get a twin school for er my first school where I was born (.) that is one thing there is also an age (.) like concern support in my part of XXXX (country of origin) so I'm thinking about if I can get support that I can organise (.) to reach them this could be a way forward (.) to continue not losing hope (.) I hope we can still be here but do something there (2) I think most people as refugees try to do this

This excerpt shows how the participant tries to create continuity and meaning to his refugeeship. He talks about this as something "most refugees try to do", enunciating how common it is for refugees to act in this way in their attempt to sustain meaning concerning the flight.

Renewing old projects which were abandoned due to fleeing or creating new projects which connect the 'old' and 'new' countries were accepted as 'a way forward', and to 'continue not losing hope'. This suggests that there is a continuous latent theme of trying not to lose hope as part of the refugee situation. This theme of hope surfaced in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Participants disclosed that hope was something one continuously drew on to manage the uncertainties associated with fleeing and claiming asylum. Now 'hope' becomes central to one's projection forward.

Connecting the 'old' with the 'new' is talked about as a way to feel connected as a person, with roots in one country, to which one cannot return, and to feel resourceful in the new context. Connecting the new with the old is done by pursuing different causes in the old country, thus connecting the future with the past.

I introduced *Justification* as a central story line running through the narratives of refugeeship earlier, and this is an underlying factor even here. Being able to help those in one's country of origin, gives justification to the flight since it has led to the good of others, and not just oneself. One understands why so many in this study continued with voluntary work or political projects as to do with the lack of opportunity in the new context. However, there is much more to this continuity. One complementary understanding is to regard commitment to voluntary and political work as a response to relieving some of the shame felt about fleeing loved ones and political projects. Again the story line of justification is present here, giving a reason for the flight as something which not only gave protection, but also led to the opportunity to change the lives of those left behind. Understood in this way, one needs to pose the question 'is there a beyond refugeeship?'

Some talked about the difficulty of being able to continue work on issues to bring about change for the better in their countries of origins from the new context. Others looked to see how their refugee situation could be utilised in the new country to help others. The following quote is an example of the strategy illustrated above. However, participant UK5 focuses on those in need of support in the new country. This includes other asylum seekers or refugees from their country of origin, as well as those from other countries, but also British people in need of support. The following participant volunteered at a British organisation for female victims of domestic violence:

> **UK5** I'm not living in XXXXX (country of origin) now so I'm getting further away each year (.) I feel er I'm getting further apart from the causes (.) the tension in the people and even the generational issues (.) so it is quite difficult for us to know what we can do for XXXX but <u>here</u> (.) I've realised that's <u>okay</u> (.) I can't stay in XXXXX as a political

activist (.) so I try to get involved again er you know to er work as a refugee to empower other people to er gain their rights er to get involved again er you know get them to speak out about the rights and problems of being a refugee er also in this country

8.3.2 Positioning within 'citizenship'

The last stage of the official refugee procedure is gaining citizenship status. This involves receiving a passport and full mobility rights, as well as the right to vote. According to British and Swedish citizenship and nationality laws, there are various categories of citizenship acquirement, with some differences between British and Swedish procedures. The most obvious difference is the introduction of the 'Life in the UK Test'[28] which involves passing a test about the United Kingdom. On completion a ceremony is held in order to celebrate and mark the occasion of receiving British citizenship.

The participants in this study did not really place much emphasis on the gaining of citizenship; it was not raised as an important aspect of their new life situation. However citizenship, as a notion was mentioned and questions about subjective and objective aspects of citizenship were raised, in certain respects resembling the participants' approach to gaining refugee status. That is to say, on the one hand receiving citizenship was thought of as something official, on paper, but on the other hand the participants did not necessarily *feel* that they were citizens of England or Sweden, or ever would be. Could this be to do with the abrupt manner in which they had been deprived of their previous citizenship? Or do the participants still feel so on the outside of society, that the issue of acquiring citizenship again seems insignificant? It is reasonable to take the view that their hesitancy is a combination of these things, something to do with feeling that one's roots are somewhere else. It could also have another explanation, which the material seems to support, a sense amongst the participants of not wanting to feel restricted to one kind of citizenship again, having given up a citizenship and having to ask another state for protection.

Further explanation for little interest shown in the narratives about gaining citizenship, could be the feeling that citizenship does not give more 'freedom' than refugee status. As citizens one has the right to vote. Citizenship implies becoming a member of a nation state. However, this nationality is described as rather narrow by the participants. Belonging to something more global has become a natural aspect of their everyday lives. Some years have passed and with the use of the internet and other technology it has become much easier for the

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[28] 'Life in the UK test' is a political initiative, not founded in British law

participants to find ways to re-connect with the 'positive' sides of their country of origin.

Whilst many of the participants express the feeling of not being 'British' or 'Swedish' they do take up a number of other positions, such as "citizen of the world", or "global citizen", positions which are talked about as being more comfortable. What the participants express as being important to them is not being placed into one single group or being confined to belong to one place. Rather, they talk about wanting to feel the autonomy of being part of something wider than one nation. I cannot help wondering if this is also connected to the disappointment of having to leave one's country because it could not offer protection. Finding oneself without citizenship for so long becomes significant for the way in which one subsequently re-approaches such a status category. Being part of something broader than just one nation enables one to form identifications one is more comfortable with, and which would not pin one down to one set space of citizenship. Instead the participants located themselves as belonging to something more inclusive. Another reason why belonging to something wider is important, lies in the fact that full acceptance is hard to find in only one place. Combining different spaces is how the participants have often found their belonging since becoming refugees.

The following participant exemplifies the point I'm trying to make here:

> **UK2** I don't want to talk about being a refugee most of the time (.) I want to forget that I'm that (1) I don't feel I am that I want to be seen as a person who had to leave er well (.) I don't want to think about it er you know (.) well maybe we are coming over it now by saying well (1) we are international (.) we are international citizens (.) citizens of the world and by making sense of it like that (.) that er everyone is a migrant you know **[**] you come into that (.) that helps er well it depends on your understanding of things (2) for me it is like well I'm international I can fit in anywhere now you know

Much like the way participants talk about integration as something they feel is possible by engaging in various activities which produced a sense of belonging to society, without 'feeling' Swedish or British, they approach citizenship. The notion of citizenship is taken on board as a type of identification, through participating in society, in the participant's own way. Participants appear to express a sense of involvement in something wider, but without taking up the identification, British or Swedish. Taking up the I-positions as: I- as international, I- citizen of the world or I- global citizen, creates the potential to 'fit in anywhere'. I- the global citizen, I-as international or I- as citizen of the world is embraced rather than I-as British Citizen or

Swedish Citizen. When it comes to refugee status and citizenship, the I-positions represented are nuanced. Although the participants say "I am a refugee", in terms of a position this is not fully taken up, it resembles the way citizenship is talked about, where we find citizen of the world is a position taken up.

Fitting in everywhere and finding a sense of belonging is certainly an ongoing theme for the participants in this study, and they are creative and agentic in finding ways to negotiate their identifications, and in finding spaces in which to feel a sense of belonging.

8.4 The challenge of political activism/political refugee contra an 'ordinary' life. Can the various positions be combined?

There is another, rather special hindrance to moving beyond being a refugee, perhaps the most interesting one. It features a moral dimension. The moral dimension contrasts the hope in moving forward, with the consequences of such a move. The very act of moving forward implies a moving away from the causes that so many of the participants have fought for, and dedicated their earlier lives to. This section is about this moral dimension of continuing the political activism contra giving it up in order to create something new and beyond. We shall consider examples where the participants attempt to combine the two.

It was quite typical of those who had a background of political activism to find belonging in such organisations in the new country. These participants described becoming a refugee almost as an extension of their earlier political activism. As seen in Chapter Seven, this space in a new political organisation or commitment to voluntary work furnished one with a broad repertoire of positions. My first interpretations of the continued political activism, was to find belonging and meaning, in a context of limited opportunities. This is probably still a reasonable observation. However, the deeper I delve into these stories of activism, the more I wonder if the stories of continued political activism have an existential basis which involves a moral dimension. I met participant SW4 several times and interviewed him formally three times. The first two interviews were dominated by stories about the importance of the movements he belonged to and his work as a left-wing political activist. On our third formal interview, he began to express some consequences of his political involvement, in terms of compromising access to what he called "normal life", and imaging a life beyond refugeeship. He talked about segregation and other obstacles because of the way in which his political activism had occupied his time ever since becoming a refugee. He was studying and working part time as well as being engaged in politics:

SW4 just imagine a normal Swedish person who wants to go to a disco (.) food restaurant or something you know normal life but if we say no I haven't got time I have got to go to a meeting (.) it's not good (.) you haven't got communication with the other world then you become like a sect you know

Participant SW4 speaks of two worlds, the 'refugee world' and the 'other world'. He contends that being confined to the 'refugee world', leads to little or no communication with the 'other world'. He questions whether or not one can ever stop being a refugee, if you do not have contact with the 'other world'. He says 'just imagine' and paints a scenario of having to say 'no' to a 'normal' activity, like going out to dinner because you have to go to a political meeting. He points out that this would perhaps not be tolerated in 'normal life' or would be seen as strange. He went on to give several examples of the consequences of political commitment:

I don't know hmm I don't think I think I have learnt er I don't really like this way of doing politics (.) they have their websites (.) for them this website is the world (.) but it's not the world (.) the world is around us and now er there is you know things we can do in this country you can find people outside of the network (.) you can become so narrow minded in this (.) this organisation only belonging to this organisation (1) for me I am part of lots of movements today not just for my country for example for homosexual or environmental movements you know and the working class movement (2) but it's difficult you have conflict within and with each other

SW4 expresses a lot of frustration in this excerpt and he does not feel fully at ease with wanting to become part of something wider than just the human rights network. Rather than breaking away completely, he seeks belonging in several alternative organisations in order not to become too 'narrow minded'. He questions the need for the network, now when there are competing causes in the new context.

Participant SW8 was a political activist in her country of origin and talks about her need to flee due to political reasons. During the interview she explained that she was no longer active and she explained what this had involved for her:

SW8 Well I have had the opportunity to see something else than just the political fight through moving here and meeting new people this has given me a model to function differently and to be honest I have to say (1) what can I do today (2) but I do feel ashamed for this (.) I have a good situation today and I think about those who haven't given up and are still fighting and I feel ashamed I feel sorry for them I can feel guilt but I think those who continue to fight needs this to feel a sense of hope

> that it will get better but the problem is this focus on the political takes away the possibility to see another reality and go forward with life

As the excerpts above illustrate, finding a way to move on after some time in the new society as a refugee is not straightforward. A dilemma presents itself in projections over the future. For example, many of the participants talk about 'hope' and 'not giving up', which may clash with the aim of positioning oneself in relation to one's work or to participate in contexts which are not dominated by other refugees. Whilst expressing a strong desire to create a new and meaningful life, there is some guilt and shame attached to this process.

8.5 Summary

In summary, what is interesting to consider is, why moving beyond is important to my participants? Firstly, gaining refugee status does not automatically open the way for a new life in the new country. Neither refugee status nor citizenship frees the refugee from her/his history of having fled the country of origin, seeking a safe haven somewhere else. Here, other people's views and understandings seem to constitute the most important hindrances. Secondly, the personal project of fleeing one's country of origin, to some extent, seemed to be incompatible with starting a new life (for example beyond political activism). Here, the impediment is based first of all on the refugee's own views and understandings. Starting a new life, in the sense of leaving one's old life behind, again raises the crucial question concerning one's right. The better then new life turns out to be, the more one questions one's own right to leave the old country and its people behind. In this sense the refugee is trapped in a personal dilemma without a solution. If one succeeds to start a new, and perhaps 'better' life, its moral basis is questioned and if one resists building a new life one remains, to some extent, forever in the refugee domain.

Thus, the participants' who self-identified as political activists and their talk about a life beyond being a refugee shows that there is no end to the refugeeship. Even if one gains refugee status and becomes a citizen in the new country, as well as manages to find inclusion in most social settings in the new country, one will always question this success to oneself.

On a more theoretical level, one could say that the obstacle to reaching beyond being a refugee is to be understood in relation to the reconstruction work in relation to sense of self, which the participants continually engaged in. Barriers based on other peoples' understandings and stereotyping to a large extent can be understood in terms of managing stigma attached to the refugee position. The barriers the refugee maintains themselves concern the moral career and it's never

ending challenges against the refugees' need to maintain a coherent sense of self, where today's' self does not betray earlier selves or the basic values which one used to evaluate oneself. Again, one should remember that individual people express this in their own unique way. Whilst some primarily express being positioned as a 'stranger' who is not part of the new society or struggles with personal justification, others, to some extent feel ascribed the position of 'respected' member of society. What is common to all the stories is the way the participants strive to move forward, some by transcending all the available and non-available resources in order to take up other meaningful positions and create something new, others by trying to get 'rid' of the refugee 'bit' through seeking the opportunity to be categorised as 'successful' again through political or professional affiliation.

9. Refugeeship and the moral course of events

As the final chapter of this study its focus will be on my findings of refugeeship. My findings contribute with an illustration of the entire asylum *process.* I highlight the official process of claiming asylum from making a claim to being granted refugee status, and in some cases even citizenship. In exploring this process as related to me by those who have made an asylum claim, another process has surfaced. This process is what I name refugeeship. When refugeeship is described by my participants, the point of departure in their stories is not taken from the point of making an asylum claim; rather they begin by narrating life before a negative turning point in their countries of origin occurred. The story of refugeeship does not end with accounts of being granted refugee status or citizenship either; refugeeship is described as continuous, though changing over time and space.

In summary, what is made apparent through the empirical study are all the aspects of personal and social meaning-making regarding the various events in refugeeship. A key finding is that each event includes a moral dimension, for example the moral aspect involved in deciding to flee, the questioning on entrance to the new country, the need to prove one's worth as a contributing refugee and the challenges involved in moving beyond the political work in order to accomplish another kind of life. These moral aspects encountered at each event, points towards refugeeship as encompassing a larger moral theme. This is reflected in the participants' identification, dis-identification and *justification* work, found present through the process of narrative interpretation.

9.1 Generalisability and the limits of this study

Before going further with a discussion of my findings, I would like to address what can be generalised in relation to the kind of analysis employed here. Plummer (2001) argues that there is no superiority to be gained through being able to make generalisations, and to follow is a discussion about this concept in relation to my study. My aim – *to explore how refugeeship as a process is articulated and experienced,*

starting from life before leaving one's country of origin, fleeing that country and seeking protection in another, including the official asylum procedure, and what it involves to be categorised as a 'refugee'- indicates that my research interest is first of all, theoretical. In order to carry out such a theoretical analysis, I needed to collect a variety of refugee and asylum seeker experiences and life conditions. Thus, my selection of participants for the study was primarily directed at this aim of selecting and analysing, the probable variations in the process of refugeeship, exploring whether it is possible to identify any basic common characteristics of this process. It is the result of this theoretical analysis that is presented in this chapter. In terms of generalisation, this theoretical analysis can be used for initially trying to understand other cases of refugeeship. However, generalisability here should not be understood in statistical terms. What is generalised is, rather, the theoretical understanding of the basic dynamics of the meaning-making which, I argue constitutes the basis for refugeeship in individual cases. In a specific case, this generalisation can only be understood as a working hypothesis, guiding our understanding of the new case. In order to support the generalisation, we have to compare how similar and different the new case is in relation to all the cases analysed in my study. Conducting a comparative analysis of this kind, will show that basic conditions in some cases are very similar and, thus, my theory might be valid to a large extent. In other cases, differences are more important and force us to develop a theory so that it covers new insights provided by the new case. In short, the variations of the individual cases in my study can be described for example in terms of: differences in age, educational background, ethnicity and new country, i.e. England or Sweden. Two countries have been included in the study, which has helped me analytically to understand what is specific to the asylum system. All my participants could communicate well in English or Swedish. The majority in this study were educated and all were very dedicated to political or professional projects, either before migration or after or both. Some of them, from a young age had been in prison due to political activity in their countries of origin or had been living in refugee camps in bordering countries; and this was very much a part of their refugee narratives. All still experienced the process of becoming a refugee in similar ways. Those who had been in prison from adolescence could not embark on education until they became refugees in Sweden or England. Almost all of my participants did embark on education in the new context, if they did not already have an education.

There are also variations that my study does not cover. I recruited, for example, most of my participants through my contacts at the Red Cross in Sweden or England, some of the similarity found amongst my participants in terms of language ability and education, may be

explained by the fact that making contact with help organisations to learn more about their situation as asylum seekers or refugees was something they had in common. Another source of recruitment was through refugee run political organisations set up to carry on the political work one had been forced to leave. Some organisations worked to raise awareness for causes in their countries of origin. Again this could explain the similarity found between my participants as driven, initiative-taking, and independent individuals. The similar aspects in their narratives can be explained by the fact they are drawing on the same culturally available 'resources' in their identity work shared by others in these voluntary organisations (Taylor, 2010).

Finally, I would like to point out that some theoretical generalisations are also of significance for other contexts or fields of study. It is arguable, for instance, that my findings shed light upon what it involves to live under the special living conditions of limbo and the conditions which come with leaving behind everything which is familiar, and to take on the unknown. The findings are also generalisable for what it entails to live with a 'spoilt' identity or to be ascribed a stigmatised group. This may involve processes similar to those of my participants, with regard to identification work, and in terms of justification and the struggle for recognition.

9.2 Refugeeship

The events constituting the transition from fleeing one's country of origin to becoming a refugee and in some cases citizens, reflects a chronological line of development. This is also illustrated by my participant's refugee stories. As indicated in the beginning of the chapter, the participants also talked about another process which I refer to as the refugeeship. My analysis of the refugee stories shows that the process of refugeeship can be understood in relation to a fundamental existential dimension, that I call the *moral career*. The challenges of the moral career were directed towards the participants' sense of self. In order to understand the importance of the moral career, one must first discover the loss of earlier identifications characterising the refugee's migration from his/her country of origin, to a new country. As mentioned above, leaving one's country of origin in fact means leaving behind important parts of oneself. In my analysis of the participants' refugee stories, I found that their narrative meaning-making was characterised by a kind of positioning and identification work, where one tried to re-construct a new sense of self. Secondly, strength of the moral challenges was based upon implicit and explicit questionings, which the participants experienced in connection to the specific events experienced during the transition to their new countries. Here, each event seemed to produce its own specific moral questions. When the

participants talked about the time of the decision to flee from their old countries, doubt and guilt were expressed more or less directly. These feelings were most probably based on explicit questionings that they had been faced with by relatives and friends in the country of origin. Later during the official process of claiming asylum, the authorities asked lots of explicit questions concerning possible hidden motives for the flight and need for protection. The participants felt accused of having tried to deceive the representatives of immigration offices. Even after having been granted refugee status, the participants felt that people questioned their motives and right to become ordinary citizens of the new country.

Thus, the moral career is constituted by a gradual changing threat to the participant's sense of self, based first of all on a series of moral challenges encountered through the process of leaving the country of origin, claiming asylum, being granted refugee status and trying to start a new life in the new country. Apart from the typical challenges, the moral career was also characterised by the participants' struggles to manage the challenges through a continuing fight for justification. The implicit and explicit moral questioning that the participants were exposed to, concerned their right to do what they had done in abandoning their country and loved ones, claiming protection from a new state and finally claiming the right to start a new life together with the inhabitants of the new country. In the figure below, I have tried to illustrate the moral career, with the central need to reconstruct a sense of self, in relation to both the challenges and justification work conducted by the participants. The sequence of events constituting the concrete transition from the old country and the granting of refugee status in the new is illustrated as a basic dimension at the bottom of the figure.

Figure 1
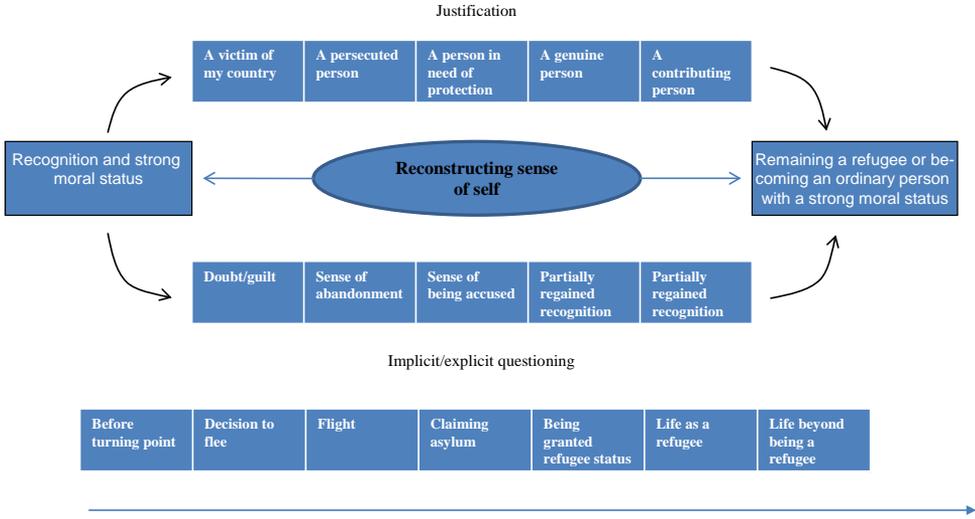
A key finding in the analysis of the refugee stories was that linear development characterising the historical description of the specific events of the transition, in the participants struggle to re-construct their sense of self, was replaced by retro-and-prospective integration of earlier and possible future identifications. These integrations have been discussed in relation to the participants' stories about who they were before leaving their countries of origin (Chapter Five) and their struggle to find a new ordinary life in the new country (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight). Thus, the narrative meaning-making included an important dimension of time-making, where the participants' sense of self was continuously re-constructed in relation to both the almost constant implicit and explicit questioning that the participants were exposed to throughout the entire process, and their dreams and plans for the future. Let us examine some of the most important findings which contribute to this understanding of refugeeship introduced above.

9.2.1 Lost and re-gained recognition

The key to our understanding of the participant's need to reconstruct their sense of self was of course to some extent due to that they simply could not find 'ordinary' positions and everyday functions in the new country. However, what contributed to the erosion of sense of self first of all seemed to be the loss of recognition that the participants experienced when leaving behind their families, friends and other people who had recognised them as good and valuable persons. This was illustrated in Chapter Five through the construction of a great deal

of explanation found in the participants' narratives. The fact that fleeing, meant abandoning one's earlier social network reinforced the threat that the flight constituted to the participant's sense of self. Recognition in itself includes a moral dimension. We build our sense of self, to some extent on how we mirror ourselves in the eyes and actions of other people. This does not just include an image of who we are. The image is always evaluated in relation to the value and standards held by the other person. Thus, the sense of self includes both characteristics of who we are and evaluations of these characteristics.

The experiences of claiming asylum highlighted the loss of recognition in a dramatic way. At this stage of refugeeship, everything seemed to be questioned, identity was literally removed and the participants even felt accused of having committed crimes. In this sense, the granting of refugee status contributed with some new official recognition in the new country. The participants felt that the long period of innumerable questionings came to an end and finally they re-gained some of the recognition they had lost. However, this did not mean that they also re-gained the recognition of 'ordinary' people in the new society. On the contrary, many people who they encountered still regarded them with suspicion and distrust. Being a refugee seemed to mean being recognised as a person in need of protection but not as an 'ordinary' citizen.

Justification was not only a way to manage the specific feelings of 'abandoning' one's country or 'proving' one's genuine need for protection. Justification should in fact be seen as a basic characteristic of the whole moral career, where participants continuously expressed positioning work as a strategy in which to re-gain a sense of removed recognition. Recognition for many of my participants was something taken for granted in their earlier roles as political activists or professionals, perhaps with the exception, as I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, of those who were of Kurdish origin[29]. Entering the asylum system involved a removed recognition and a particular social positioning, as well as an ascribed identification as someone who had abandoned their country and sought protection. Justification, as a means to re-gain recognition, as aforementioned still permeates everyday encounters. In order to illustrate removed recognition, on entry to the asylum system I return to Goffman.

Goffman has an interesting analysis of asylum, not however in the sense of someone fleeing his/her country. Rather, in his book *'Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates'* Goffman explored institutions as a place of safe haven and rest, but

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[29] The Kurdish participants in this study expressed a desire to find recognition for their Kurdish identity in their new countries, as the country of origin denied them this.

found that those admitted to psychiatric units, rather than experiencing this as a 'haven of rest' instead experienced many of the reactions similar to those experienced by prisoners sentenced to prison. Claiming asylum, as we have already established means asking for protection and therewith a safe haven. However, on entering the asylum procedure, one finds oneself in a 'closed community', with limited rights and stripped of all previous identifications.

Individuals entering total institutions (a concept I introduced in Chapter Seven) find themselves deprived of the decision-making power over simple, everyday routines such as: eating what and when you want to; sleeping when you want to; working and making everyday and long-term decisions concerning your life situation. The official asylum procedure which is experienced on entry to becoming an asylum seeker has striking resemblances to a 'Total Institution'. To begin with, many of my participants had experienced on arrival in England or Sweden, 'special asylum housing conditions' (put in the words of the participants), as part of being detained at the beginning of the process. This took away everyday autonomy with regard to eating, sleeping, working life, to name a few examples. Although it is common to be placed into these 'reception centres or 'detention centres' on arrival, even those who have not experienced these places of residence, the brutality of the official asylum procedure involves a sort of institutionalisation in a more metaphoric sense. Just like the entrance to prison, the participants find themselves being deprived of their passports or other personal documents, having to give finger prints, being photographed, giving their life history, receiving instruction on the rules which apply to them as an asylum seeker. These include being obliged to report to the police station on a regular basis, or a lack of freedom of mobility. After having personal documents removed and having been photographed, and given fingerprints etc., claimants are issued with an asylum registration card (ARC). These aspects of the lack of autonomy are referred to by Goffman as 'Civil Death' and he claims that the consequences of these special living situations are the 'contamination of the sense of self'. These concepts of Goffman's are of particular interest to my findings. Integration is well debated within migration policy and politics, and is considered a key goal of the EU, seeing integration as a marker of success when it comes to migration policy. Goffman's work illustrates the disruption which can be experienced or the 'dispossession of self' when encountering systems which place considerable constraints on one's capacity to take up familiar positions in relation to one's identification. He writes:

Here we begin to learn about the limited extent to which a conception of oneself can be sustained when the usual setting of supports for it are suddenly removed" (1961:148).

Goffman is referring to things that help us define ourselves when he talks of 'supports'. They are props, if you like, which help us to present our desirable selves in interaction with others. This also led to the removed recognition experienced by my participants on becoming asylum seekers. A 'civil death' is experienced whereby my participants find themselves not even recognised as a citizen of any country, but rather, categorised *only* as an asylum seeker. Those categorised as an asylum seeker find themselves not even recognised as someone with rights. Hence, many of my participants expressed their existence with the use of metaphors such as "animals" with no more rights than to "breathe the air", "eat" and "sleep".

I introduced in Chapter One, the idea that what is new to today's era of asylum migration, is novel ways to label and categorise different groups of migrating. The results discussed above, shed light on the impact such categorisation processes have had on my participants identification work and that the labelling system places constraints on taking up new positions, which encroaches the path to 'integration' and sense of belonging and participation.

9.2.2 Implicit and explicit questioning

The questioning my participants experienced regarding their intentions, both from 'Others' and the questioning they directed towards themselves, is essentially at the core of the various moral dimensions involved in refugeeship. The implicit questioning refers to the questioning of one's intentions, and legitimate reason for abandoning one's country of origin. The questions are largely directed from the refugee or asylum seeker towards him or herself. The participants expressed the implicit questioning through the way in which they continuously questioned their fleeing, on the one hand acknowledging that they felt they had to flee and on the other, posing the question: *was fleeing really the 'right' thing to do?* This implicit questioning was largely reinforced, when the participants talked about finding themselves facing a somewhat more explicit questioning when encountering various social arenas. These included the official asylum system, media and the everyday notions regarding asylum seekers and refugees in the new country. A basic ground upon which the moral dimensions of refugeeship rest, is the 'doubt' which one continuously faces in questioning one's own actions, as well as the doubt 'Others' can express towards ones' actions. This was responded to by my

participants through justification work. Justification is a theme which permeates refugeeship.

All my participants talked about being questioned even after being granted refugee status in the new country. The new country was described by participants as ascribing them a stigmatising identification. Through identification work, participants contest these stigmatising notions of the asylum seeker and refugee. Although I have not carried out a media analysis, these contexts are confirmed through previous research on the social construction of asylum seekers and refugee migration discourses, as well as by readings of media analysis and migration policy, all things which make up the 'context' asylum seekers and refugees are living in (Blommaert, 2001; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Every and Augoustinos, 2007; Leudar, Nekvapil, Baker, 2008). An example of identification work, exemplified in the empirical chapters, is the way my participants expressed their hard-working nature and competence. This may be understood as rhetorical positioning, speaking to the context *asylum seekers are using the welfare state'*, for example. These contexts have been identified through interpretation of the participants' descriptions of the ways they contest the negative notions about asylum seekers and refugees expressed in the context in which they live. By these means, the participants expressed that they felt discriminated against, their education was not considered worthy and they were seen, for example as coming to the 'new' country for financial gain. These expressions indicate the context in which my participants find themselves a part, and part of the rhetorical positioning is an act of speaking to this context, resisting and contesting it. Responding to each moral dimension is partly approached through justification work.

9.2.3 The series of justification

Through justification work, the participants attempted to manage the challenge of how to maintain a sense of 'recognisable' self, at the same time as incorporating his or her experience of the procedure of becoming a refugee, something the participants felt partly proud of, as well as ashamed of in relation to wider discourses of asylum migration and their countries of origin. This identification work was accomplished with great agency by my participants, through combining new and old positions in an ongoing identity project. This involved making sense of past experiences in order to create balance in the future, as well as anchoring their narratives to certain identifications, such as 'I-as the successful lawyer', 'I- as representative of the people/political activist', I- as the orderly citizen. Drawing on these identifications assisted my participants in maintaining a personal sense of self, at a time when an

erosion of sense of self was experienced, largely related to the way in which others viewed and treated them as asylum seekers or refugees. Besides serving to maintain a sense of self, the identification work functioned as justification for the flight and the need for protection. Even long after being granted refugee status, my participants found themselves justifying still, in everyday encounters their reasons for making an asylum claim.

By taking up certain positions as an act of resistance to stigmatising notions concerning refugees, in the new context, such as *the asylum seeker as a burden* or *the ever-increasing flow of refugees as a contributing factor to social problems,* my participants embarked on positioning work in relation to the implicit and explicit questioning. Although, not always overtly stated in the interviews with me, my participants did assume these particular contexts, and positioned themselves in relation to these, trying to form their own story lines in response. Identification work was engaged in as a process of resistance to the negative connotations linked to the conceptions of 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker', as well as a strategy to maintain a sense of self. Thus, the main story line in the participants' narratives could be understood as a kind of counter-story line of justification. In fact, the story lines of justification dominated what the participants said about the refugeeship, making experiences of abandonment, guilt and lack of recognition indirectly visible.

In this sense, the refugeeship is ongoing and does not seem to have an end; rather the meaning ascribed by my participants, to the experience of refugeeship changes, as do the moral challenges encountered along the way, giving rise to the expressions of justification throughout the narratives. Therefore, together with the implicit and explicit questioning, justification is also at the core of my findings concerning refugeeship. In fact, I argue that central to the experience of refugeeship, is an ongoing and underlying theme of justification, which follows those with the experience of becoming a refugee, regardless of how well one may feel a sense of success, as a refugee or not.

A significant part of the moral career of refugeeship entails this sense of needing to continuously justify oneself, one's actions and space in the new context, as a response to the implicit and explicit questioning central to refugeeship, and as a means to re-gain recognition lost through leaving behind one's identification framework and coming to a context which ascribes them a stigmatised identity. Apart from being questioned by the migration authorities and residents of the new countries, my participants also clearly felt judged to some extent by 'Others', for example, those left behind in the 'old' context.

So what constitutes the ongoingness of justification as a characteristic of refugeeship? Briefly, one could say, that justification played out continuously in the narratives in the following ways: Justification of the political project in the country of origin as an initial cause of the migration; justification of the flight; justification to migration authorities; justification as a 'genuine' refugee and justification for 'moving beyond' political activism and creating another kind of life, as an 'ordinary' person and not *only* as a refugee, as well as justification for the right to a space in the new country. One of the theoretical points of departure in this thesis is the assumption that social and personal identifications are entangled, I now return to this theme in relation to the matter of justification, showing stigma is not treated only as an individual psychological construction, but also collectively constructed (Howarth, 2006).

In the interview situation, the 'justification talk' was directed or orientated towards different 'audiences', what Billig (1987) refers to with his concept of rhetorical talk and anticipated criticism. Part of the response can be understood as being a response which was orientated towards an official audience, such as asylum institutions, political organisations and the new society as a whole, as well as persons encountered along the way or media and political debate. In this sense, the response, although directed towards 'anticipated' criticism, was also constructed against the background of past experience, which involved a great deal of real accusation, as asylum seekers and even as refugees today. Those who are then granted refugee status, whilst experiencing 'anticipated criticism' also find themselves facing a new moral challenge, that of:

> Do I have the right to start a new life or is it my duty to continue the political activism, help others in my country and in the new country?

The challenge, again, is that of justification; how do I justify to myself, and 'Others' the right to a 'better' life? My participants continuously presented the migration, not as a choice, but as a decision they had felt compelled to make. The participants in this study also emphasised the migration as a necessity and not as a luxury; that is to say, not for the sake of a better life standard, but rather as a life-saving measure. In this sense, my participants expressed a sense of conflict over the issue of 'moving beyond' and, as presented in Chapter Eight, one way of solving some of the conflict felt, was by continuously being involved in projects which benefited other asylum seekers and refugees in need. A moral challenge was encountered in wanting to succeed in the new context, while still appearing conscious of the needs of others.

This conflictual dialogue was not orientated primarily towards an official audience, but was more of personal, reflective meaning-making. This was concerned with being at ease with the decision one felt compelled to make regarding fleeing and now starting a 'new life'. The point I attempt to make here is the complex interaction between a more inner existential talk and the outer rhetorical talk, and that the individual and the social have an ongoing interaction.

The results of Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight has been the identification of: self-presentations, as an attempt to upgrade the 'spoilt' identity, explanation, sense of abandonment, erosion of sense of self, sense of mistrust, the attempt to create new opportunities. These findings are understood as involving moral challenges in refugeeship, which to a large extent contributed to the subsequent need for justification. These findings have included exchanging a sense of recognition and strong moral position, experienced in the country of origin, for a series of moral challenges such as: guilt and doubt, sense of shame and abandonment, accusation, proving ones 'worth' in the new context and finding ways to combine political activism (which partly entails being limited to refugee domains) and creating a new life beyond being a refugee and feeling one has a 'right' to this.

As we have learnt, it was extremely common for the participants to have a past of political engagement, which involved belonging to political organisations. Often, fleeing was expressed initially as a sense of abandoning these organisations and their political projects when moving to England or Sweden. It therefore seems reasonable to understand part of the challenges of 'moving on', as something intrinsic in the commitment to the political activism of these organisations. Some of the organisations the participants were involved in also made the flight to safety possible, so a feeling of wanting continuously to support the needs of others in the new and old contexts, can perhaps be understood as 'paying something back'. Graham and Khosravi's research supports this notion and they explain:

> Political exiles suffer most from a feeling of guilt. They left - some of them say 'abandoned'- their friends, families and their homeland in its hour of need. They express a strong desire to return and 'pay back' their 'debt' (1997:118)

Even those who were not politically active, can feel a sense of responsibility towards their countries of origin, now as refugees living in a new society and becoming even more aware of some of the challenges their countries of origin face. This sense of 'abandonment' of the political cause or loved ones, also raised issues of disloyalty, giving rise to the great deal of justification outlined so far.

Chapter Eight showed that various strategies were employed by the participants in moving forward, such as making meaningful connections between her or his 'old' country and the 'new'. If this was difficult to achieve, some found ways to support others living in the new context. These strategies also have a moral aspect running through them, whereby the participants appear to justify the 'abandonment' of certain projects in their countries of origin, but also abandonment of the old life, for a 'safer' life. I cannot help feeling through all the conversations I have had with the participants and many other refugees and asylum seekers that this is a significant part of their meaning-making processes. That is to say, making sense of the conflict of feeling compelled to flee, at the same time having to rather abruptly abandon people, places and political and human rights causes, to save 'their own' lives, is an ongoing aspect of their lives today and therewith, an underlying existential characteristic of refugeeship.

9.3 Moral Career

As illustrated in figure 1, the fundamental dimension of the refugeeship is understood as a *moral career*, or more specifically as a loss of one's rights as a refugee in a new country. The moral career here refers to issues of what is considered right or wrong for my participants. In relation to current values, this is influenced partly by the participants' beliefs about how they are viewed by others, and partly how he or she views him- or herself. The refugeeship is not just defined by the various *events* such as fleeing or being granted refugee status, but rather by the *values* attached to these events and the moral challenges faced at each event. Part of the value given to the events and choices are how one feels about these events and choices. But what has also become clear in this study is the value given by my participants to the choices and events of refugeeship, has also been influenced by the silent accusation encountered with certain institutions and social systems.

9.3.1 Moral career and need for justification

After the turning point (referred to in Goffman's terms as pre-patient phase), the participants describe the beginning of the moral career, one which was strongly characterised through entrance to the asylum system (the phase Goffman calls inpatient phase). The moral career was characterised by the fact that the asylum system, initially, gave no opportunity to gain recognition as an asylum seeker. Therefore attempting to gain back earlier recognition was conveyed through the repeated expressions of warranting justification for the flight. This was made clear through the participants' descriptions of the demands the asylum system placed on them in terms of questioning one's identity

and credibility and placing parameters on taking up other, more desirable I-positions *as* refugees and citizens in a new 'home' country; ultimately, placing constraints on being able to create a new, more positive moral career.

As indicated throughout the findings laid out in the four empirical chapters, many of the themes identified in the participants' narratives referred to changes regarding their position repertoire, as a result of the changed relations to 'Others', as well as the change in repertoires available in terms of taking up new I-positions outside of the 'refugee domains'. This is perhaps unsurprising given the participant's experience of fleeing their country of origin, which involved a concrete break from people and places including core identifications, such as medical doctor or political activist. However, at a basic experiential level, the narratives also seem to refer to something much more complex and fundamental. I name this experiential finding, 'The fight for justification'. This is carried out by taking up justifying positions and resisting others when talking about leaving one's country of origin and asking for protection in another, and indeed over the positions taken up as refugees, such as volunteer or political activist. These positions are explained as necessary in order to continue to 'do good' for one's country of origin, and contribute to the new context. Part of trying to regain more positive I-positions, is in response to a sense of removed recognition and as a way to prevent the erosion of sense of self which began on entry to the asylum procedure.

9.3.2 Refugeeship and the sense of self

As indicated by Goffman and Harré, a moral career concerns an individual's identity, especially the tension between 'Self' and 'Others', more specifically, between the refugee and the dialogues which make up the context in which the refugee finds him- or herself living. Such contexts are informed and influenced by media and political debate, which in turn inform common sense notions of refugees and the construction of certain macro-level story lines, such as the asylum seeker as bogus or looking for financial gain. The dialogue between refugee and 'Other' contributes to the removed recognition. It creates a sense of shame over being seen as a refugee or asylum seeker, as a result of the positioning of refugees and asylum seekers as people who are potentially 'cheating the system'. Howarth (2002) in her article "So, you're from Brixton?" shows how the struggle for recognition pervades the lives of young people growing up in Brixton[30] and their everyday

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[30] Brixton is a multicultural suburb of London and has been victim to racial abuse- for example, in 1999 the area was bombed by a single-handed extremist (Howarth, 2002)

experiences. The results show how young people construct their identity through and against the representations of 'Others', the strategies used and the effects on self image and self-esteem. A further finding is the way the young participants of this study join forces to develop social and psychological resources to protect themselves against such prejudices (Ibid.). My participants responded to the interaction they encountered through justification in their positioning work, such as by referring to the position of independence before the turning point, or as someone who had not come looking for 'luxury'. Most of my participants, and other refugees I have spoken with, live with a sense of having to justify their abilities and worth in the new society, however, many are creative in conceiving new positions which combine their sense of being a refugee, (in terms of what being a refugee means to them), and their positions in 'ordinary' life, contributing to a re-gained sense of self and recognition. An important expression of the justification work found in the participants' refugee stories is that they present themselves in relation to the questioning they are exposed to, as a response to questions concerning doubt, guilt, their decision to flee; they presented themselves as victims of oppression in their countries of origin. In the same way they present themselves as a persecuted person when they felt questioned for having abandoned their countries of origin. When encountering the asylum system they present themselves as genuine as opposed to 'bogus' and in becoming refugees, they present themselves as a resource, contributing and hardworking, as a response to an accusation that asylum seekers and refugees are a burden on the new society.(see figure 1).

9.4 England and Sweden- two *different* contexts

Although this study was never intended to be a comparative study in any traditional sense, the fact that data were collected in two different contexts does deserve some attention. I will present here the most striking similarities and differences and try to understand the impact of the context on the narratives of refugeeship.

As outlined in Chapter One, asylum migration law in Sweden and England is influenced by migration policies of the European Union. Another influential body is the United Nations Geneva Convention for refugees, which gives the definition of who can be considered a refugee. This definition is used by local Swedish and United Kingdom migration authorities when interpreting asylum claims. A striking finding, regardless of whether or not my participants had claimed asylum in Sweden or England, was that they experienced the asylum procedure in similar ways. The events and the derogatory treatment

experienced during the claimant period were articulated in the same way by all the participants, and played out in the same way in identification work. In the results chapter's quotes are differentiated, using SW1 and UK1 etc. and illustrate the similarity in the way participants talk about their situations. However, the contexts to which my participants came were different. England and Sweden are two different countries, with their own historical, political and societal structures. They have their own migration narratives and their own migration discourses. These are informed by political debate and policy, which between the two countries differ. Although the participants experienced the actual asylum procedure in similar ways, their talk of being refugees in the two different countries- England and Sweden does differ in some respects. I have not studied empirically the two different countries in terms of history, politics and societal structures. It goes without saying, however that contexts influence individual experiences. Previous research included in Chapter Two, as well as policy documents; reveal differences in the two countries[31] .This supports my interpretations of the way in which participants have sometimes talked differently as refugees in Sweden or in England.

A significant difference was the emphasis given to democratic ideology and notions of equality by the participants living in Sweden. Sweden as being 'not as equal or democratic as it claims' came through in the participants' talk of being a refugee there. Swedish rhetoric places a great deal of emphasis on democratic practice and this is perhaps why the participants living in Sweden positioned themselves in relation to this rhetoric. Norman (2004) referencing to Rabo (1997) writes:

> Equality is a central precept in Swedish legislation and political rhetoric as well as in Swedish cultural notions about being a person and about 'society' and Swedes may be tempted to think of Sweden as the most equal of all nation states. (2004:224)

Norman goes on to write:

> Fairness and solidarity are closely linked to the conception of equality. The social good should be fairly distributed through the solidarity workings of the state and its citizens. (Ibid)

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[31] Some examples of differences in local refugee policy is the introduction of the life in the UK test. No such test exists in Sweden. England does not give free language courses on a national level to all refugees, although local colleges may offer some classes. In Sweden language courses are given on a national level (SFI), these are financed by the government and attendance gives a monthly allowance to students. I found there to be more governmentally funded services for refugees in Sweden. In England refugees were more widely dependent on charitable and voluntary organisations.

The disappointment of not experiencing a concrete manifestation of the political goals, such as 'democracy', was found in the talk of many of the participants living in Sweden, but was not common in the data collected in England, with the exception of one of the participants living there, who was a diplomat working outside his country of origin, when the war in Iraq (2003) broke out. The participants in England found themselves in a context where the discourse of asylum seekers as economic migrants is strong. The concept 'bogus' has arisen in relation to asylum seekers, implying that asylum seekers are 'false', 'phony' and 'trick' the system. The participants in England directed their talk to this discourse, constantly positioning themselves as hard-working, genuine and contributing to society. Although talk of 'democracy' and 'equality' or 'the genuine refugee' was present in the narratives of both those living in England and Sweden, the emphasis was distributed slightly differently, depending on the context in which the participants were talking. As I pointed out in chapter One, although England has a history of migration, dating back far longer than that of Sweden, Sweden does have a longer experience of asylum migration, and the debates on this kind of migration include the discourse of Sweden as having an 'open, generous system'. I make no claims about the 'truthfulness' of this, but what I do postulate is that this Swedish self-image colours the contexts in which refugees in Sweden find themselves a part. Norman (2004) found in her research on Equality and Exclusion: 'Racism' in a Swedish town, that the construction of 'spreading the burden' in the establishment of a refugee reception centre in a small town in Sweden, displayed the notion of refugees as a local resource. At the same time, refugees were also betrayed by government policy as 'a problem' to be solved. Migration debate in England, although containing similar rhetoric as in the Swedish governmental policy is different. A UK proposal has been made to tag asylum seekers during the claimant period in order to be able to trace and more easily deport them on the occasion of a failed asylum claim. Other measures which emphasize asylum seekers as persons under great suspicion have been implemented. Clearly, more research is needed to understand the impact such political or media contexts can have on seekers of asylum or refugees. We need to know more about how social knowledge is created and what impact this may have in creating the contexts in which refugees and asylum seekers find themselves living. Howarth's research presented above supports this.

9.4.1 The contested context of asylum and the sense of self

To understand more about the dialogue between refugee and their context, I refer to the work of Harré and Moghaddam (2003). They write about personal identity as being our own experience of the 'self', and collective identity as the context in which personal identity can develop. This understanding of the self-concept sheds light on some processes made visible in the data collected for this thesis in which the participants find themselves 'involuntarily' members of a particular group, that group being asylum seekers or refugees. The participants compare themselves to 'Others' within the asylum group, often dis-identifying with the characteristics of 'other' asylum seekers and engage in positioning work which resists the connotations common to the asylum seeker or refugee concept. They also make comparisons between the group 'asylum seekers' and 'the rest of society', by giving examples of how asylum seekers' rights are impinged, in ways that the 'rest of' society does not have to endure.

   The participants in my study gave rich descriptions of his or her 'character' before migration, both in terms of how this was experienced personally and collectively. By their accounts alone, most of the participants appear to have experienced positive personal and collective identities, with the exception of those belonging to marginalised ethnic groups such as Kurdish people. Being categorised as an asylum seeker, not only puts constraints on being able to form new personal and collective identities, through work for example, it also comes with a marginalised collective 'image'. Before the turning point, in their countries of origin, many of the participants could call on several collective identities, such as profession, nationality, culture, and various extra-curricula activities. As an asylum seeker, most of these identifications are expropriated which means there is little to draw on when it comes to expressing a self-concept (Taylor *et al,* 2003)*.* It is in this sense that the participants find themselves in a state of uncertainty, not easily being able to resume previous professional or political positions. However, at the same time they are unable to self-identify with the characteristics commonly ascribed to asylum seekers and refugees. It is at this point that creative positioning work is called upon; to maintain a personal sense of self and a new positive moral career. Experiencing the loss of an established collective identity can mean a compromised personal identity, Taylor *et al* postulate:

> Collective identity is rationally and psychologically primacy and therefore is the most important component of self-concept. For groups that have a well-defined collective identity, attention naturally turns to personal identity and esteem. But when collective identity is

> compromised in any way the entire self-concept is jeopardized (Taylor *et al* in Harré and Moghaddam, 2003:202).

A compromised self-concept is arguably created in this space of asylum, whereby one is not accepted for who one was, who one is today or who one might be tomorrow. The popular discourse of a refugee or asylum seeker does not tend to include a successful professional person and therefore the participants found themselves working hard to convince others of their educational, political and professional qualifications. At the same time, they found themselves being positioned in ways which did not equate with how they saw themselves. This corrupted the sense of self in the eyes of 'Others' and may lead potentially to an uncertain personal identification. Personal identification, according to Taylor *et al*, is describing 'who I am'. This is questioned as an asylum seeker and more importantly the asylum seeker finds her or himself in a position of not being able to live up to their personal identity, due to the constraints placed on taking up other desirable positions in the new context. An essential element of the participants' personal identifications is about being hard-working and competent and contributing to society. The new context does not provide the conditions necessary for sustaining this personal identity, which can, according to Taylor *et al.* (Ibid) involve negative consequences for 'self'. This finding is supported by Leudar *et al.* (2008), who in their research on hostility themes, found present in a media analysis carried out in the United Kingdom the effect of these hostility themes on asylum seekers' and refugees' sense of self (see Chapter Two for a summary of Leudar *et al.'s* findings).

These attributes and positions which gave my participants a sense of worth in their countries of origin were left behind. For example, the things they used as comparisons in making their evaluation are no longer available in the new context, such as 'my own' group or sub-group. Collectively speaking, the characteristics the participants shared with certain groups, before migration, contributed to their collective identification; however, the desirable group has been replaced with the group 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee'. This is a space of limbo in terms of identification and is a challenge, as collective esteem arises from group membership.

So how is this challenge dealt with by my participants?

9.5 Transcending 'old' and 'new' – mixed identifications

Through creative positioning work, my participants attempted to deal with loss of agency, caused by the flight, and by how they are viewed by others, through creating something else. This was not just about re-constructing the 'old' life situation, nor was it about just adapting to the

new context. Rather, it was about integrating the various spaces and experiences one had met with in life, and creating other meaningful positions. The positive and negative aspects of the narratives, introduced in Chapter Five, were present in the narratives appearing in Chapter Eight. They were included in talk of the person who had survived, and as someone who perseveres. The negative aspects of the narratives were played out through continuous expressions of the challenges to becoming the 'lawyer' or the 'professor' again, with repeated talk of 'settling' for something 'in-between'.

The desire to create something beyond is expressed, but the participants raise a number of hindrances and give accounts of the 'challenge of moving forward'. The looking 'beyond' and maintaining a sense of hope and optimism seems to be an important side of the positive aspects in their narratives. Westin (1990) makes a similar observation in his study, Encounters: the Uganda Asians in Sweden. This study showed that the road to re-creating the earlier, appreciated life was encountered by hindrances along the way. My participants employed a master strategy here, and instead tried to create something beyond the 'old' and the 'new'. For example, one of my participants who was a human rights lawyer in his country of origin, now unable to practice law in Sweden, took up the position as 'legal adviser' to other new asylum seekers, by helping them prepare their case, or by accompanying the new asylum seeker to migration authorities or a lawyer in the field of asylum law. This participant explained that by doing so he made use of his professional, legal background, in a context he had personal experience of. Another participant living in England, having experienced extreme trauma during the Rwandan Genocide, wrote a book, Miracle in Kigali- The Rwandan Genocide, a survivor's journey. This participant felt that this helped her make sense of her 'old' experiences and trauma and move on in her new situation.

Nyberg, E. (1993) found in her study, Migration Families with children: Family relations in a changed life situation that, the processes described in moving forward, were that of 'recreating'. Migrants' attempts to 'emotionally rebuild' meaning in their new existence, competence, self-esteem and companionship are illustrated in her study. These processes are illustrated in my study too. Although in the case of those who defined the refugeeship as having strong political connotations this was more complicated, as strong moral challenges were attached to it, including issues of guilt and shame.

The process of continuity and discontinuity is illustrated in Chapter Eight, and encompasses various aspects. First the participants described 'ridding oneself' of being a refugee. This was expressed as challenging but also disappointing. As a result, some participants became more deeply involved in activism or other voluntary work. These activities

reflected back on by some, as restricting one's opportunities to take up other positions. In fact, some participants were fully aware of this as limiting them to the 'refugee domain'. The counter-strategy which was described as successful was complementing the refugee identification with other new identifications. This implied broadening one's identification repertoire, leading to a sense of belonging to something wider, such as 'citizen of the world' or 'global citizen'. Here, we witnessed the awareness and agency of the participants in creating these new identifications, showing how far they had come in their identification work in creating something new and beyond. Identifying with the notion of global citizen, gave them the opportunity to feel less like a person in exile, and instead as someone who moved between various spaces. However, as some of my participants pointed out, this was also a 'solution' to the challenges of being a refugee. That is to say, living in exile meant for some being a person of a certain origin, from a distance and without actually travelling to the country of origin. At the same time, 'British' or 'Swedish' was impossible to identify with. Therefore, being 'global' was the solution. One participant explained that seeing himself as 'global', meant feeling more 'normal' and more 'international', with fewer of the constraints that the negative connotations associated with the 'refugee' label. Nyberg, C. (2006) showed in her study Pluricultural identifications in a Swedish-Ugandan-Indian context people's capacity to form multiple identifications or in Nyberg's terms, Pluricultural identifications and move between various social categories in agentic social identity work, even if this was not always an uncomplicated process.

9.5.1 The agentic capacity of my participants

I have claimed throughout this thesis that people are agentic in their identification and positioning work, and not just dependent on wider power structures for gaining recognition. The participants have repeatedly shown that they are in possession of agency throughout their descriptions of their experiences and, more importantly, through responses to their life situations. They also demonstrate agency and capacity by engaging in 'creative' meaning-making, when it comes to understanding the totality of their experiences. For example many have begun to turn the negative aspects, experienced at the point of fleeing, to something positive. I gave an example of this 'creative meaning-making', found in the way the participants take up the position of 'global citizen' or 'citizen of the world'. Taking up such a position, shows creativity in developing new categories or repertoires. This makes it possible for participants to exceed being positioned in a

particular moral space, and instead to become part of something far greater and wider, than that of 'Just' 'Swedish' or 'British'.

Graham and Khosravi (1997) in their article about Repatriation and Diaspora culture among Iranians in Sweden showed that not feeling the restriction of a particular country's border was important to one's opportunity and possibility as Iranian emigrants or political refugees. They write:

> It is the possibility of moving from country to country within the diaspora as it is developing, and not that of becoming rooted (or incarcerated) in a particular place, which is important. (1997:131)

An important aspect of creative meaning-making amongst those with the experience of being deprived of their 'homeland' seems to lie in opening up the options and opportunities beyond the restriction of creating a 'new' homeland. Instead, it is feeling a sense of flexibility to move freely between borders and to identify with the notion of citizen of the world rather than as a citizen of one's country of origin or the new country. This is understood as an act of agency. It shows up in identification and positioning work, and it is a strategy for creating a new, more positive moral career. The research presented in Chapter Two illustrates the social positioning of asylum seekers and refugees through various hostility themes. Leuder *et al* (2008), for example, shows the way refugees and asylum seekers can direct their talk towards such constructions. As found in the research presented in previous research Chapter Two, this thesis also found continuity in the participants' talk of who they were stressing positive attributes of hard-working and contributing. But a discontinuity, was also evident in talk of a positive life situation which included family, working life, political engagement and so forth. These themes of continuity and discontinuity include: 1) descriptions of highly valued I-positions and a life situation before the 'turning point' 2) a turning point, which involved a drastic change of status, 3) this is followed by 'triumphant talk', having 'won the fight' 4) comments on implications of refugee status 5) finally a return to talk in a somewhat negative tone, about a lack of opportunity to fulfil ones' dreams and to become 'successful' again or indeed at least to lead a 'normal' life. Over time, however, creative meaning-making allowed the participants to transcend the restrictive categories that they experienced earlier, and to engage in the flexible broader process of positioning, permitting one to take up many different positions, while at the same time maintaining a sense of self.

9.6 Final word

This study explores what meaning the participants ascribe to refugeeship and how refugees and asylum seekers articulate the notions of fleeing, claiming asylum and 'refugee status'. My research interest is to 'get at' an understanding of this procedure, what it entails to flee one's country, encounter the official legal asylum system and to live as a refugee in the new context. Refugeeship is a term I coined to capture the existential processes of fleeing, claiming asylum and being granted refugee status. A more encompassing definition of refugeeship can now be presented. I understand it as a series of moral challenges, starting in the country of origin and continuing long after refugee status is granted. I argue that refugeeship is a space in which creative meaning-making is a continuum of incorporating the multiple positions which come with this experience, supporting the notion of the 'identity project' as an incomplete work in progress (Taylor, 2010).

It is important to make clear that seekers of asylum and refugees are individuals, and how this process is experienced, largely depends on the kind of life one has led prior to migration (Graham and Khosravi, 1997). Some of my participants self-identified as Kurdish and spoke about before the turning point even as a life of oppression. However, this does not mean they did not find a space of participation which endowed them with a sense of recognition in their countries of origin. Therefore even those who saw their lives in the shadow of oppression experienced an erosion of sense of self and loss of recognition when claiming asylum and becoming a refugee. My study shows that the asylum system in place is a stigmatising practice. Being a refugee, and worse an asylum seeker, comes with a set of questions, of which my participants expressed awareness: why are you here? What did you do? Are you in genuine need of protection? Will you integrate? Will you contribute to our society? These blunt questions lack recognition for the experiences which often accompany those fleeing their countries of origin. These questions are insensitive to issues of persecution and torture and to the consequences of becoming displaced, such as estrangement from one's own children or parents.

Howarth, (2006) argues for a social psychology of stigma which connects the psychological to the political, by showing stigma is far more than an individual psychological construction, but rather collectively constructed. She writes:

> Stigma is as much about the resistance of identities as the reduction of identities; it is a dialectical process of contestation and creativity that is anchored in and limited by structures of history, economics and power (2006:450)

Howarth argues for the exploration of possibilities and conditions for stigmatised communities to be seen as agents and not (only) as objects or victims of stigma (ibid)

What has been illustrated in this study, is the creative positioning and identification work my participants engage in, in resisting stigmatised identities, as well as in making sense of fleeing, claiming asylum and being granted 'refugee status'. The results show how the participants in this study approach the demands placed on them by the asylum system and the stigmatising label 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee', through working actively with various voluntary projects improving their 'old' and 'new' societies. However, it should be remembered that 'Others' definitions and categorisations remained as continuous obstacles to new meaning-making on many occasions. The participants' new categorisations and identifications were not always recognised by 'Others', maintaining implicit and explicit questionings of the refuges rights to start a new 'ordinary' life in the new country. In consideration of these findings, an idle wish is that migration policy in the future would impact on a sense of inclusion, rather than contributing to the sense of exclusion so often experienced because of the restrictive nature of these policies today.

In terms of knowledge, this thesis contributes to an understanding of the whole forced migration process. Whilst there is a great deal of research on refugee migration, it is usual that a particular aspect or experience is researched. Here I attempt to illustrate the process in its entirety. This has led to an understanding of the demands the current asylum policy and law places on individuals who have been forced to flee their countries. Despite the creative, agentic approach of the asylum seeker and refugee of which we have seen many examples, a problematic finding is that the asylum procedure is destructive, and erodes sense of self. It places constraints on 'integration', sense of belonging and recognition. With these findings I hope to contribute with an understanding as to how this can impact on people trying to create a new life. It is important to recognise that the conditions for refugees to build a new life in an accepting environment cannot be achieved by the individual alone; the process is one of collaboration.

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Appendix 1:

ETHICS NOTICE FOR PARTICIPANTS IN PhD INTERVIEWS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

The study is about the experience of migration as perceived by refugees themselves and aims to understand the lived experience of refugees that see their migration as forced due to their political or other persecution. It is researched in two countries within the European Union, Sweden and England. This study is funded by the University of Stockholm. The Study is led by myself, Nicola Magnusson, a PhD student from the Stockholm University. My supervisor is Professor Anders Gustavsson.

If you agree to participate in this study I will ask you to discuss your experience of becoming a refugee and what it has involved for you to migrate under the circumstances of feeling compelled to migrate to England or Sweden.

Confidentiality
This study is being conducted within the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Social Science ethics board (www.vr.se), all information that is taken from you including your personal details and recorded information will remain confidential. I will not use your real name or name the organisation(s) you may work with.

Right to withdraw from the study
You have the right to stop and leave the study at any time. It is also possible for you to change your mind after your participation and ask for your comments to be removed from the study.

What happens after the interview?
All the material will be analysed and prepared into a PhD thesis, which will be published as a book. The book will be published in 2011. You can receive a copy of the book as well as a copy of your transcript. Nicola Magnusson: Nicola.magnusson@ped.su.se 0046 70 494 3596 or 0046 8 162000-ask to speak to Nicola Magnusson.
Thank you!
Nicola Magnusson