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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**  
**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**School of Social Sciences**

**Refugees and Asylum Seekers:  
Exploring the Nature and Role of Resilience**

by  
**Jane March-McDonald**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
September 2010

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**ABSTRACT**

**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS: THE NATURE AND ROLE OF  
RESILIENCE**

**By Jane March-McDonald**

This thesis examines the nature and role of resilience in forced migrants' lives with particular reference to the day-to-day lives of Somali women living in the UK. In contrast to the dominant discourse of victimhood associated with the label of 'forced migrant' this empirical study explores the notion of the 'strong migrant woman'. Drawing upon perspectives that illuminate power relations and adopting a social constructionist framework, a qualitative and predominantly ethnographic approach was taken to elicit Somali women's accounts of their family life in a city in southern England. Challenges encountered within the research field, including language barriers, issues of informed consent and women's reluctance to engage with the study, led to the adoption of an increasingly informal, flexible process of data generation. This was via formal and informal individual and group interviews and participant observation of women's daily activities. Together these rich sources of data illuminate the complexity and contraction of the resilience concept and in doing so promote a more informed understanding of the diversity and richness of forced migrants' lives.

Findings from this study challenge the use of static frameworks and labels in determining and categorising migratory journeys and experiences of (re)settlement. The need for recognition of the complexity and fluidity surrounding the nature of border crossings is argued. Drawing on a pluralistic theoretical approach to understanding resilience, this thesis illuminates the complex ways in which risk and protection, strengths and vulnerability operate within women's day-to-day lives. 'Complexity and contradiction' and 'movement and fluidity' are identified as key inter-related themes in understanding the nature of resilience within these migrant women's family life. A model developed on the basis of this study's findings and encompassing a more holistic approach is outlined as a potential tool to aid the complex task of resilience assessment.

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# Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, Jane March-McDonald

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Refugee and Asylum Seekers: Exploring the Nature and Role of Resilience

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed:

*Jane March-McDonald*

Date: 3.11.11

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the nature and role of resilience within the lives of forced migrants. More specifically, the concept of resilience is explored in the day-to-day lives of Somali women migrants living in the UK. A key aim of this study is to elicit the voices of forced migrant women through their accounts of resilience, risk and protection in relation to family life within the UK. Initial thoughts and ideas that informed the origins of this study were that forced migrants, though inherently vulnerable as a result of their forced migrant identity and experiences, were resilient and had resources that enabled them to cope with daily life in exile.

The study on which this thesis is based stemmed from both my health visiting practice experiences and an initial review of the literatures on forced migrants. The aims of the study are informed by my professional practice and the wish to adopt a practice /policy orientation in discussing the findings. As a busy health visitor I held a large caseload with a significant number of families with complex health and social needs. I was aware of how refreshing I found working with forced migrant families. Welcoming, unassuming, talking shyly with me and opening up a little on the issues and questions they had, it was very easy to engage with these families. At the same time, these families were very much ‘unknown’ to me in terms of culture, practices and history. Watching a young Somali mother breast-feeding, I was shocked to see her breasts covered in scars. Tentatively asking about the marks I was informed by her husband ‘that it was a long story’. He politely indicated that it was not necessary or too complex to be told to me. While the adversities of the past appeared to be just that, having no place in the conversations that I had with these families, I nonetheless framed these women as ‘victims’ that needed ‘to be helped’.

Taking this perspective further, as part of my studies for a Masters in Health Promotion/Health Education, I conducted a small study of local health, social care and education agencies that explored professionals’ understanding and responses to refugees’ health and social needs. At the same time, I knew that what I really wanted to pursue was the opportunity to hear forced migrants speak directly about their own lives. With the support of an Economic and Social Research Council studentship, this goal became a possibility.

The literature review undertaken in preparation for this doctoral study identified dominant discourses that tended to emphasise forced migrants’ victimhood,

portraying them as deficient and vulnerable. Competing challenging discourses indicating notions of strength and resilience amidst forced migrants' vulnerability were also present. The need to seek forced migrants' own accounts of their lives and experiences in exile was identified. This study is a response to this early investigation of the topic and chooses to focus on women's accounts of forced migration and their experiences of family life in exile. It was anticipated that from these accounts of daily life women's experiences of resilience, risk and protection within family life would be illuminated. It was proposed that using this approach would capture the richness and diversity of these lived experiences in ways that migratory labels and categories have failed to do. In doing so, the strengths of forced migrant families would be revealed and better understood.

With this focus on understanding the nature and role of resilience in the lives of forced migrants, this thesis explores two key concepts associated with the strong migrant woman. The concept of migration, its context and nature alongside the forced migrant label is introduced in chapter one. This provides a framework or context for the study. Here the literatures in relation to the forced migrant are critically reviewed. A broad overview of the debates and the contested nature of identifying the forced migrant are outlined. The role of labels and discourses is examined, along with the ways in which policy and legislation contribute to the construction and reinforcement of the forced migrant identity. A critique of these literatures, drawing in part on studies of the Somali community in the West, suggests both the complexities and limitations of the forced migrant concept. Drawing on a wider literature based on studies of women's experiences in exile, the notion of the 'strong migrant woman' is explored further. Within this wider literature, women migrants' strength forms a significant discourse. Though based on a small number of empirical studies, some prominence is given to Somali women's strengths, both pre-migratory and in exile. This suggests an area for further investigation.

The resilience concept is seen as pertinent and appropriate for exploring both issues of strength and vulnerability within forced migrants' lives. It is used in this study as a vehicle for exploring the ways in which strength may operate within the day-to-day lives of Somali women living in the UK. An examination of this concept, its competing approaches and emphases are outlined in chapter two. Underlined and illustrated within this chapter are the concept's conceptual complexity and its contentious and frequent ambiguity in relation to its operation and practice. The

complexity of this concept is understood as valuable in facilitating a more informed understanding of forced migrants' lives. Active agency, gender and success criteria for the concept and the closely associated concepts of risk and protection are explored and highlighted as areas that require further attention.

The resilience concept is argued to provide an appropriate tool for identifying evidence of forced migrants' strengths and agency and the research strategy adopted for this study seeks to mirror this understanding by giving participants' voice and agency in the research process. Chapter three details this research strategy along with a discussion of its inherent challenges and the ways in which these are overcome. This account outlines the study's aims, definitions of key terminology used and the theoretical approach to resilience adopted by the researcher. Aspects of the research process that particularly highlight the methodological tensions encountered in the field are discussed. These underline the methodological flexibility evident in the unfolding of the research process, the adoption of an increasingly explicit ethnographic approach and the responsiveness required of the researcher in implementing the research strategy.

With the decision to focus on Somali migrant women in a city in the south of England, the first part of chapter four situates these women within Somalia's migratory history and the wider UK asylum framework and trends. This provides a context for a closer examination of participants' accounts of their departure from Somalia, their family circumstances and their migratory journeys. These accounts, though revealing a diverse array of circumstances and experiences in relation to their various border crossings, are seen to hold in common the inability to return permanently to their homeland. Fear, secrecy and fragmentation are evidenced in participants' migratory journeys, as well as the complexity and fluidity of their continued movements and border crossings.

A predominantly descriptive account of women's everyday lives in exile is provided in chapter five. Two questions are posed as the basis for presenting this account. 'What do the women get on with in their lives?' and 'How do they do this?' Four broad areas of activity are identified that capture how women's time and energies are absorbed within daily family life. These are seen to relate to their roles and responsibilities as homemaker, their management of hostile environments, their membership of the Somali community, and their coping and management of loss and adversity.

A further interrogation of the data is achieved by asking the question ‘Why do the women just get on with their lives?’ in the way that their accounts suggest. This allows for further analysis of the data and exploration of the meanings attributed by these women to their activities. In response to this further interrogation four key areas are given further consideration. These are ‘being a good Somali Muslim woman’, ‘the busyness of daily life’, ‘strength and independence’ and ‘a corporate approach to life’. These aspects of participant’s lives are examined in terms of their role in sustaining (and undermining) the women’s resilience as forced migrants here in the UK.

More detailed discussion of the study’s findings is to be found in chapters seven and eight. Two main areas of findings, the forced migrant concept and more specifically women as forced migrants are re-examined in chapter seven. Movement and fluidity, continuity and change and loss and gains are seen as recurring themes. Attention is given to ‘unpacking’ and illuminating these themes, thereby exposing both ambiguity and contradiction. The need for a more dynamic understanding of the forced migrant concept and a more considered use of the term is argued. In exploring the possible meanings given to women’s activities and busyness, the role of religion and corporate living, the notion of participants’ and their family’s strength is seen as a thread running throughout this discussion in chapter seven.

A re-examination of resilience, risk and protection in the day-to-day family life of women in exile is presented in chapter eight. The notion of migrant women’s strength is evident within women’s accounts in terms of both the pre-migratory strengths they carry into exile and the ‘getting on with life’ approach to managing family life. The merits and limitations of the strengths orientation of the study are re-assessed drawing on the different approaches to understanding resilience outlined in chapter two. While acknowledging the merit of each theoretical approach to understanding resilience, this chapter posits the need for its re-conceptualisation. Bringing the different theoretical positions together it is argued, captures both the complexity and contradiction of the resilience concept and in doing so facilitates a more informed understanding of the diversity and richness of forced migrants’ lives. The potential contribution of this more complex understanding of resilience to practice and policy fields, along with some of the challenges it holds, are outlined. A model developed on the basis of this study’s findings and encompassing a more holistic approach is presented with a view to assisting practitioners in making more effective interventions with migrant communities.

The thesis concludes with a brief summary of the key findings from the study. These are reviewed using two identified themes that emerge from the discussion of findings overall. ‘Complexity and contradiction’ and ‘movement and fluidity’ are presented as inter-related in serving to better understand the nature of resilience in the lives of these migrant women. Following further methodological reflections on the empirical study undertake, this final chapter concludes with some consideration of the contribution that this thesis makes to understand the nature and role of resilience in the day-to-day lives of Somali women migrants and women in exile more widely.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **FORCED MIGRATION: CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the concept, context and nature of forced migration in order to provide a framework for this study. The literatures will be critically reviewed to assess the extent to which dominant societal discourses surrounding the forced migrant are reflected. These construct the forced migrant in terms of vulnerability and victimhood, emphasising dependency and loss of agency. Exploration of the literatures will seek to establish the saliency of competing discourses that emphasise the forced migrant's resilience, strength, adaptability and survival.

In part one of this chapter, a review will be undertaken of the developing field of academic study in relation to Forced Migration and refugees. A broad overview of the debate and contested nature of identifying the 'subject' will be provided and will include such questions as to who or what is a forced migrant, what are the causes of this escalating phenomenon and can forced migrants be distinguished from other forms of migrants? The role of labels and societal discourses will be examined, along with the role of policy and legislation to examine how they might contribute to the construction and reinforcement of forced migrant identity. Having presented a framework for understanding the concept of 'the forced migrant', the second part of the chapter will present a critique of the concept and the literatures. The Somali community in the West will be drawn upon to illustrate the complexities, contradictions and limitations inherent within the forced migrant concept. Finally, in response to the identified limited representation of women as forced migrants, existing literature in relation to forced migrant women and that of the broader experience of women in exile, will be examined to assess support given to a discourse of 'the strong migrant woman'.

#### **PART ONE: FORCED MIGRANT: CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK**

##### **The developing field of academic study**

The study of Forced Migration has transformed over the last two decades, rapidly evolving as a contentious, politically charged and highly pertinent area of academic study, intertwined with wider socio-political issues and questions related to sovereignty, national identity, national security and the control of borders,

globalisation, and the North South divide and issues of justice. Emerging out of the arena of Migration and Immigration studies in the 1980s (Bascom, 2001; Joly, 1996), the study of Forced Migration can be described as a significant, if still immature body of work, which has become established alongside Refugee Studies (Joly, 1996). That being said, the relationship between the two fields is complex, contested and evolving. Debate centres on the appropriateness and consequences of Refugee Studies becoming increasingly submerged and obscured within the broader field of Forced Migration. Some scholars argue the importance of maintaining a distinct separate field of Refugee Studies- one that recognises the unique, specific situation of the refugee and takes account of their special legal status (Hathaway, 2007; Adelman and McGrath, 2007).

Several factors have influenced the impetus and structure for a changing and expanding field of study. First, the end of the ideological cold war with its deconstruction of the ‘sanctified’, political refugee in its aftermath-remodelled and presented as the ‘bogus asylum seeker’. Secondly, there is a demand by humanitarian organisations for evidence direction in the provision of assistance programmes to the relentless admission of refugees and internally displaced persons. Equally significant is the failed refugee containment in the South, and evidence of escalating numbers on Europe’s doorsteps, made more problematic by the increasing complexity in migration flows (Giner, 2006; Zetter, 2000, 2007).

A broad range of disciplines can be seen to contribute to the field of Forced Migration studies: Law, Social Sciences, Medicine, and Humanities. These stand alongside charitable organisations examining the subject from conceptual standings such as inequality, social exclusion and human rights. While individual disciplines carve out their potential niche in advancing the field (Castles, 2003; Malkki 1995), an interdisciplinary approach is increasingly called for, both in terms of methodological principle due to the recognised complexity of the subject and as a necessary requirement to challenge discriminatory legislation and practices (Giner, 2006; Castles, 2003; Cremlyn and Briskman, 2003; Christie, 2003; Voutira and Dona, 2007). The establishment of the Refugees Studies Centre at the University of Oxford in 1982, the launch of the Journal of Refugee Studies in 1998 and the development of online information resources such as Forced Migration Online and ICAR (Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees), have all served to promote and support a wider, international and interdisciplinary approach to the subject (Giner, 2006; Malkki,

1995). The boundaries of this field are difficult to define, overlapping with such fields as Development, Conflict, Disaster and Migration. However, what perhaps distinguishes it is its integral relationship with practice and policy, underpinned by its political and funding interests and resulting in a knowledge base that is both directed and applied (Kunz, 1973; Malkki, 1995; Castles, 2003). Jacobsen and Landau (2003) state that the need to conduct research that is both academically sound and relevant to practitioners and policy makers represents a ‘dual imperative’ for Forced Migration researchers; something researchers appear to be ‘both plagued by and attracted to’ (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, p.1). A general stance taken by forced migration researchers is that their research will serve to improve the lives of those researched. Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992) reframe this advocacy stance by highlighting the potential reciprocal benefits of research for both researcher and refugee. The refugee is therefore viewed as a resource rather than a problem, challenging the balance and nature of the traditionally viewed research relationship. While substantial academic growth has occurred within the field, it can be contextualised when placed within the larger framework of Ethnic and Racial studies, in which it sits.

### **The ‘forced migrant’**

It is argued that forced migrants are a socially constructed phenomenon, with associated collective meanings and understandings that are constructed and reconstructed in the context of, and in response to changing economic, political and social influences both nationally and globally (Turton, 2003; Tomlinson and Egan, 2002). They are therefore ‘not something we discover, but something we make as a result of our social and cultural conventions’ (Turton, 2003, p.3). The consequences of this are the emergence of increasingly complex, ambiguous and contradictory constructions of the ‘forced migrant’, making definition and distinction difficult (Giner, 2006). Pertinent though, is that they are made by ‘others’ rather than by forced migrants themselves, with language that promotes discourses of passivity and ‘otherness’ (Turton, 2003; McGhee, 2005).

*‘The language of migration...is spoken from a sedentary, or state-centric perspective. It is the language we use to talk about them....’*  
(Turton, 2003, p.4).

Different conceptions have also led to a proliferation of sub-categories and labels, within which conceptual understandings also greatly differ (Giner, 2006). The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) states that forced migration ‘is a general term that refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people, as well as people displaced by natural environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or developmental projects (IASFM online). Zetter (2007) notes the increasing use of the ‘forced migration’ term within the literatures and suggests that ‘forced migrant’

*‘better captures the complexity of contemporary root causes of migration, whilst at the same time contextualising refugees within the wider migratory processes of transnational and social transformations.’*

(Zetter, 2007, p.189).

The refugee is a sub-category of the forced migrant, conceptualised as both a legal category, i.e. a Convention refugee, or more broadly used in a conventional sense to signify someone fleeing from various conditions of threat (Srinivasan, 1994). A 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, evolving after the Second World War and reflecting the need to differentiate forced migrants from involuntary migrants, the term is commonly used in relation to its legal definition, that of someone who has fled from his or her home country and is unable to return to it.

*‘... owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’, and who having undergone the asylum process of the host country, is granted refugee status to those fulfilling the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.’*

(cited UNHCR, 1996, p.16).

While concern surrounds the dilution and narrowing of the legal rights and entitlements afforded by the term’s legal conceptualisation, Voutira and Dona (2007) suggest the term ‘refugee’ is ‘irreducible to merely a legal, administrative label or category’. This is supported by the ‘philosophical, historical, social and cultural meanings and connotations it has come to signify and be associated with, and bears testament to its continuing value and significance’ (Voutira and Dona, 2007, p.163). That being said, the term ‘refugee’ is being sidelined increasingly in favour of other

terms within the Forced Migration literature (Castles and Loughan, 2005, cited Voutira and Dona, 2007, p.1). Zetter (2007) suggests this reflects the increasing complexity and blurring of the refugee label. Malkki (1995), though acknowledging the term's legal or broad descriptive usefulness, reminds us that 'refugee' can never represent a generalisable type of individual. Each individual to whom the label is ascribed represents a 'world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories and psychological or spiritual situations' (Malkki, 1995 p.496). Zetter (2007) in a similar vein, emphasising the need to see the person rather than merely the label or category, suggests that labels ascribed to forced migrants

*'...form a life narrative and an overlapping sequence of events, not just static features of geographical origin, national identity and legally designated statuses'.*

(Zetter, 2007, p.183).

While the status of refugee confers legitimacy, being more likely to evoke empathy and support from society, discourses represent the refugee as a 'passive victim of circumstances', devoid of agency in their migratory 'journey' and traumatised as a result of their 'refugee experience' (Turton, 2003).

The asylum seeker category has emerged in an attempt to separate out those migrants moving for political as opposed to economic reasons, allowing for the identification and labelling of the deserving and undeserving (Turton, 2003; Sales, 2002). Rutter (2001) defines the term as 'someone who has crossed an international border in search of safety and refugee status in another country' (Rutter, 2001, p.4), and having applied for asylum in the host country, is awaiting the outcome of their application. The category though has taken on its own metaphorical representations and meanings, reflecting state and society's perceptions that asylum seekers are merely economic migrants using the asylum process as a means to overcome increasing immigration restrictions. Asylum seekers are represented in terms of flooding, overflowing, overwhelming, saturating the host society and sapping it of its resources (McGhee, 2005).

*'We must therefore 'dam the stream, divert it, put up barriers to it-preferably keep it as far away from us as possible.'*

(Turton, 2003, p.5).

‘Asylum seeker’ increasingly represents constructions of bogus, scrounger, terrorist and deviant, individuals seeking purely to exploit the social, economic benefits and goodwill of the host country (Malloch and Stanley, 2005; McGhee, 2005). Restrictive asylum policies, leading to the use of ‘transnational social networks, new transport and communication technologies and the use of people smugglers’ by forced migrants, only serve to confirm the assigned identity of ‘bogus’ (Turton, 2003, p.14). Papadopoulos et al (2004) argue that racist discourse impacts on all, regardless of their legal immigration status and that the public, to an increasing extent, view all migrants as here for economic reasons.

Forced migration movements, though not a new phenomenon, having taken place throughout history, are a changing phenomenon, increasing in frequency and number, and involving countries previously rarely ‘touched’ by large numbers seeking refuge and sanctuary. Attempts to understand the underlying reasons for forced migration, though largely neglected until recently, are recognised as linked to complex patterns of multiple causality (Castles, 2002, Ferris, 1993). Though traditionally understood in the past as a humanitarian issue with the onus on responding to unpredictable emergencies in the world, this view has been increasingly discredited as both global and historical processes have come under scrutiny.

Globalisation, characterised by the growth of cross cultural border flows linked to economic and political factors, cultural production and people, is argued to provide the context for forced migration (Castles, 2002). Giddens suggests that globalisation ‘produces conflicts, disjuncture and new forms of inequality’, the consequence of which is a social North /South divide between the rich and poor states of the world (Giddens, 1994, cited Richmond, 2002, p.708). Corrupt governments, human rights abuses and the breakdown of society are seen to characterise weak states that show patterns of forced migration. The development of transnational communication, of extensive, accessible transport systems, of transnational communities and networks providing flows of remittances, goods and information, can all be argued to facilitate forced migration in ways and on a scale never before experienced or imagined (Marfleet, 2006; Horst, 2006). Papastergiadis suggests that rather than thinking about causes of (forced) migration, we need to think about processes of flux and flow (Papastergiadis, 2000, cited Marfleet, 2006, p.216).

World changes also have impacted upon forced migration, including the breakdown of the former Soviet Union, major changes occurring in China, Asia and

Africa, increasingly permeable borders, new forms of nationalism and the breakdown of central government control (Richmond, 2002; Zolberg, 1989, cited Joly, 2002). The West is particularly singled out as a perpetuator of inequality and domination, with the effects of decolonisation and super-power conflicts, the sale of weapons in exchange for goods from the poor, and the competing interests of multinational companies. All these are highlighted as key contributory factors for the North/South divide, civil wars and unrest (Castles, 2002; Malkki, 1995; Richmond, 1988; Sales, 2005). Malkki (1995) places forced migration explicitly within a wider context of socio-political and social processes, suggesting that these have often been considered merely a ‘backdrop’ to, rather than the causes of, forced migration and therefore viewed as unworthy of study.

*‘Nationalism and racism, xenophobia and immigration policies, state practices of violence and war, censorship and silencing, human rights and challenges to state sovereignty, “development” discourse and humanitarian interventions, citizenship and cultural and religious identities, travel and Diaspora, and memory and historicity, are just some of the issues and practices...’*

*(Malkki, 1995, p.496).*

### **The role of labels and societal discourses**

Zetter (2007) suggests that labels ‘not only are used to describe the world but also to construct it in convenient images’ (Zetter, 2007, p.173). The use of labels and their associated societal discourses can be argued to be a contributing factor to the homogenisation of forced migrants’ lives and to their ‘othering’. Throughout the literatures, labels applied to forced migrants serve to categorise, distinguish and establish legitimacy. But labels are also argued to serve alternative purposes and social agendas, having power to render the individual a carrier of the dominant messages and attitudes of the society through their attached discourses. The individual is therefore depersonalised, their identity distorted and limited, constrained by powerful ‘truths’ holding the ability to stigmatise and separate from society (McGhee, 2005). Fowler (1991) states

*‘Language provides names for categories and so helps to set their boundaries and relationships: and discourse allows these names to be spoken and written*

*frequently, so contributing to the apparent reality and currency of the categories'.*

*(Fowler, 1991, cited Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.428).*

A number of different discourses attached to the forced migrant are evident in the literatures. McGhee (2005) highlights the government's role in establishing and reinforcing a discourse that equates the asylum seeker with benefit dependence and related social problems. The 1998 White Paper 'Fairer, Faster, Firmer', and the Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999, he suggests, have both contributed towards constructing all asylum seekers as 'a suspect class of potential benefit shoppers and benefit fraudsters' (McGhee, 2005, p.72). Winder (2004) states that, in turn, myths about asylum seekers have also become rationales for state policy, serving as 'rancid and polarised' reference points for political debate (Winder, 2004, cited Marfleet, 2006, p.286). Joly (1996) highlights that government response to asylum seekers has not always been so damning; rather, discourses in the past have been created to serve their interests and purposes. This is evident in the response to different 'waves' of immigration. For example the Ugandan Asians were portrayed as an educated group requiring little assistance (Ward, 1973, cited Joly, 1996, p.120), and the transferable skills of the Vietnamese were emphasised emphasized as a significant benefit to society. The Cold War refugees were often presented as 'political heroes and courageous defenders of freedom' (Pupavac, 2006, p.3). Marfleet (2006) highlights the power of political actors to influence society's attitudes.

*'Those with power and authority, who are most directly involved with the structures of the state, play a central role in shaping and generalising ideas about difference and exclusion and in encouraging popular attachment to them. This is especially significant at times of instability when those in power choose to promote racist discourses, using the resources of the state itself to disseminate them.'*

*(Marfleet, 2006, p.278).*

Discourses of threat, representing 'the enemy within' (Fekete, 2001, cited McGhee, 2005, p.71), also are associated with the term 'asylum seeker'. The attack on the twin towers and the Pentagon in the US, as well as the UK's own terrorist incidents have heightened the need for national security and served to endorse a demonising discourse that portrays all asylum seekers as potential terrorists and the

asylum system as a terrorist refuge (Sales, 2005; Lewis and Neal, 2005; Marfleet, 2006). The subsequent Anti Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, 2001, giving powers for the detention and expulsion of suspected terrorists, as well as the rapid processing of suspected asylum seekers, has further served to confirm the threat of the asylum seeker to the public. The war with Iraq has contributed to increased global tensions and reinforced the West's 'war on terror' strategy, aiding and justifying the prominence of a discourse which converges 'crime, terror, Islam, migration and asylum as a nexus of dangers'...constructing forced migrants as 'malign outsiders bearing the imminent threat of violence and subversion' (Marfleet, 2006, p.265).

The media can be argued to frame and shape the public debate on asylum and immigration. Their persistent daily portrayal of negative themes and attitudes displayed in racist headlines and commentary, their use of provocative terminology such as 'asylum cheat' and 'illegal refugee' and their failure to highlight and challenge racist attitudes and policies, perpetuate and confirm common discourses and assumptions held in relation to the forced migrant (Buchanan et al, 2003 cited Lewis and Neal, 2005; McGhee, 2005; Lynn and Lea, 2003).

But paradoxically, labels and discourses also can be viewed as benefiting the forced migrant. The label of Convention 'refugee' and its associated categories of protection, are highly prized and sought after by forced migrants, yet increasingly difficult to obtain as a result of restrictive asylum policy. Such a label is not without cost to the forced migrant though, imposing constraints on the refugee identity in order to conform to the expected and required refugee image, 'a feminised, traumatised victim' (Pupavac, 2006, p.3; Papadopoulos, 2001; Summerfield, 2001). The refugee is required to frame his/her experiences in discourses of illness, trauma and victimhood so as to legitimise and affirm their assigned label and to obtain scarce resources, denying or extinguishing their natural strengths and ways of coping (Watters, 2001). Pupavac (2006) suggests that this assigned 'sick role' serves to both secure resources and to free the individual from social obligations and responsibility within society, so 'creating a relationship of dependency, which undermines individual autonomy' (Pupavac, 2006, p.21).

The dominance of societal discourses in relation to the forced migrant can also be argued to provide a catalyst for debate and questioning, both within the academic arena and in society generally. Discourses prompt critical analysis of policy and legislation and bring to focus broader issues for discussion about our society and the

world in general (Sales, 2002, 2005; Mynott, 2000; McGhee, 2005; Grillo, 2005; Marfleet, 2006). They can be seen to activate advocacy and promote social movements. For example, Marfleet (2006) highlights 'The World Social Forum' with its focus on global change, including challenging the criminalisation of refugees and of state policies focused on exclusion. But such challenges struggle to compete with the overwhelming force of dominant discourses that are securely attached to the forced migrant and which are embedded within the fabric of today's society.

### **Legislation and policy**

Over the past eighteen years, issues surrounding UK legislation and policy in relation to immigration and asylum have become increasingly prominent within the political and social arenas, dominating government election agendas and resulting in increasing attempts to respond to fears that the UK immigration and asylum system is out of control and open to abuse. A raft of legislation and policy has emerged, the essence of which is argued to carry emphasis on deterrence and increasing restriction in relation to UK border crossings. McGhee (2005) captures the sense of fear and anxiety experienced by many of the British public, reinforced by the media imagery of threat and 'otherness' that can be seen to have contributed to this drive in protecting us from 'danger' and the 'undeserving stranger'.

*'Fear ...that 'our' small island will be engulfed by 'strangers' who will bring their diseases, their crime, their neediness and even their sinister anti-Western malcontent into our midst.'*

*(McGhee, 2005, p.90).*

It is not to say though, that fears over immigration and asylum are new, having been seen throughout history, illustrated by the first legislative attempts to control our borders in the 1905 Aliens Act, and witnessed subsequently throughout, coming to the forefront of the national agenda following the world wars, and again after the Cold War (Marfleet, 2006; McGhee, 2005, Kushner and Knox, 1999). Some would even suggest that fears about immigration have a cyclical pattern, with moral panics arising every few years. But what arguably distinguishes this recent period in immigration history in Britain (and to a similar extent in Europe), is the intensity and determination of legislation and policy to deter people from crossing our borders. For those who do manage to do so, the focus is to weed out those deserving to stay from

those undeserving, recognising still the need to be seen to fulfil our commitment to the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, of which we are signatories.

Alongside this strategy of deterrence and exclusion, is also a political discourse embedded within policy, of multiculturalism, of welcoming the enrichment that diversity brings, an acknowledgment of our dependence on immigrant labour and a commitment to actively promoting inclusion and citizenship for those considered deserving (Sales, 2005; McGhee, 2005). Sales (2002) highlights the inherent contradiction that this promotion of inclusion and cohesion within a broader framework of exclusion exemplifies (Sales, 2002), while McGhee (2005) suggests that a commitment to active citizenship, through such programmes as English and citizenship education classes, reflects an underlying belief that without them,

*‘...migrant communities will not be civilised, loyal or committed enough to be part of Britain, and that what they lack (British ness) could be the source of future social risk’.*

*(McGhee, 2005, p.74).*

Lewis and Neal’s (2005) summary of the government’s three-pronged approach to immigration and asylum retains its pertinence.

1. To loosen, in a regulated way, the control of labour migration.
2. To tighten control on asylum.
3. To establish a framework for the promotion of social cohesion and an inclusive national identity.

*(Lewis and Neal, 2005, p.428).*

Commentators highlight the futility of a strategy premised on the need to distinguish between different categories and motivations of migrants (Lewis and Neal, 2005; Sales, 2002). However, despite this, policies can be seen to have been ‘successful’, achieving their desired goal. A continuing fall in the number of asylum applications and successful applications over recent years, suggests the government has the issue ‘under control’ (ICAR, Statistics Paper 2, 2009).

What impact has this climate of deterrence and exclusion had upon the forced migrant, and how has it shaped forced migrants’ behaviour and public identity? A significant number of academic commentators have critiqued the government’s

immigration and asylum agenda and the reinforcing and motivating influences of the media, highlighting and condemning the inherently racist, xeno-racist and Islamophobic philosophy from which they stem (Lewis and Neal, 2005; McGhee, 2005; Marfleet, 2006; Sales, 2005; Grillo, 2005). Policies and legislation emerging within the UK over the last eighteen years can be seen to have had a detrimental impact on asylum seekers' ability and increasing difficulty to seek asylum. A reduction in their rights to asylum through the establishment of stricter criteria, as well as exclusion and isolation from mainstream society and its resources reflects punitive policies premised on the need to encourage voluntary return, and a message of deterrence to potential economic would-be migrants.

Policies and doctrine exemplifying this reinforcement of 'Fortress Britain' include among others:

- The identification and listing of those countries considered 'safe' from whom asylum will not even be considered, as introduced in The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, (Home Office, 1996)
- The extension of powers of the Immigration and Carriers Act, 1987 so as to discourage facilitation of illegal entry (The Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999).
- Making entry to the UK illegal without passport or documentation (Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act, 2002; Asylum and Immigration (Treatments of Claimants) Act, 2004)
- Creating 'offshore' processing centres and adopting 'offshore' bordering practices, with the effect of 'exporting the border' so as to deter 'threat' before it reaches the UK (Cabinet Office, 2007, p.2).
- Measures to secure authentic and reliable identity documentation /identity data by way of the biometric identity scheme and the e-Borders programme (UK Borders Act 2007)
- The creation of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) in 2008, to implement the 'e-Borders' programme.

Consequently, the commitment to enhance border control and increase UK security can be seen to impact on and restrict asylum claims within the UK, as well as to prevent asylum seekers entering the UK in the first place (McGhee, 2010). Gibney

(2006) observes a paradox in the West in which Western states simultaneously recognise the rights of refugees, while also criminalising their search for asylum through ‘non arrival measures’ (Gibney, 2006, cited McGhee 2010, p.23).

Restricting legal entry to the country, as part of a wider strategy to secure Britain’s borders from threat of terrorism and ‘dangerous’ individuals, has led to increased illegal entry with the use of agents and traffickers making forced migrants vulnerable and dependent upon unscrupulous profiteers, with the need to often undertake dangerous and life threatening migratory journeys to the asylum country (Sales, 2005). Gibney (2004) illustrates this necessity with the following quote.

*‘...I put a question to the Minister (Lord Rooker, Minister of State, Home Office) asking whether there was a legal way in which an asylum seeker could enter this country. He gave me a very blunt answer- “No”.’*

*(Lord Dholakia. House of Lords, 2002, cited Gibney, 2004, p.107).*

Resorting to illegal entry has reinforced and confirmed the discourse of threat and deviancy associated with the forced migrant and served to drive these migrants ‘underground’, confined to living on the fringes of society as ‘non-citizens’, perpetuating a climate of suspicion and wariness towards the stranger (Sales, 2005; Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.434; Malloch and Stanley, 2005).

Malloch and Stanley (2005) suggest that the principal way in which asylum seekers’ rights to asylum have been deterred, has been through the denial of claims (Malloch and Stanley, 2005, p.59). Restrictive measures introduced into the asylum process, such as reduced right to appeal on a negative outcome along with the withdrawal of financial support, the fast tracking of applications and strict rules in relation to the timing and country of an asylum application, can all be argued to undermine the legitimacy of the applicant’s persecution, sustain an atmosphere and experience of suspicion, interrogation and disbelief for the asylum seeker, along with the erosion of their right to asylum. For those fortunate enough to be granted status of some kind, asylum rights within the country have diminished, evidenced in the withdrawal of the status ‘Exceptional Leave to Remain’ which has been replaced by ‘Humanitarian Protection’, with its reduced entitlement and by the introduction of the ‘Five-Year Strategy for Immigration and Asylum’ (Home Office, 2005). This grants all further refugees temporary status for five years, followed by a review to see if

either permanent status or return home is warranted (ICAR, UK Legislation part 2). Papadopoulos (2001) reminds us of the trauma that forced migrants may encounter as they experience ‘disorientation, disempowerment and helplessness’, awaiting ‘their fate’ by that of officials (Papadopoulos, 2001, p.414), while Refugee organisations challenge the acceptability of lives lived ‘in limbo’ awaiting confirmation of their permanency (or not) within the host country (Refugee Council Online, 2005).

Policies aimed at isolating the asylum seeker from the rest of society can be seen to be an increasing objective of immigration legislation and policy, imposing particularly harsh and stringent constraints on the asylum seeker, infringing on and undermining their basic human rights in an attempt to demonstrate that Britain is not a ‘soft touch’ on immigration. Commentators highlight not only human rights abuse concerns in relation to these exclusionary polices, (i.e. that the asylum seeker is placed beyond the human rights framework, Malloch and Stanley, 2005, p.66), but also the inherent racist and xeno-racist values behind them (McGhee, 2005; Marfleet, 2006; Mynott, 2000). Don Flynn of the Joint Council for the Welfare for Immigrants, in relation to the 1999 UK Immigration and Asylum Act said:

*‘...It leaves undisturbed a decades-old legacy of racism at the heart of British immigration policy, and will continue to invoke the strongest feelings of revulsion on the part of all fair-minded people for as long as it is allowed to remain on the statute book.’*

*(Flynn 1999, cited Mynott, 2000, p.314).*

The 1999 UK Immigration and Asylum Act is regarded by some scholars as a landmark in British Immigration legislation, introducing measures that sought to separate, mark out, contain, and cut off asylum seekers from mainstream society (Home Office, 1999). In it, the allocation of responsibility for all asylum seekers was passed from local authorities to a specialised service, the National Asylum Service Support, (NASS), who were to manage the new compulsory dispersal system, allocating asylum seekers to ‘no choice’ accommodation situated throughout the country. This resulted in the isolation of asylum seekers from their natural gatherings of community members. Mynott (2000) suggests that within the Act was an underlying government assumption that asylum seekers would share an overarching connection with the established non-white communities, so creating a multicultural community and reducing the risks of possible racial tensions. He argues however, that

it also acknowledged an unspoken belief that white people were inherently racist. According to Sales (2005), the Act's impact led to the separation of asylum seekers from refugees, reinforcing society's notion of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrant, as well as seriously undermining the migrant's wellbeing (Refugee Action, 2001, cited Marfleet, 2006, p.276). The Health of Londoners Project (1999) which highlighted that asylum seekers are adversely affected as much by insecurity and exclusion in the host country as by the traumatic events from which they have sought to escape, can be regarded as pertinent.

The Maastricht Treaty (1992), introducing European citizenship, along with its extension of citizens' rights provided in The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) allowed among other things, freedom of movement, residency and entitlement to work within the Union. This has served to add to the complexity of forced migrant trajectories and in distinguishing and categorising migrants, many forced migrants have moved within the European Union having once secured citizenship. The impact of the 9/11 attacks in America (2001) and the subsequent anti-terrorist measures taken, for example, exemplified in the Anti –Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, 2001 and the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act, 2006, has been to mark out all Muslims, many of whom are asylum seekers and refugees, as potential terrorists, increasing their sense of isolation and alienation within society, and potentially creating 'a convergence of asylophobia with Islamophobia within the UK' (McGhee, 2005, 2010). While policies and legislation can be seen to isolate, deter and differentiate the forced migrant from society, their impact is therefore not uniformly experienced, but through the discourses that policy and legislation carry and perpetuate, all are constructed as deviant, a social problem, and unwelcome here.

## **PART TWO: A CRTIQUE OF THE FORCED MIGRANT CONCEPT AND LITERATURE**

### **The homogeneity of the forced migrant experience**

Having examined the concept of the forced migrant alongside the role of labelling, associated dominant discourses, policy and legislation, it can be argued that the literature contributes somewhat to reinforcing simplistic notions of the forced migrant concept with limited understanding of forced migrants' experiences.

Persistent powerful images of the imagined ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ forced migrant, sustained by both the need to ‘neatly’ distinguish, categorise and label and a widely accepted universal ‘refugee’ discourse, arguably fail to acknowledge or take account of the complexity and heterogeneity of forced migrant’s migratory circumstances, experiences and everyday lives. Evidence supporting the need to challenge this will now be presented.

The Forced Migration literature reflects the socially constructed nature of the concept and arguably mirrors the tendency to distinguish between different types of migrants despite the ‘fuzziness’ and increasing complexities of doing so. As a body of academic knowledge, the literature has been criticised for its disjointedness and inaccessibility. The diverse numbers of stakeholders involved in the field as well as poor inter-disciplinary coordination and working, serves to fracture and weaken the field’s research strength. A lack of long-term research and dissemination strategies, the obscurity of valuable, local practice research studies by practitioners, and the submergence of refugee research into the broader category of Race and Ethnic Studies, also can be seen as contributing to the undermining of this body of knowledge (Harris, 2004).

The literature relating to the Somali community in the UK exemplifies the fractured and disjointed nature of the evidence. Harris (2004) suggests that there is a dissonance between the information that actually exists and that which is thought to exist; a criticism also levied at the more established field of Ethnic studies (Gillborn and Ladson-billings, 2004). Though diverse and (contrary to popular belief) significant in volume, it is criticised for its problem-focused emphasis, the absence of the Somali ‘voice’ and its failure to reflect the homogeneity of the community (Harris, 2004). The issues that Somali people are concerned with in relation to their lives are well documented: employment, education, physical and mental health, tensions around youth and gender and the divisions within the community generally. In addition, khat use and female genital mutilation provide a focus for studies reflecting areas of concern raised by community leaders and professionals. With only a small number of papers identified by Harris (2004) that highlight Somalis’ strengths, the public image of the Somali community reflects the problem focused literature. Consequently, the community has come to be commonly associated with ‘violence, anarchy, knife crime, khat and piracy’. A member of the Somali Youth Forum has

also added ‘helplessness, voicelessness and invisibility,’ to the stereotypical list (Hamilton and O’Neil, 2009).

An academic body of knowledge that has socially constructed parameters, poor interdisciplinary cooperation and which fails to capture the diverse voices of the communities it represents, raises questions. How representative it is- and how ably can it contribute to our understanding of the lived experiences of forced migrants, both in relation to their migratory journeys and their settlement experiences?

While a substantial number of research studies contribute to the formation of policy or policy recommendations (Aruni et al, 2002; Dennis, 2002; Okitikpi and Aymer, 2003), there is little analysis of the outcomes of recommendations made, nor of their perceived effectiveness when implemented, raising questions as to the power of research to bring about change in the lives of forced migrants. No more is this so than in relation to the issue of asylum and asylum seekers, regarding whom despite insurmountable evidence challenging the practices, policies and attitudes of society, there remains limited political/societal will for change. A contributory factor to this is, arguably, the focus of UK and Western policy on distinguishing the forced and economic migrant, and on confirming those deserving of entry due to their ability to meet strict criteria for refugee status or because they offer certain skills required by our society, from the un deserving, who justify exclusion (Sales, 2002). Marfleet (1998) suggests that distinction between forced migrants and economic migrants is only important for those who want to ‘perpetuate systems of exclusion’ (Marfleet, 1998, cited Mynott, 2000, p.326.). However, a moral argument suggests that forced migrants need to be distinguished because they make specific claims on our society. They highlight issues of responsibility, demand responses regarding ethical and legal commitments, and call for reflection on issues of sovereignty, citizenship and democratic liberalism (Turton, 2003). They require us

*‘...to consider who we are: what is or should be our moral community and ultimately, what it is to be human.’*

*(Turton, 2003, p.8).*

It is suggested that UK and European policy has focused on securing exclusionary boundaries at the expense of attempting to understand and address underlying reasons and conditions from which people flee. This, it is argued, will result in the likelihood

of increasingly complex forced migration patterns for years ahead (Sales, 2005; Ferris, 1993).

### **Complexities of distinguishing the forced migrant**

Increasing complexity, evidenced in a blurring of motivational factors for movements and onward movements, renders traditional notions of the ‘individual fleeing persecution and seeking sanctuary’ problematic, demanding consideration of forced migrants and their migratory journeys in less rigid and compartmentalised terms. However, some scholars still insist on the need to make distinctions between migrants based on the motivational factors for flight. Kunz (1973) presents a framework of push versus pull factors; push factors relating to the context of the home country that motivate an individual to seek safety; pull factors representing the new country to which the individual is drawn. Kunz (1973) states that

*‘It is the reluctance to uproot oneself, and the absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere, which characterises all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrants’.*

*(Kunz, 1973, p.130).*

Zucker and Zucker (1987) state that ‘ Immigrants are deemed to be influenced by hope of a better life, while refugees are trying to rebuild part of what they have lost’ (Zucker and Zucker, 1987, cited Joly, 2002, p.6). Zolberg et al (1989) adopt a contextual approach, examining the structural factors that lead to flight. They concede that economic and political forces are interconnected reasons for flight, but that socio-political factors such as physical political violence and below subsistence living conditions, caused as a result of war/civil war, precipitate involuntary migration. Shacknove (1985) states that the absence of ‘physical security, vital subsistence and liberty of political participation and physical movement’ represents the essence of refugeehood’ (Shacknove, 1985, cited Joly, 2002, p.6). Efionayi-Mader et al (2005) state that ‘It is the loss of hope in a country’s social, economic and political situation, which often pushes people to leave, rather than an individual’s particular situation’ (Efionayi-Mader et al, 2005, cited Moret et al, 2006, p.78).

Other scholars argue that ‘ the era of discrete refugee definitions is over’ (Bascom, 2001, p.12901; Zetter, 2000; Turton, 2003). Marfleet (2006) highlights the changing transnational context in which migration occurs; one marked by

transnational communities, transnational communication and a sophisticated smuggling business. All migrants draw on active social global networks, creating global movements of re-circulating migrants moving across unbounded communities (Gilck Schiller et al, 1992, cited Marfleet, 2006, p.218). Dowty (1987) states that ‘so-called economic migrants are often responding as much to political repression as to material deprivation’ (Dowty, 1987, cited Richmond, 1988, p12). Richmond (1988) suggests that distinguishing between forced and voluntary migrants is misleading as all human beings are constrained. He suggests a model representing two sides of a continuum; one side is proactive in relation to migration, the other reactive. Both political and economic migrants make decisions along the continuum, often in response to anxiety created by a failing social system, perceived as unable to meet subsistence needs. The majority of migrants, he suggests, fall in the middle of the continuum. What they have in common ‘is the experience of movement through networks in which information is obtained, resources mobilised and decisions taken about further journeys (Marfleet, 2006, p.223).

Turning to the Somali community, the literature describes a diversity of circumstances and trajectories that accompany border crossings. Living within a globalised, transnational world, the West, for many Somalis, is both tangibly near and familiar, offering opportunity and possibility, while at the same time, set against a context of exclusion and deterrence. Horst (2006) provides an extract from a young Somali man illustrating a globalised, ‘shrinking’ world.

*‘When I told him that our habar yar went to Edinburgh, my brother informed me of the number of the train she must have used from London. I asked him where he got such information, and he told me it is the talk in Mogadishu cafes. Well I guess it used to be the same for me as well; we used to talk about streets and places in Canada or the UK, about people who went...then, everybody would want to know how the person had made it and they all would want to try the same. But of course, after ten or twenty people manage to get through a certain route, that would be discovered and closed.’*

*(Horst, 2006, p.18).*

The circumstance in which departure from Somalia occurs influences migratory trajectories and experiences. Moret et al’s (2006) international study of 814 Somali participants, using case studies based in eight countries, examines Somali secondary migration and provides valuable insight into understanding Somali migration and onward movements. They found that those Somalis leaving at the

outbreak of the war, either following the bombing of Hargeisa in the north, or the fall of Siad Barre's regime in central and southern Somalia, left urgently, seeking sanctuary in neighbouring countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and Yemen, with little thought or planning given to onward journeys. These therefore, according to Kunz, can be regarded as acute refugees (Kunz, 1973, cited Moret et al, 2006, p.79). In contrast, those leaving later can be considered as anticipatory refugees in that they were able to a degree to plan their departure, drawing on established contacts, remittances from relatives in the West and the expertise of smugglers who knew successful migratory routes. Migratory journeys were more likely to be quicker and with fewer transit stops.

Anticipatory refugees are known to plan strategically for their journeys, with decisions as to which family members should stay and which should go to the West being a collective family decision, one taking account of not only the benefit to the individual, but that of the whole family. Single women might be chosen to migrate to protect them from rape, a common threat in the towns and refugee camps in Africa, bringing dishonour to the family name. Females are also considered to be more loyal to the family and therefore more likely to send regular remittances back home (Moret et al, 2006). Arranged marriages are viewed as a viable alternative to escaping the hardships and threat to life. Lack of sufficient finances leads sometimes to one family member being sent with a hope that others might be able to join them through a reunification family programme (Kleist, 2004). Stringent conditions for family reunification built on the premise of the nuclear family and the prioritisation of lineal or vertical ties over horizontal ones, (such as those of siblings), means that many have no means to redress the fractured family life as they had initially hoped and planned to do.

Migration trajectories highlight increasing complexity, evidencing migrants' changing motivations for movements and border crossings, including escaping intolerable refugee camp conditions, seeking better protection systems and living conditions, having better economic/employment opportunity, and reuniting with family, friends or community (Moret et al, 2006). The following, in relation to a Somali migrant, illustrates the complexity of these journeys.

*'My family are from Hargeisa but we were living in Mogadishu in 1988 when the country began to collapse. We were the wrong people in the wrong place.'*

*We were in real danger so we left for Kenya. Things were a mess there; we found enemies as well as friends. We went to Tanzania and then Zambia. It was clear we could not go home, but we did not know where*

Harsh conditions in the refugee camps, or unauthorised residence in the towns with no state protection or opportunity for employment, leads to many migrants pursuing secondary movements from these first countries. Over half the migrants in Moret et al's study (2006) did not file for asylum in the first country that they reached; this predominantly due to inadequate registration procedures and documentation processes (Moret et al, 2006). Most forced migrants from Somalia intending to come to the West, would use Kenya or Ethiopia as stopping points, spending time there to consider their options for onward journeys as well as arranging the practical needs for the journey. Saudi Arabia is known to be a common route used by migrating Somalis, being easily entered using an 'umra' visa, allowing entry for religious visits to the holy shrines. Because Saudi Arabia is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention, it does not offer protection to refugees or the promise of non-refoulement. Children also have no right to education or higher education and employment is unregulated and therefore employees are vulnerable to abuse. Moret et al (2006) suggests that employment in Saudi Arabia for Somalis is usually through illegal channels. Illegal workers face the threat of deportation back to Somalia on a daily basis (Moret et al, 2006). Some migrants return to Somalia following a number of stopping points in neighbouring countries in order to orchestrate onward journeys to the West with family members at home and abroad (Moret et al, 2006). While traditionally, these movements across borders following initial migratory settlement are classed as secondary migration, Kleist (2004) prefers to refer to them as 'continued movements', recognising that for many Somalis their journey to the West is not their first movement, nor is it necessarily their final destination. Simons (1995) states that 'the key elements of Somalism are nomadic pastoral traditions combined with clanship and Islam (Simons, 1995, cited Griffiths, 2002, p. 46).

Criteria for entering the UK legally include family reunification, resettlement and certain limited cases (Moret et al, 2006). The increasingly stringent migration regime within the EU makes crossing western borders legally extremely difficult, costly and dangerous (Kleist, 2004). Many Somalis are not able to meet the demand for documentation, either because it has not been issued or it is not recognised.

Migrants are often, therefore, in the hands of smugglers, who choose viable, known routes, sometimes leaving their charges in western airports in destinations that are either unknown to the migrant or falsely claimed to be the agreed destination. Forced migrants are obliged to register for asylum at these ‘unplanned’ destinations due to enforcement of The Dublin Convention, which states that asylum must be claimed in the first EU country of entry (The Dublin Convention, 1997, cited Kleist 2004, p.9). Moret et al’s study (2006) found that most Somalis enter Europe by air travel, with journeys continuing overland to the required destination. The use of look- alike passports from those of naturalised European Somalis was found to be the main form of entry in Moret’s sample, these being obtained either through family networks, or more commonly bought from agents. Extending requirements of the Immigration Carriers’ Liability Act 1987 however, has made air travel into Europe significantly harder for forced migrants (Van Hear, 2004).

Detailed knowledge of Somali’s trajectory movements is limited with one possible interpretation of this being that migrant strategies remain safeguarded within Somali international networks so as to facilitate future movements. Assal (No year) in his research with Somalis in Norway, also found that participants would provide very little specific detail in relation to their journeys, but would indicate that their route had been via Germany into Norway. Overcoming and out manoeuvring the restrictive deterrents enforced by the West for entry is known, however, to require determination, courage, cooperation, use of collective knowledge and resources and flexible strategies. Despite this, there is limited recognition given to the role that agency, resourcefulness and determination play in forced migratory processes. While some evidence of this can be found within the Migration literature (Moret et al, 2006; Marfleet, 2006), the Therapeutic, Trauma and wider literatures tend to examine this period, if at all, solely within a trauma/victim framework (Papadopoulos, 2001). Turton (2003), however suggests that there is a need to focus on forced migrants as purposeful actors in migratory processes, with emphasis given to understanding their active decision-making and the use of resources during this process. In doing so we are more likely to view

*‘...forced migrants as ‘ordinary people’ ...with a capacity for agency against all the odds.’*

*(Soguk, 1999, cited Turton, 2003, p.12).*

## **Women as forced migrants**

An overall criticism of the literature is the tendency to present refugees as a homogenous group(s), rather than seeking to portray individuals with different experiences, preferences and understandings of their lives (Hynes, 2003; Kohli and Mather, 2003). Some refugee communities are unevenly represented, with those considered a 'problem' being more frequently 'investigated' (Harris, 2004). This may be due to their size in number and whether or not they have established Community Associations, these being frequently used for research recruitment. Some groups are noted for their relative absence from the literature, including the disabled, gay and lesbian refugees and the elderly, caused perhaps, by the methodological challenges of researching a 'hidden community' (Roberts, 2002; Harris, 2003). Evidence related to forced migrant families is limited and primarily represented within the Therapeutic/Mental Health literature, which adopts a systemic approach to the family unit (Weine et al, 2005; Lie et al, 2004), or in literature related to children and young people, where it may provide context, highlight protective resources and roles, or make reference to its absence, such as in the case of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (Okitikpi and Aymer, 2003; Hodes, 2000).

There is a predominant focus on male refugees or the un-gendered refugee despite increasing recognition of the gendered nature of the 'refugee experience'. This leads to the homogenisation of individuals, and an essentialised 'refugee' experience and identity, rendering women's experiences invisible and silent (Reed, 2003).

Such practice can be seen both in relation to women's experiences of persecution and in women's discrimination within the asylum system itself (Dumper, 2004). Dumper (2004) states that this stems, in part, from the continued influence of the stereotypical image held of the single, male political exile, prominent within the Cold War. Reed (2003) highlights that this gender-blind focus is prevalent within Migration research/policy generally, suggesting women's experiences to be considered secondary. A mapping exercise commissioned by the Home Office identified only six academic publications produced between 1996 and 2001 which addressed the experiences of refugee women and their integration in the UK. Though some reports were excluded or not identified, the exercise serves to highlight the paucity of available information on female refugees within the UK (Home Office, 2002, *Integration: Mapping The Field*).

While acknowledging these criticisms, Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al (2008) draw our attention to an evolving literature since the 1990's in relation to women's experiences as refugees. Within this, refugee women are portrayed as victims or as members of a group who are victimized. In addition, there is a significant discourse of 'the strong refugee woman' to be found, with recognition given to the key role she plays in organising and holding the family together, as well as in resisting oppression (Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al, 2008). However, when examining this literature and the wider literature, which focuses on the accounts and experiences of women migrants in exile, there seems to be limited empirical evidence to support this notion of 'the strong refugee woman' and the factors contributing to this strength and ability to cope with daily life in exile. This thesis, in part, attempts to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge.

Gozdiak (2008) suggests that religion 'operates in compelling, competing and contradictory ways' shaping refugee women's experiences, promoting their resilience and facilitating or impeding their integration (Gozdiak, 2008, p.185). We have however, very limited evidence of the role religion plays in women's lives, even though studies demonstrate the importance of religion to the refugee (Maybe, 1994; De Voe, 1997, cited Gozdiak, 2008). Women's experiences and engagement with religion is suggested to be different from that of men's. For example, under adverse circumstances, women can be seen to absorb themselves in religious rituals such as weddings and naming ceremonies for babies, while men stay focused on the conflicts and issues related to their adversity. Thus, Gozdiak (2008) concluded from her observations of Kosovar Albanians at Fort Dix, United States, that 'the men prayed and looked back, while the women prayed and kept walking forward (Gozdziak, 2008, p.189). Religious ritual is evidenced to play a role in trauma healing, with Weillmeier (1994), suggesting its ability to create 'sacred time and place' in which the past, present and future are brought together allowing individuals to step outside the reality of everyday life (Weillmeier, 1994, cited Gozdiak, 2008, p.190). For many Muslim women, Islam and the religious practices they adopt can be seen to reinforce their sense of ethnic identity and culture, marking their distinctiveness from the host society, as well as creating a sense of connectedness with other Muslim ethnic minority women (Abdulrahim, 1993). As regards Somali women in Australia, McMichael's (2002) ethnographic account found that Islam provided a thread for the women's lives, enabling them to overcome discontinuity and fracture. Islamic practice

and ideology also gave them a ‘home’, which could be carried ‘over time and space’ (McMichael, 2002, p.172). However, McMichael (2002) emphasises the importance of not essentialising ‘the Muslim’, and urges the need to recognise and allow for diversity in understanding behaviour.

While religion can be seen to be a source of support and encouragement serving to strengthen women in exile, it is also argued by some to undermine and threaten women’s resources for coping. Abdulrahim (1993) suggests that Muslim women, representing the distinctive public and political face of Islam, have been targeted by Western societies as a means by which to attack minority cultures. Popular argument suggests that unless Muslim women are emancipated, they cannot achieve integration into Western society. Experiencing a sense of marginalisation from host communities, for many Muslims, Islam has taken on a new significance and contemporary meanings in exile. Women can be seen to play a key role within this, being both used as a measure by which Sharia’ or Islamic law is adhered to, as well as becoming part of a mechanism by which group distinctiveness is controlled and maintained (Buijs, 1993). Bhachu (1993) however, challenges Western assumptions that certain cultural forms are oppressive, suggesting that some cultural practices can be liberating and empowering for women. The relationship that women have with ‘organised’ religion opposed to their personal experiences of spirituality and faith, adds additional complexity to this debate, as Gozdziaik’s (2008) quotation from a refugee woman attending a Refugee Women’s Network conference in America, illustrates:

*‘The solace we derive from our faith is one thing, the unequal treatment and oppression experienced at the hands of an imam, a batiushka or a priest is something else.’*

*(Gozdziak, 2008, p.189)*

Arguably, there is a gap in our knowledge in relation to the role religion plays in refugee women’s lives and how it operates within day-to-day family life. While the evidence suggests Islam contributes to enabling women to move forward from the past, as well as helping them reconnect with and recreate that which they have lost, it also appears to bring additional burdens and constraints as they seek to live up to the religious expectations placed upon them to be ‘ideal women’ (Abdulrahim, 1993). Only by uncovering ‘the subtle shades of meaning and perceptions with which

migrant women view the world', can a new and fuller understanding be gained of how religion might contribute to the way women manage their lives in exile (Buijs, 1993, p.12).

It is suggested that the commonality of the refugee experience is the forced uprooting from the familiar patterns of everyday life and the struggle to recover control and a sense of continuity with the past (Eastmond, 1993, p.36). This does not necessarily mean that refugees are resistant to change; rather, there is a need for change to be integrated in culturally meaningful ways. Changes in refugee roles and identities, evidenced in the activities and rhythms of daily life in exile, suggest that on the whole, men and women have tended to respond differently to the challenges of reconciling their lives in the West with that of their past. Women's role within the home is recognised as a contributory factor to their better adaptation than men, with women's responsibilities for maintaining household routines and childcare being seen to provide them with occupation and purpose. A sense of contentment with their domestic role, in sharp contrast to men's status-driven need to find similar employment to that left behind, also is suggested as a factor accounting for the different gendered responses to adaptation (Buijs, 1993). Domestic roles, though, can be seen to have undergone transformation. For example Palestinian women in West Germany lost the traditional support of extended family within the home in addition to having to cope with added chores (Abdulrahim. 1993). Despite the women's increased workload, Palestinian men did not contribute to the domestic sphere of life even though they were unemployed.

For many of the Palestinian women in West Germany their predominantly domestic identity contrasted with their previous experiences of having outside employment in the camps of Lebanon. This was now seen as incompatible with women's domestic and childrearing responsibilities. The change was perceived to bring benefits to both the women and the Palestinian community as a whole, serving to shelter and protect them from the public world of the host society (Abdulrahim, 1993). In contrast, some migrant women have engaged in outside employment and this can be seen to bring both advantages and disadvantages to women's lives. Chilean women in the United States were forced to take on outside employment, as a dual income was considered essential in order for families to survive. Though employment was a new experience for many of them, benefits were seen in the form of acquiring both new skills and the host language. Unlike the Palestinian men in

West Germany, the Chilean men took on new roles and responsibilities within the home including childcare. However, Chilean women still experienced an increase in their daily workload. The changes in gender responsibilities led to a wider questioning by women concerning the privileges that men traditionally enjoyed (Eastmond, 1993). Eastmond (1993) concludes that the Chilean women were able to reconcile their private and public roles and responsibilities with the traditional expectations of them as mothers.

Sarah Cox's (2003) study of Somali families in the UK also emphasised the central role that women undertook as mothers and housewives, their strength and resistance to adversity evident within the challenging circumstances in which they carried out this role. She found from her study that the women:

*'...created welcoming new homes in sub-standard accommodation among people who neither spoke the language nor shared their religion...made do on subsistence level benefits and coped with pressures that destroyed relationships, and left them to bring up children alone.'*

(Cox, 2003, p.38-39).

Somali women migrants and refugees living in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, were largely seen to be employed in outside work, though mothers with young children sometimes remained full time within the home (Summerfield, 1993). It was suggested that outside employment by the host community contributed to their overall independence and the sense of control that they experienced over their lives. The requirement to be competent in English, both by the host employer as well as in managing public activities such as shopping, can be seen as a significant factor in aiding women's adjustment to Western life (Eastmond, 1993). With Somali men generally being reluctant to take on low status paid work or to help shoulder the workload for women in the home, women complained of the overload of responsibility placed upon them, with some believing that being single might somewhat relieve the burden upon them (Eastmond, 1993).

A common thread throughout the accounts of refugee/ migrant women's experiences of outside employment is that women are largely constrained to work within the lower paid, unskilled sector, limited in choice by a lack of marketable skills, a poor acquisition of the language, and the host's employment regulations. In analysing wider social structures that may contribute to this, Abdulrahim (1993),

questions the role of education, employment and the state, in confining the Palestinian women in West Berlin to a private identity. Phizacklea (1983), in a similar vein, identifies racial discrimination and/or legal controls as impacting on migrant women's employment in Europe, serving to ensure women's continued subordination to men (Phizacklea, 1983, cited Buijs, 1993, p.5). While outside employment can be seen to contribute to women's ability to adjust within the host country, many women are limited by constraints, created arguably by both the State and/ or the needs and ideals of the migrant community itself.

Though the roles and responsibilities of migrant women can be seen to take different 'paths', there is a sense that their daily lives are frequently busy, and for many, over burdened with responsibility. Both domestic and public roles can be seen to bring with them different opportunities and benefits that enable women to manage the challenges of living in exile and of getting on with their lives. At the same time, there appears to be a cost, either in terms of managing a 'double shift', that of home and workplace and the tensions this is seen to create in gender relationships, or there is a lack of integration and sense of isolation which some experience within the host society. Nevertheless, there is evidence of transformations within women's roles and daily activities, reinforcing the notion that their past lives cannot be merely replicated, but rather, need to be recreated in culturally meaningful and acceptable ways.

It is suggested that women refugees and migrants appear more able to manage the challenges of living in exile than men, evidencing both adaptability and resilience (Colson, 1991, cited Buijs, 1993, p.4; Eastmond, 1993). The notion of women's strength and agency is implied and this will be further examined to see how these concepts can be understood to operate within forced migrants' lives. The position of women within the exiled family is one marked by changing power relations as family roles and responsibilities are renegotiated and transformed in the light of exile. For some women this can be seen to lead to their increased status and control within the home, with factors such as their new economic and social responsibilities contributing to this change. For others, their agency and independence is undermined, particularly when isolated, working from home, having little English, and dependent upon children and/or husband for daily living (Buijs, 1993). Bangladeshi women living in Tower Hamlets, had little education, couldn't speak English, and worked within the home, being dependent on their men folk for simple daily chores to be carried out (Summerfield, 1993). In contrast, Somali women migrants of Tower Hamlets,

London, demonstrate their independence and ability to get on with and manage daily life largely independently of their seaman husbands. By gaining employment with the host society they secured their financial independence. This as well as the supportive Somali women's networks they established in which friendship and information could be shared, were recognised as significant factors in the women's relative independence. These in turn contributed to their better mental health than the Bangladeshi women (Summerfield, 1993). Immigrant context and cultural background are, therefore, important considerations when examining notions of strength and agency in forced migrant women's lives (Buijs, 1993).

Both the Somali women in Tower Hamlets and the Chilean women in the United States were accustomed to their independence and used to coping with daily family life on their own. For the Somali women, their husbands were often at sea for long periods, while the Chilean men had been imprisoned before migrating. Moussa's (1993) research suggests that women's resistance and ability to get on with life and survive stems from their pre-migratory experiences, and remains 'a reservoir of strength and power that they consciously or unconsciously are able to draw upon' in exile (Moussa, 1993, cited Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, p.6). Gender role tensions within the family, created by women's increasing sense of confidence and skills as they successfully negotiated public and private spheres of life, enabled them to resist demands to return to and meet the traditional expectations and ideals of 'the dependent, good woman'. In some communities, this contributed to instances of marital disharmony, domestic violence and divorce. Summerfield (1993) highlights the prevalence of divorce within the Somali community, stating that the majority of women she had met while working with the community in Tower Hamlets had divorced and remarried at least once. Women's economic independence as well as the community's acceptance and support given to single mothers, are seen as key factors in this trend. In contrast, Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlets, who were economically dependent upon their husbands and for whom divorce carried stigma within their community, tended to stay with their husbands, even though they might be subjected to domestic violence.

While there is evidence of women's strength and agency in negotiating daily life in the West, the evidence suggests that some women are disempowered and deskilled in exile. Though others are portrayed as 'strong women', it does not suggest that they do not also experience vulnerability. Colson (1991) highlights refugee

women's tendency to be affected by stress over issues related to family events and relationships, while men, are seen to be vulnerable to stress as a result of worrying over money and status (Colson, 1991, cited Buijs, 1993). Overall, an impression is gained from the literature that power relations, notions of strength and agency operate in complex, diverse and sometimes contradictory ways within forced migrant women's lives and that of their families.

A corporate way of life is a significant feature of many refugee/ migrant communities in the West. A shared sense of survivorship, a commitment to return home, as well as a need to retain a distinctive identity and separateness from the host society, can all be seen as contributing to the formation and effectiveness of strong, cohesive, supportive networks (Eastmond, 1993). Women benefitted from these networks both psychologically and socially, gaining friendship, protection from racism, social control over their children and men folk, as well as chaperoning availability (Abdulrahim, 1993). Corporate living also reflected an ideology where by collective identity, solidarity, and simple lifestyle characterised and personified community resistance to their absorption by the host society (Eastmond, 1993). Such ideology did not necessarily stem from past practices in the homeland, but as in the case of the Chilean families in the United States, reflected idealised patterns of political practice and ideological Puritanism (Eastmond, 1993).

Transformations also took place within the corporate model of living bringing both losses and gains for the women. For the Chilean families in the United States, the increasing self-sufficiency of households and greater dependency of married couples on each other led to family life becoming more individualised, with the community providing merely socialising opportunity for weekends. Though the loss of the close networks increased some women's sense of isolation, the monitoring and controlling role of the community on its members was significantly reduced, which they found pleasing (Eastmond, 1993).

Corporate living can be seen to bring a number of benefits to women's lives, providing very practical support in helping women manage daily life as well as promoting a sense of safety and familiarity within the cultural alienness of the host society. But on a much deeper, ideological level, for some it reassuringly represented the strength of their cultural, political and ethnic identity and their successful resistance to contamination by Western values.

## Conclusion

This literature review has outlined the context and nature of forced migration within the UK, highlighting its contested and evolving nature. The shaping and representation of the forced migrant identity has been presented through the examination of societal discourses and labelling, and in response to and as a result of legislation and policy. A critique of the ‘forced migrant’ concept has highlighted the need to recognise the messiness, complexity and diversity of migratory movements and of the limitations of attempting to label and categorise ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ migrants. The Somali community, with their ‘onward’ journeying and traditional nomadic cultural framework has been used to exemplify some of the discussion.

A criticism of the disparity between the competing discourses: the problematised/vulnerable forced migrant and in contrast, the competent, active agency of some, has been highlighted, suggesting the failure to recognise and develop an understanding of forced migrants’ strengths and agency in negotiating and contributing to daily life. While the vulnerable nature and identity of the forced migrant is not refuted, or sought to be eliminated it is argued that there is a need for these two paradigms to be rebalanced, by highlighting the strengths and assets that forced migrants use in negotiating and overcoming the challenges and obstacles in their lives and by examining the contribution society (policy makers, practitioners, communities) makes in facilitating this successful negotiation. Exploring a wider literature base, and the emerging literature on women in exile, there is to be found a significant discourse of the ‘strong woman’, though notions of strength, power relations and agency can be seen to operate in diverse and complex ways as women’s lives, their roles and responsibilities, are transformed in exile. Somali women can be seen to carry a very powerful image of strength and independence, with factors such as religion, corporate living, daily responsibilities and activities deemed to contribute to their ability to manage life in exile. This study intends to explore further how strength operates within Somali women’s daily lives in the UK. It seeks both to build on the available evidence and to identify the diversity of meanings and experiences that may be present among the Somali women in relation to their understanding of their daily lives. The concept of resilience provides a framework with which to explore both issues of strength and vulnerability. Its ability to accommodate the dualism and complexity of the forced migrant identity, one that is both strong and

vulnerable, makes it a valuable tool in this task. The following chapter seeks to outline the conceptual framework, document its relevance and use within the Forced Migration literature, and state the position the researcher will take in using the concept.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESILIENCE

### Introduction

The resilience concept has emerged from a variety of academic disciplines reflected by the diverse range of epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches associated with and contributing to it. The result is a contested, theoretically ambiguous, conflictingly evidenced and (arguably), misinterpreted concept. In spite of this, it draws increasing academic interest, remains popular and identifiable among professionals, and can be seen as providing a flexible, practical and positive focus for research and practice. That being said, adopting a ‘slippery’, questionably robust concept such as resilience for this study’s framework requires justification. Hebb’s (1958) pragmatic stance that a theory’s value is determined by its ability for us to take action, or think about the issues, rather than if it is correct, provides one possible line of defence for its use, albeit a contested one (Hebb, 1958, cited Gordon and Wang, 1994, p.192). This chapter seeks to confirm the pertinence and appropriateness of the use of the resilience concept for this study, its centrality in helping one think about the issues concerning the forced migrant identity, of challenging the literature’s dominant portrayal, and in identifying future direction and action in relation to policy and practice. The developing concept, its competing approaches and emphases will be outlined and critiqued enabling the author to present and defend her adopted position and selected application of the concept. The review will highlight the relevance of resilience and ways in which the concept has been, or can be, applied to that of the forced migrant.

### History and development of the resilience concept

The resilience concept has a history with diverse and contrasting routes in mythology, fable, and science (Glantz and Sloboda, 1999). For example, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century American stories captured the heroic antics of Horatio Alger, who displaying pride, energy and initiative, overcame adversity and came to personify the strivings of the American people to achieve despite facing ‘the odds’ (Garmezy, 1991; Rigsby, 1994). Within the sciences, studies conducted in the 1970’s involving both schizophrenic patients and children vulnerable to psychopathology identified atypical adaptive outcomes and trajectories (Garmezy, 1971, cited Garmezy, 1987; Garmezy, 1974; Garmezy and Steitman, cited Luthar et al, 2000). The emerging resilience

concept led by developmental psychologists, focused predominantly on populations with identified social or psychological pathology, and sought to identify individual traits and coping styles that characterised the child as hardy, invulnerable, stress resistant or resilient, as they came to be labelled (Gordon and Song, 1994; Gilgun, 1996; Waller, 2000). While this focus invaluabley challenged the pathological, deficit approach adopted in understanding and responding to certain individuals and communities, it was criticised for its blame culture towards those failing to meet the ‘successful’ criteria along with its failure to recognise that no child or individual is invulnerable (Moriarty, 1976. cited Gilgun, 1996; Ryan, 1971, cited Waller, 2000).

As the search for factors leading to atypical outcomes in individuals continued using predominantly positivistic, quantitative approaches and methods, the developing concepts of risk and protection formed both integral and separate fields to the resilience concept. Notions of statistical risk and protection took precedence, progressing from identifying single risk and protective factors in the individual, to recognising the effects of cumulative risk and protection and the dynamic relationship between these factors, the individual and their environment. Limitations to the proliferate body of new knowledge was an inability to identify the processes, mechanisms and meanings given to risk and protective processes, or the ability to take account of contextual variety in the forms of class, gender, race and ethnicity. While initial studies provided a substantive foundation for the concept, (being referred to or drawn upon extensively by other disciplines), psychopathology appeared unable to employ research approaches that captured subjective meanings of risk, despite articulated intentions to do so, along with their failure to draw on the knowledge and expertise of disciplines that could lead to others continuing where they had left off (Gilgun, 1996; Jessor, 1993; Burack, 1997). Contextualist and phenomelogical approaches undertaken by such fields as Social Work, Family Therapy and Health Promotion have used qualitative methods to explain ‘why’ some individuals were resilient despite facing adversity, and the role of the individual’s environment in contributing to that outcome (Ungar, 2006; Luthar et al, 2000; Gilgun, 2004; Fraser, 1997; Gordon and Song, 1994). Thoits (1995) and others regarded this work as complementary to the predominantly quantitative studies previously undertaken, but also argued that qualitative studies provided a distinctive and essential element to understanding and operationalising the concepts (Ungar, 2003; Waller, 2001).

Extensions of the resilience concept can be seen in relation to its application to the study of families, adults and communities, as well as the business world and institutions (Daly, 1999; Walsh, 1998 cited Fraser et al, 1999; Doron, 2005). A small, but significant area of research, (particularly in relation to African-American immigrants, aboriginal American families, Asian-Americans and Hawaiian and Hispanic/Latino families) has developed, seeking to understand cultural meanings of risk, protection and resilience, questioning whether, these interlocking concepts can be understood universally, or whether as Guerra and others argue, (Guerra, 1999; McCubbin et al, 1999; Ogbu, 1981; Ungar, 2006). they need to be understood in relation to distinct groups of people.

The progression of the initial Garmeziian notion of resilience over the last forty years can be seen to demonstrate the developing questioning and understanding that knowledge brings, leading to new conceptualisations. Not all viewed this 'progress' positively, with critiques questioning the scientific value of the body of work, calls for serious, urgent attention to theorising and terminology, and suggestions that the concept has served its purpose and should retire (Luthar et al, 2000; Rigsby, 1994; Kaplan, 1999; Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). For example, Bartelt (1994), bemoaned the failure of empirical evidence to meet the concept's need and the destructive consequences of subjectivity:

*'...Resilience, as a concept is difficult, if not impossible to empirically specify, and is too easily conflated with measures of situational success or failure. It suffers from its roots in subjective interpretations of biographical events, and it is too closely dependent on observer-imputed stresses and resources for dealing with stressors.'*

*(Bartelt, 1994, cited Kaplan, 1999, p.22).*

Windle (1999) highlighted the disarray and bedlam to be found within the field:

*'First it would be beneficial to the field if greater effort were directed toward some empirically-based taxonomy of risk, protective factors and resiliency processes... There is no organising framework for integrating studies, for evaluating common and unique findings across different subject populations, variable domains, or spacing intervals, or to study the impact of alternative operational definitions and classifications procedures on the identification of resilient individuals.'*

*(Windle, 1999, p.174).*

Despite criticism, the concept has consistently provided a framework that challenges how we view and respond to individuals, groups and communities in ways other than through a problem lens. Other research areas also provide this, such as the developing fields of Health and Wellness, the Positive Psychology movement and the Strengths Approach in Social Work. Yet, resilience remains distinctive in so much as risks and adversity remain integral to the concept. Without the presence of risk or adversity, resilience is redundant.

The following summarises the breadth of the resilience concept's study and application within the resiliency literature. These underline the integral nature of the risk and protection concepts to resilience.

- The statistical identification of risk in children, young people and adults: illuminating risk mechanisms and risk chains, risk in relation to gender, risk in relation to ethnicity.
- Statistical protective factors in relation to the individual, family, community, culture and ethnic identity including: protective chains, compensatory protective factors, buffering protective effects.
- The identification of assets and the role of agency: understanding how personal attributes develop, such as the ability to empathise with others.
- An eco systemic approach to resilience: considers the socio-political context of the individual, the resilience and analysis of oppression, resilience and culture.
- Resilience in relation to policy and practice: to inform policy, practice initiatives, treatment models, and primary prevention. To develop skill-building for life and social skills.
- A social constructionist approach: the meanings people give to adversity, the role of understanding and interpretation in resilient processes.
- The development of resiliency models: The Resiliency Model of Family Stress Adjustment (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1993, 1996).
- Family resiliency: family system characteristics, specific relationships within the family.
- Resilience used as a metaphor.
- Community resilience.

## Resilience: key features

Having outlined the historical development of the concept, how might its key features, as provided by the contributions of a broad range of disciplines, research orientations and literatures be summarised? Central to the resilience concept is its contested, ambiguous, and contradictory nature, both conceptually and in its application. This reflects the diversity of its contributors, the rapidity and breadth of its development, its theoretical and practical malleability and its imperviousness to criticism and challenge. The competing definitions of the concept alone arguably demonstrate greater value attached by researchers to defending their theoretical/disciplinary standpoints and positions than to attending to the theoretical integrity and cohesiveness of the concept. Despite this, a consistent and powerful thread running through the various definitions available is that resilience occurs in the face of adversity, and that a ‘strengths’ opposed to a ‘deficit’ approach to understanding and responding to people, families and communities should be taken (Ungar, 2006).

The concept’s ability to be incorporated into, or underpinned by, different theoretical positions, makes it flexible and attractive to a wide range of disciplines. Structural-Organisational theory (Sroufe, 1979; Cicchetti and Tucker, 1994); Ecological theory, (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Werner and Smith, 1989; Waller, 2001, Gilgun, 1996); Critical Theory (Seccombe, 2002; Mederer, 1999) and Social Constructionism (Ungar, 2004) represent some of the theoretical stances used in relation to the operation of the concept. While the strengths and appropriateness of these theories are strongly contested between resilience scholars, a stumbling block for the concept has been the lack of reciprocal exchange of theory and knowledge between the disciplines, along with a failure to adopt an inter-disciplinary approach to its study (Gilgun, 1996).

No universally agreed theoretical criteria for determining resilience have been established, with some scholars even arguing the impossibility of this. Daly (1999) in her qualitative study of the effects of infertility on couples concluded:

*‘Were some more resilient than others? ... The answer is a fully equivocal “No”! ... To say they were more resilient would be contingent on setting a standard of successful adaptability. In my view this is not possible.’*  
(Daly, 1999, p.34).

Tensions between the highly successful adaptation criteria and the competence based definitions (in which success is based on better outcomes ‘than would be predicted according to normative expectations for adaptation in a particular set of adverse circumstances’), are evident across the disciplines. There is conflict regarding notions of measured outcomes and behaviours and subjective outcomes and behaviours (Fraser et al, 1999, p.137; Gordon and Wang, 1994). Gilgun (1999) summarises the different interpretations and criteria for assessing resilience by suggesting that it can be assessed ‘as an outcome, an adaptation, or a form of coping and can be conceptualised in abstract, general terms or to specific developmental domains’ (Gilgun, 1999, p. 44). Differing criteria for acquiring the resilience label explains the disparate frequency or expectancy in which resilience occurs. Overall, the literature seems to indicate that people are able to overcome and recover from forms of adversity to varying degrees, though there remains a lack of consensus over the effects of multiple, cumulative risks and adversity, and the question of long and short term perspectives of success.

Lastly, the concept’s practice/policy orientation and its resonance with both professionals and lay people are lastly highlighted. Garmezy, in an early paper, highlighted the concept’s significant potential to benefit the lives of individuals, along with its ability to refocus policy (Garmezy, 1971, cited in Garmezy, 1987, p.159). Policies and practices that contribute to outcomes of resilience can be seen to be wide-ranging, are often incorporated into much broader models of working, and may be subsumed either explicitly or implicitly under an umbrella of objectives that promote competence, cohesion and health. Dispute is evident within the literature as to how best resilience might be promoted, with arguments focusing on whether efforts should be directed at promoting assets and protective resources universally, or known risks instead being targeted, along with promoting assets within these risk groups. Pollard et al, (1999), Lietz, (2006) and Gilgun, (1996) argue the former stance, with Kalil and Kunz, (1999) and Fraser et al, (1999) supporting the latter position. In the highest levels of risk, protection is either non-existent or fails to counteract the ‘poisonous effects of extreme adversity’ (Fraser et al, 1999, p.140). Glantz and Sloboda (1999) introduce a sobering note to the warring parties:

*‘Prevention and treatment interventions based on poorly constructed notions of resilience or ill-conceived versions of the somewhat related*

*notions of coping/adaptation are likely to be very limited in their effectiveness.'*  
(Glantz and Sloboda, 1999, p.118).

Contrasting the formal policy/professional arenas is the argument that the natural resources for promoting resilience lie in the everyday lives and actions of individuals and communities (Saleebey, 2006; Schofield and Beek, 2005; Werner and Smith, 1992). Masten (2001) eloquently captures the arguably innate ordinariness of the phenomena:

*'Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and their communities.'*

(Masten, 2001, p.235).

Identifying the key features of the resilience concept serves to highlight the complexity and contentiousness of the resilience field. Having taken an overview of this diverse and contested concept, its contribution to our understanding of the needs of forced migrants, and an assessment of its strengths, limitations and potential for application in relation to this field, the Forced Migration literature will now be explored.

### **Understanding resilience within the Forced Migration literature**

The presence of the resilience concept within the Forced Migration literature can be understood as one representing the dissenting voice of the present dominant pathological and deficit models which embody the forced migrant identity. It responds to and facilitates a call for a new approach to the study of forced migrants (Muecke, 1992; Summerfield, 1999; Watters, 2001). The construct can be seen to be used both explicitly, either taking centre stage or merely in reference, or, more usually, implicitly, immersed within a non-pathological/deficit approach to the forced migrant. Resilience is also frequently inferred as scholars map the adversities and daily struggles encountered by forced migrants. Though many of the links found to the concept merely reflect facets of the concept's orientation, theoretical construction, or sentiment, as opposed to a construct clearly defined by the authors themselves, one gains an overall impression from the literature of a significant challenge to the

existing dominant paradigm, one united by its focus on strengths rather than deficits (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005, p. 399). Alongside this, the integral concepts of risk and protection are also evidenced, with particular emphasis given to issues of risk and adversity.

The resilience concept features in diverse ways within the refugee literature.

These are summarised below:

- It features as central to the study or paper, making explicit reference to the concept, and/or alongside similar constructs such as strengths, coping, and survival.
- It emerges as a significant theme in the findings of a study.
- There is brief/scant reference to it. It may also be highlighted as an area to be explored.
- It can be identified as significantly representing the resilience construct, or elements of the construct, for example, risk or protection, but there is no direct reference to the resilience concept.
- The reader is able to infer something related to resilience.

The resilience concept is unevenly distributed throughout the literature, being most prominent in relation to studies involving children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This might not be surprising given the concept's historical routes and continuing influential traditional focus. It appears least prominently in papers focusing on asylum and asylum seekers. Here the emphasis is on highlighting, mapping and understanding the problems encountered as a result of the asylum process.

The conceptual and theoretical disputes highlighted within the resilience literature appear far removed from the concept's use within the Forced Migration literature, suggesting its practical application and relevance to the field supersedes its contentiousness and theoretical limitations. While occasional reference is made to the concept's fluidity and contested nature, few authors feel the need to define how they have conceptualised and operationalised the concept. Those attempting to do so provide definitions drawn from the work of developmental psychopathologists emphasising competency and skills, and successful adaptation and recovery, therefore reinforcing a traditional notion of individual resilience (Rutter, cited Goldberg and

Huxley, 1992, p.100, cited Watters, 2001, p.1712; Garmezy, 1991, cited Muecke, 1992, p.520; Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000; Fraser et al, 1999). The author's choice of references may signify an intention to identify key significant contributors to the resilience field rather than any allegiance to the stance itself, and indeed, these authors can be seen to adopt and develop a variety of approaches to the concept within their work.

While there is a strong focus on the resilient label being attached to 'the refugee individual' and the broader, collective refugee identity, an ecological stance can be seen to be taken in which forced migrant resiliency is understood as interrelated and inter-dependent upon the wider societal environment in which the individual is placed, the risk factors to which they are exposed, and the protective factors they have access to (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.514). In a study aimed at improving services to young asylum seekers and refugee children, Warwick et al, (2006) viewed outside environmental stresses experienced by refugee children, such as discrimination, racism and trauma caused by forced displacement, as potentially undermining their resilience. A nurturing environment, with sensitive, responsive services was seen as essential in promoting recovery, adaptation and wellbeing in relation to these risks. Watters (2001) in his critique of mental health services and their pathologising tendencies towards refugees' experiences of trauma, highlights the effects of UK policy on refugees, in which control over their own lives has been continuously eroded, making them vulnerable to mental ill health. Particular reference is made to the voucher system and 'no choice' dispersal policy introduced by the Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999 (Home Office, 1999). Resilience is, he argues, regarded as being dependent on experiencing 'secure, stable, affectionate responses, and an experience of success and achievement'; unlikely features to be found in a hostile society in which asylum policies produce 'profound dislocation and anxiety to people already facing multiple losses' (Goldberg and Huxley, 1992, cited Watters, 2001, p.1712; Sales, 2005, p.456). Whittaker et al, (2005) in their study of young Somali asylum seeker and refugee women, found the women resilient, attributing it, in part, to the support they sought from family, friends and services. Characteristics of the individual, along with protective environments, were highlighted as mediating experienced risks.

Despite some evidence within the literature to support an ecological perspective of forced migrants and resilience, there is a tendency to view and respond

to forced migrants independently of the environments they inhabit. Mental health, physical ill health, unemployment, under-employment, poverty, ghetto-like tendencies and religious fundamentalism are identified as problems and behaviours attributed to the individual rather than understood as problems contributed to, and exacerbated by individuals' environments. An ecological approach seeks to understand individual's behaviour and experiences through understanding the wider context of their lives.

Gilligan, (2004) states:

*'The degree of resilience displayed by a person in a certain context may be said to be related to the extent to which that context has elements that nurture this resilience.'*

*(Gilligan, 2004, cited Ungar, 2006, p. 4).*

Taking this argument further, Ungar, (2006) advocates the need to address the inherent potential blame culture of the resilience concept, by adopting an explicit position in which a dual assessment of both the individual and their environment is undertaken in relation to resilient outcomes. It would no longer be the forced migrant alone who would be deemed as having passed or failed the resiliency 'test', but also that of their environment, the extent of its resilience nurturing resources and the access individuals and communities have to those resources.

There is some (though limited) evidence to support the use and understanding of forced migrant resiliency as a culturally defined and influenced phenomenon. Two studies can be identified as focusing on this as a central theme. Goodman (2004) and Whittaker et al (2005) highlight from their qualitative studies the unique cultural meanings, significance and processes attached to participants' experiences of adversity and protection. For Whittaker et al's participants, the Somali women's attitude to life and its challenges was to 'just get on with it'. This reflected a cultural need to keep up appearances, conceal psychological distress and association with other's distress, as well as the need to manage concealment about their western behaviour and attitudes. Goodman's (2004) study of fourteen unaccompanied young asylum seekers from Sudan settled within the USA, explored the youths' attributed meanings and understanding of their experiences and survival. The author identified culturally-based coping skills that emphasised collective identity, emotional suppression and an acceptance of God's will, concluding that resilience, rather than

being viewed as an individual process or trait, should be recognised as a culturally based phenomenon (Goodman, 2004). Both studies highlight the need to understand and value cultural meanings given to experiences of adversity, protection and resilient processes, so emphasising the concept's contextual nature and variability.

Challenges to the pathological/western medicalisation of forced migrant trauma found within the mental health literature and elsewhere, also echo this cultural stance. Authors (Burnett and Peel, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2001; Summerfield, 1999), argue the need to understand the cultural meanings attributed to trauma and suffering, identifying, supporting and facilitating, when necessary, those factors that aid recovery for the individual and their community, as well as recognising an individual's capacity to recover, along with acknowledging communities' natural resources to promote recovery. Burnett and Peel (2006) for example highlight the deep shame within some cultures associated with sexual violence to men and women, leading to rejection by family and community. The tendency to label forced migrants with medical diagnoses, such as post- traumatic stress disorder when showing common reactions to experienced trauma demonstrates a failure to recognise not only the contextual meanings given to the trauma but also the role of factors such as experiencing independence, having good social support and economic/social activity as central to recovery (Burnett and Peel, 2006; Summerfield, 1999). Papadopoulos (2002) suggests an alternative interpretation of silence in refugee lives. Rather than viewing it as a maladaptive response to recovery from trauma requiring therapeutic intervention, it could be understood as the individual's purposeful silence, allowing for healing to take place in their life (Papadopoulos, 2002 cited Kohli, 2006, p.710). Despite these challenges to the way trauma is interpreted and responded to by Western Mental Health services, the forced migrant continues to be researched and treated with a focus on symptomatology, medical intervention and individual recovery.

### **An anti-oppressive framework for resilience**

Recognising and responding to the undermining effects of oppression and structural inequalities on an individual's ability to access resources and make resilient choices, is argued by some to be key to promoting change and better outcomes for all (Seccombe, 2002; Jessor, 1993; Anderson 2001 cited Cowger et al, 2006). Power and control are seen as defining the parameters of how and to what extent one can adapt to

adversity. Seccombe asks: 'Can families be expected to become resilient without significant structural change in society?' (Seccombe, 2002, p.389). A focus on racism and discrimination, denial of human rights, poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion is scattered across the Forced Migration literature, taking either centre stage or merely brief reference being made, contributing to what can be regarded as an anti-oppressive resilience framework.

Coker (2001), Cole and Robinson (2003), Harris (2004), and Watters (2001), highlight the discriminating practices of Health and Education services in relation to forced migrants. Lynn and Lea's (2003) study examining the social discourses found within the popular press in relation to asylum seekers, suggested that the hostility evidenced was such that they likened it to the emergence of a 'new apartheid'; terminology that certainly portrays the notion of extreme, organised hatred, but which also arguably requires critical assessment and consideration as to its appropriateness within the given context'. Mallock and Stanley (2005), Sales (2002), (2005), and Kralj and Goldberg (2005), focus on asylum and immigration policy, highlighting its discriminatory, exclusionary and stigmatising nature, along with its failure to recognise human rights.

Looking specifically at employment, Stewart (2003) in her study of both employed and unemployed refugee doctors and their narratives of employment, found that they experienced discrimination at every stage of the employment process. Papadopoulos et al's study (2004) of Ethiopian forced migrants in relation to migration and adaptation, found that 27% felt that they had experienced discrimination in gaining employment. Poverty, social isolation and inadequate housing in areas of high deprivation also are highlighted, with Aldous et al (1999) suggesting that these hardships are accentuated for refugees over and above other marginalised groups due to communication problems, social isolation and the loss of status and material goods in their country of origin. (Burnett and Peel , 2001; Lie, 2002; Doyal and Anderson, 2005). The corrosive, lifelong effects of insidious, chronic risk with its undermining of wellbeing and positive adaptation highlighted within the resiliency literature, is often overshadowed in studies focusing on forced migrants. There is a tendency in these studies to focus on traumatic events of war, for example torture and persecution, as opposed to the daily struggle and grind of living and adapting in a hostile, racist host society (Schroon and Parson, 2002; Glantz and Sloboda, 1999).

Highlighting oppression on forced migrants' lives suggests that researchers and practitioners have adopted an advocacy role, recognising a need to challenge and propose reform so that the odds might be changed for forced migrants as opposed to being beaten by them (Ungar, 2006; Walsh, 1998, cited Seccombe, 2002). Evidence of resilience is not the purpose of the writing, rather the need to be responsive to the cumulative effects of multiple oppression that paralyses, and renders the forced migrant powerless.

There is also evidence that suggests forced migrants can be resistant to oppressive circumstances and are able to challenge and sometimes overcome the damaging effects of structural inequality in their lives if empowered and supported (Anderson, 2001, cited Cowger et al, 2006, p.100). Watters (2001) highlights the active agency of refugees to work with and challenge service providers to promote alternative, more appropriate representations of their identity and needs, stating that 'attention should be given to the resistance of refugees and the ways in which they respond to experiences, challenging the external forces bearing upon them' (Watters, 2001, p.1709). Tomlinson and Egan (2002) draw attention to forced migrants' persistent determination and struggle to find employment.

Forced migrants are placed as equal partners through participatory, qualitative approaches in research, recognising their agency, expertise and the need to hear their voice on matters concerning their lives and communities (Papadopoulos et al 2004; Aruni et al, 2002; Chatty et al, 2005; Weine et al, 2005; Green et al, 2005; Doyal and Anderson (2005); McMichael, 2002. Practices such as that highlighted by Kohli and Mather (2006) of a multi agency project aimed at supporting young refugees, demonstrates how professionals seek to help forced migrants' children make sense of the past, identify and use new skills, and establish networks of support and information, so building on the resilience evident amidst their vulnerability. There are a number of studies that attempt to incorporate forced migrant perceptions and experiences into practitioner training. For example, Warwick et al's (2006) project with refugee and asylum seeking children sought to incorporate the children's experiences about settlement into Social Work training. Watts (2004) highlighted refugees effectiveness in challenging the prejudice and misunderstanding held by young people, and called for spaces to be provided that encouraged refugees' to tell their personal stories of persecution and loss, so as to provide a context that would enable understanding. Butler (2005) recognises the need for 'space' for the

oppressed. He described the nature of the START project, a project of mutual support for forced migrants and students as:

*'An 'activist' organisation...seeking to provide a space for the development of oppositional interpretations of interests and needs, where the voices of those who are excluded from the dominate discourses can be heard.'*

*(Kenny, 2002, cited Butler, 2005, p.154).*

Evidence is provided of attempts to recognise, respond and facilitate individual and group resistance to oppression, the damage caused by insidious risks, their 'particular pernicious influence on individual's coping skills and expectations' and their overwhelming nature. This makes 'changing the odds' for forced migrants arguably fundamental to policy/ practice planning and implementation (Glantz and Sloboda, 1999, p.120; Jessor, 1993; Osgood et al, cited Pollard et al, 1999).

Despite some attempt to give forced migrants voice, greater control and influence on their lives and the resources they need, increased skills and competency, and to act as advocates on their behalf, there is scarce evidence to suggest that their lives have been transformed. Oppression in its many guises remains a daily feature of their lives. Failure may be attributed to the inability of Forced Migrant researchers to prioritise issues of oppression on the research agenda. Certainly there is limited understanding of the meanings given (and forced migrants' responses) to oppression. Furthermore, there appears to be little identification and promotion of the assets and resources that help them cope. Cremlyn and Briskman (2003) indicate service failure, highlighting the predominate failure by social workers to 'resist the oppression and racism inherent in the wider treatment of asylum seekers', thus suggesting that social workers' efforts have focused on managing as opposed to challenging the constraints placed on young asylum seekers (Cremlyn and Briskman, 2003, p.174). Anderson (2001) suggests that the resilience concept *per se* is at fault as it is unable to address the root causes of oppression (Anderson, 2001, cited Cowger et al, 2006). One could ask if this is indeed the case or whether this is rather a reflection of the researcher's inability to realise or achieve the concept's potential?

The overall sense of limitation and failure of this approach mirrors the resiliency literature. However, recognition that change is dependent upon political and societal responses that are open to change, along with preparedness to relinquish/share some of our power and advantages with those who have less, is arguably the

determining factor in the success or not of this anti-oppressive approach. There appears little to suggest willingness for this within the Forced Migration literature.

### **Risk and protection as integral to resilience**

From this review of literature relating to resilience, it is evident that risk and protection can be seen as related, if not integral to the concept of resilience. It is therefore important that these two related concepts are examined further within this study. While knowledge of risk and protective factors has evolved separately, viewing them as distinct entities is argued by some to be a false dichotomy. Both may act as to expose/increase risk, or to protect, depending on the individual and context (Kaplin, 1999; Schofield and Beek, 2005). Statistical notions/operation of these concepts are prevalent throughout the resiliency literature, as indicated earlier, but alongside them is a developing evidence base that seeks to understand the meanings people give to risk and protection, recognising the contextual/cultural nature of these concepts. Both approaches to risk and protection are evident within the Forced Migration literature, with statistical evidence being drawn on to base or support argument; an approach frequently adopted within the Mental Health field.

The substantial, prolific reference to risk and hardship encountered by forced migrants in their home country, in their journeys and adjustment to the host country and in the asylum process, leaves little room to question the inherent vulnerability that forced migration poses. A 'broad sweep' of the literature identifies adversities and risks in relation to trauma, loss and fragmentation (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Alcock, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2001), isolation from home, family and the host community (Ager et al, 2002; Tomlinson and Egan, 2002) and an increased incidence of (often long-term) mental and physical ill-health (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Frazel and Stein, 2003; Hodes, 2000). Other factors described include: inappropriate services, with forced migrants having limited understanding re navigation of complex systems or of overcoming barriers to their access (Dennis, 2002; Papadopoulos, 2004; Coker, 2001); and social exclusion (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; Dennis, 2002; Cole and Robinson, 2003). While many papers have only one particular focus on this spectrum of adversities, forced migrants will often experience them as multiple and cumulative. This is known to exacerbate the impact of individual stressors, each interacting adversely with the other, and for a ripple effect to result, leading to exposure to a

spiral of overwhelming risk and adversity exposure (Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, 1998, cited Kalil and Kunz, 1999).

Doyal and Anderson (2005) clearly capture the overwhelming nature of cumulative adversity with their study of African women with AIDS/ HIV status, highlighting the case of a woman with AIDS contacted as a result of gang rape. They conclude:

*'... An HIV diagnosis may have a very different texture when it represents not a huge disruption in a largely predictable narrative but yet another trauma laid on top of forced migration, sexual violence and the death of partners and children.'*

*(Doyal and Anderson, 2005, p.1734).*

Risk and adversity lose their sense of remoteness and depersonalisation when portrayed as human stories of pain, struggle, challenge and despair. These accounts help recognise and understand the diversity of meanings attributed to such experiences, their complexity, their salience and ordering. They reveal both commonality and uniqueness of experience (Thoits, 1995; Gordon and Song, cited Luthar et al, 2000, p.550). Papadopoulos (2004) highlights one Ethiopian's story of loss and separation.

*'I had a nice life in Ethiopia. I am not saying everybody was like me. For the past twenty years I had a happy life. In that country when I was working as a journalist, I had a good life. Of course I had a rough ride too. I was in jail. However, at times*

*I prefer prison to life in exile...I am trying to overcome the sequel of my life in exile such as loneliness, lack of partner and family separation.'*

*(Papadopoulos, 2004, p.61).*

Goodman (2004) illustrates the absorption of anxiety and worry for those left behind.

*'I remember the hunger facing us in Kakuma. I can remember because now I am in America I'm ok. But my brothers have remained behind and are suffering. In my blood I can feel hunger because my brother is suffering. In my stomach I'm ok, but in my blood I am still suffering.'*

*(Goodman, 2004, p.1184).*

It is suggested that protective factors can be understood to operate in the context of risk, with their defining feature being that they modify a person's response to the risk situation, producing a better than expected outcome to the risk than those individuals without the factor (Luthar, 1991, cited Kalil and Kunz, 1999, p.199; Rutter, 1987). Despite over a hundred identified protective factors having been identified over time, Ungar (2004) voices researchers' concerns that we still cannot be more specific as to which key factors will be protective in relation to high risk individuals, or fully understand the dynamic process operating in risk and protection. In contrast to this statistical approach, protection may also be understood as those resources (from the individual, from familial support, from external support) that support and help manage or overcome difficulties and challenges, or reduce their stressful effects upon the individual, family and community. Turning to the Forced Migration literature, some key protective factors are seen consistently throughout, though many when mapped onto the risks discussed in the previous section can be seen to be unavailable or limited.

The need to have a sense of belonging, of community and support with those who share a cultural history and experience is highlighted as being important during the challenging transitional period of adaptation and settlement (Alcock, 2003; Burnett and Peel, 2001; Cole and Robinson, 2003). Alcock (2003) illustrates how the asylum dispersal policy is undermining this source of protection. Burnett and Peel (2001) stress the importance of refugee community organisations for developing a sense of identity and shared support. Recognition is also given to the need for forced migrants to be a part of, and play a part in the wider host community, developing links and friendships (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Lie et al, 2004). Warwick et al (2006) emphasise the environment's essential nurturing nature required to protect forced migrants. Associated with this emphasis on community is the protective role of employment and regular activity outside of the home, although it is unclear which activities or which aspects of it are beneficial (Lie, 2002, 2004). Lie (2004) questions if this is about the role outside activity has on confirming agency and competency.

The role of the family is linked to recovery from psychological/mental illness, and to providing general vital support (Lie, 2004; Weine et al, 2005). It is suggested by these authors that the family may provide the emotional space for the telling and sharing of memories along with offering continuity in relation to shared values and history, amidst change and confusion.

Religion (particularly Islam), can be seen to frame and provide understanding of forced migrants' experiences, and to sustain and help them overcome adversity, (Ai and Huang, 2003; Gozdzik, 2002; McMichael, 2002; Papadopoulos et al, 2004). Despite its centrality and value in many forced migrants lives, McMichael (2002) also confirms what has been highlighted in the previous chapter, that it is an area in which we have little understanding. King (1998) comments (in relation to mental health provision), that religion and spirituality is regarded at best as 'cultural noise...or, at worst, pathological thinking...' (King, 1998, p. 1259). The role of culture and indigenous ways of coping is also highlighted. Phinney et al, (2001) emphasise the importance of a bi-cultural identity, resulting from processes of acculturation that promote simultaneously a strong ethnic identity and adaptation and integration into the host community. Highlighted is recognition that some forced migrant communities can be seen to have less opportunity to develop their cultural identity, being more likely therefore to experience marginalisation, with limited access to both their cultural community and the host society as well (Aruni et al, 2002). Thornton (1998) suggests that indigenous protective resources are not always recognised or appreciated, being unspectacular, but suggests that they are to be found in the daily activities and struggle of people's lives. Differences between risk and protection are sometimes only subtle and only identifiable when family life is examined in detail (Thornton, 1998). Therefore, the methodology adopted for this study therefore, which is outlined and discussed in the following chapter, will be one that is able to capture and shed light on these unspectacular, everyday processes of family life.

While some research accounts provide insight into the processes of protection that are occurring in the context of vulnerability, like the Resiliency literature, remain questions remain unanswered. Pertinent to forced migrants is the notion that like risks, protective factors are cumulative. Some individual communities are able to attract them more than others. This underlines the need to listen to individual assessment and understanding of protective experiences (Waller, 2001).

### **Reframing the forced migrant as resilient**

Zimmerman (2005) suggests that the resilience theory is focused on strengths rather than deficits. It is this recognition of forced migrants' strengths that orientates and focuses an alternative approach to understanding and responding to them. Resilience may or may not be specifically referred to, but its essence and implications

are clearly evident within the writing. Strengths are to be found within individuals, families and their communities, despite vulnerability, pain and continuing adversity. The tendency to focus on strengths, yet not lose sight of the fact that they occur within a context of adversity and challenge, reiterates and affirms the affiliation with the resilience concept. Adjectives such as resourceful, strong, independent, confident, robust, capable and resilient reflect the many characteristics ascribed to the forced migrant identity in studies such as these, which present a counter discourse to the presentation of victimhood traditionally associated with the forced migrant (Papadopoulos, 2004; Butler, 2005).

So how does a strengths approach reframe the problems that forced migrants experience and help us understand and approach them in a new way? While acknowledging support for a higher incidence of mental health in refugee populations attributed to trauma and forced migration experiences, several authors highlight possibilities of personal growth arising out of trauma and suffering, demonstrated by such factors as enhanced relationships, new meaning and purpose in life, and deepened spiritual beliefs (McCrone et al, 2005; Turner et al, 2003; Bhui et al, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2004; Cadell and Stallard, 2004). This suggests we need to seek to understand meanings given to trauma and adversity, and learn from people's attitudes and experiences. Ernest Hemingway states that 'the world breaks everyone and afterwards many are strong in the broken places' (cited Waller, 2001, p.290). Weine (2005) points to the need for researchers to use non-clinical populations, so as to avoid overshadowing the resilience and strengths of families that can be found 'out there'. Knowledge gleaned is to direct and guide future research and practice.

Evidence of a Strengths approach to the study of forced migrants can be found within the literature. Tomlinson and Egan, (2002), Stewart (2003), Charlaff et al (2004), identify the skills and resources forced migrants have, their abilities to find employment and be self sufficient through developing and using their own networks and their desire and willingness to contribute and participate somehow to society. While children are traditionally viewed as dependent, vulnerable and in need of protection, there are challenges to this western construction of childhood with some scholars calling for the recognition of children's rights, strengths, and capacity to define their best interests (Cremlyn and Briskman, 2003; Warwick et al, 2006;). Kohli and Mather (2003) highlight the disparity of research between that which focuses on the vulnerability of the child and that of emphasising their capacity to respond

robustly to the stresses that surround them ‘recognising the inherent strength and capability within the refugee label’ (Kohli and Mather, 2004, p.204).

While examples of this strengths orientation suggests an alternative way of understanding the lives of forced migrants is not only possible, but arguably desirable, the literature provides little insight into how knowledge and understanding gained from these studies and this approach has impacted the lives of forced migrants. This criticism, however, is also voiced in relation to the Forced Migration literature generally (Harris, 2004). What it does contribute is a challenge to recognising the strengths that forced migrants have amidst their vulnerability. If tapped into, strengthened and facilitated, these strengths have the potential to address and overcome some of the challenges they face. It serves also to provide a broader framework for the resilience concept, strengthening the challenge to the dominant discourse.

Theoretical, conceptual approaches to resilience are contested, but all can be justified as contributing in different ways to understanding the lives of individuals, families and communities. Attempts have been made to map elements contained within these different approaches onto the Forced Migration literature. While the appearance is given that these can be distinguished within the literature as distinct approaches, this delineation is artificial, with approaches frequently overlapping or amalgamated within a study. This reinforces the notion of fluidity and ‘messiness’ associated with the concept. Mapping these approaches serves to highlight the different facets of the concept, to encourage examination of the literature through different lenses and with different emphases, and in turn, to shape the study as it seeks to recognise and encompass these essential strands within it. Luthar et al (2000) state that an explicit position must be taken as to how the resilience concept is to be conceptualised and applied within an individual’s research. While no definition knowingly exists that incorporates elements of these different approaches, Ungar’s definition of the concept most reflects the positions. However, though it is inferred, it fails to explicitly highlight the central role of power in resilient processes.

*‘In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individual’s to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well being, and a condition of the individuals family,*

*community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways.'*

*(Ungar, 2006, p.8).*

Three important concepts found within the resiliency literature will now be briefly explored in relation to the Forced Migration literature, active agency, gender and success criteria. Selection of these concepts is based on their shared link to the important concept of power.

Human agency, 'the power to control and make choice about one's life and achieve one's goals', is argued to be central to resilient processes (Fraser et al, 1999; Gilgun, 1999; Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). In contrast victimhood is associated with passivity and dependence, the loss of autonomy and powerlessness. Despite the dominance of the victimhood discourse within the Forced Migration literature, the agency of forced migrants is seen and at times facilitated. Gozdziak (2002) recounts how Bosnian refugees rejected the western identity refugee ascribed to them and its connotations of 'victimhood, powerlessness and loss of agency'. Rather, they spoke of themselves as 'experiencing a series of hosts' (Gozdziak, 2002, p.140). Aruni et al (2002) facilitated the voice of young asylum seekers in Milton Keynes so as to hear and understand their goals and needs when settling into the UK, recognising that they might be different from those described by integration programmes. Chatty et al's study (2005) advocated and responded to a need to give youth agency in the research process, adopting research methods that positioned the youth's perspectives as central. Green et al (2005) explored the role of children and young people in interpretation, highlighting its complexity and the skills required of the children. They identified the sense of achievement, competence and pride that the children gained from the role. In contrast to the accepted stance of the activities' inappropriateness, the authors highlighted and supported the children's understanding and value of the role. Kohli (2006) portrays the agency of asylum seeking children in the choices they make in relation to how they tell their stories, recognising the competence and purposefulness behind them. Human agency though is not effortless; it is achieved at a cost to the forced migrant, and involves 'a lot of work, struggle and pain' (Gilgun, 1999, p.64).

The role of agency is also seen as essential in securing assets to protect against risks and adversity (Gordon and Song, 1994; Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). While some may be able to recognise, interpret and access essential resources to protect

against or buffer risk, others may not. Gordon and Song (1994) suggest that issues of power lie at the heart of agency and the ability to secure protection. For many forced migrants' their ability to make choices is constrained by the more powerful, the concentration of their energies on survival and repeated, cumulative experiences of adversity and failure thereby reducing them to, and reinforcing, their victim status and dependency. As Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) highlight:

*'The resilience paradigm encompasses views of individuals as active agents who can substantially affect their own life circumstances..., but as Seligman's classic experiments on learned helplessness established, continued onslaughts from the environment can disable the strongest.'*

*(Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000, p.863).*

There is need for caution and a critical approach to practices and discourses promoting and proclaiming the agency and empowerment of forced migrants. Tomlinson and Egan's (2002) study, exploring the roles of UK organisations providing employment related services to refugees found a policy discourse and a providers discourse which emphasised the empowerment of the forced migrant. Recognition of forced migrants as both skilled and competent- a potential asset to the workforce -was at odds, though with their difficulties and experiences of gaining appropriate employment. This suggests a disjuncture between the two.

*'These accounts do not reveal a picture of progressively becoming more confident and enabled, but of an on-going struggle between hope and despair, between the desire to be active and useful (suggesting an identification with an empowered refugee) and becoming dependent and passive (and thus disempowered).'*

*(Tomlinson and Egan, 2002, p.1031).*

Watters (2001) suggests that the voices of forced migrants may only be listened to in so far that their problems can be represented in ways that are palatable and operable within Health and Social Care services. Kelly (2003) proposes that the policy and encouragement of Community Associations aimed at empowering and facilitating forced migrants to access resources and to have a voice, is built on incorrect, presumptions and knowledge, suggesting an absence of commitment to listening and working with forced migrants to provide empowering policies.

Accounts highlight that the facilitation of forced migrants' agency may merely be an illusion to suggest greater choice and opportunity in life. The cost of 'agency' for the forced migrant may be bitter disappointment, repeated setback, and an increasing sense of hopelessness.

Examining gender and risk, Burnett and Peel (2001) and Reed (2003) highlight the vulnerability of women to experiencing sexual violence, rape and domestic violence. Women's roles and responsibilities, including additional ones traditionally not previously undertaken, are seen to shape and constrain the opportunities women have to develop social networks, acquire English language, and the extent to which they are able to participate in available initiatives and activities (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Harris, 2004; Reed, 2003; Phillimore and Goodson, 2006). Cox (2003) (contrary to this perception), suggests that Somali women have taken advantage of new opportunities for education and employment, aiding their adjustment within the host country. Harris (2004) highlights the demeaning of Somali women's status and role, with women seen as taking on the menial work that Somali men reject. Doyal and Anderson (2005) and Anderson and Doyal (2004) highlight the plight of African women, many of them forced migrants, who experience multiple oppression and marginalisation due to their status as women, diagnosis of HIV positive/AIDS and their asylum status. Yet motherhood and the responsibility of parenting is seen to bring not only a burden, but also the reason to live.

*'I thought that the little time I have left to live on this earth I have to live for these children and be a strong person.'*

*(Doyal and Anderson, 2005, p.1732).*

Within these challenges, there can also be found positive experiences for women as a consequence of their migration. Papadopoulos' (2004) study of Ethiopian refugees found that the women experienced a sense of liberation and increased activity in private life, unknown of before, contributing to their better adaptation to life in the UK than men. McMichael (2002) describes Somali women's resilience and ability to manage transition as striking, despite times of sadness and depression.

*'Some of the men, they are too strict, but the women say, 'this is a free country' and tell them to get out. That's why so many Somali women are single.'*

*(Cox, 2003 p.39).*

Rutter (2001) suggests that key turning points, the opportunities and choices offered to them, are the most significant factor in determining resilient outcomes. For some forced migrant women, life in a new country presents opportunities and choices never experienced before. Harris (2004) challenges us to think beyond western notions of liberation and freedom, suggesting that Islamic traditions chosen by women to be practiced may reflect confidence and self-assertion.

*'I've seen both sides of this life, from when I left Somalia. I've seen life from inside my Western clothes... I blended in...I dress differently now. I go into my Hijabo, and I see a different side of life...People are suspicious of me now. People look down on me. I've been rejected for jobs...I'm sure rejection comes with my change of dress...I don't care. I'm facing the world now. Your judgement won't change my life! What's important is my faith. I feel stronger now I have the Hijabo...I am strong.'*

(Harris, 2004, p.64).

The conceptual variation in relation to the criteria the label of resilience demands is diverse, contested and confusing within the resiliency field. While traditional debate centres on the competency/highly successful outcomes for development, alternative understandings have developed. Daly (1999) introduces the notion that resilience is not a static achievement of success, but rather 'a capacity that ebbs and flows in the course of navigating adversity' (Daly, 1999, p.35). Gilgun (1999) asks at what point an outcome should be assessed and advocates a concept of resilient stepping points that become part of ongoing adaptation and coping in life. Daly (1999) suggests that resilience is evidenced by the increased sense of understanding of self and relationships, and the process of change. Gilgun (1996) from her study of adults who had experienced violence in childhood, suggests that positive adaptation and functioning, indicating resilience, may exist alongside psychological vulnerability and pain.

Though these theoretical arguments for determining resilience are not evident within the Forced Migration literature, there are diverse standards used to demonstrate the concept. McMichael (2002) found the women to be resilient, but still sad and depressed at times. Anderson and Doyal (2005) found from their study of African women with HIV positive status/AIDS that they re-evaluated life and found new appreciation of things previously taken for granted. They felt that as a consequence of their experiences they were 'closer to God, more courageous and more mature'. The

authors suggest that the women demonstrated 'amazing resilience' (Anderson and Doyal, 2005, p.102, p.104). Whittaker et al's (2005) study of Somali women emphasised refugees 'strengths, resilience and the appearance of 'moving on', being strong, not dwelling on problems and coping' (Whittaker et. Al, 2005, p.190). Strongly emphasised within the Forced Migration literature is forced migrants potential for resilience given the resources, opportunities and facilitation. This supports Ungar's advocating the need for joint assessment of the individual and their environment, recognising the resiliency label is dependent on both (Ungar, 2004).

In most cases, in attributing the resiliency label, decisions are taken by those other than forced migrants themselves. Ungar, taking a social constructionist approach to the resilience concept, emphasises the need to listen to marginalised and silenced voices so as to understand localised definitions of resilience (risk and protection), rather than just those of the privileged and powerful (Ungar, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

This literature review has sought to outline and demonstrate the development of the resilience concept, illustrating its conceptual complexity, contentiousness and frequent ambiguity in operation and practice. Different approaches to the concept have been briefly discussed in relation to their strengths and limitations. These have been further explored in the specific context of forced migration, and with particular reference to studies relating to the Somali community. The need to take account of these different positions within this study is highlighted, recognising their contribution to the understanding of forced migrants' lives. Particular features, namely active agency, gender, and success criteria for the concept, have been selected and examined in more detail underlining areas requiring questioning, reflection and attention. Lastly, the aligning and integral concepts of risk and protection have been discussed, emphasizing the importance of meaning and understanding given to such factors by forced migrants themselves.

We are left with evidence suggesting the enormity of the daily challenges and struggles of the forced migrant. Conversely, the persistence and inability of policy, practice and society to respond to these overwhelming risks, or to provide the necessary protective resources needed to overcome them. But that being said, there remains within this a strong discourse of strength, perseverance and struggle, contributed and facilitated significantly by the resilience concept. Kohli (2006) states

from his study of social workers and their response to young asylum seekers, that they 'looked for and found resilience in the young people and their contexts' (Kohli, 2006, p.7). The resilience concept has been argued to provide the tool for this study to 'look' for evidence of strength and agency amidst adversity and vulnerability. It therefore provides the means for strengths (alongside traditional notions of dependency) to be explored in this study. The experiences of a particular refugee community will be explored therefore, via an approach that seeks to give participants voice and agency.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

My research question asks what the nature, role and salience of resilience within the lives of forced migrant families is. The aim of the study is therefore to elicit the voices of forced migrants and their accounts of risk, protection and resilience in relation to family life within the UK. Researching with forced migrants poses particular methodological and ethical challenges though. In this chapter I present my research strategy for this study, highlighting the study's inherent challenges and demonstrating how I have sought to overcome these so as to be able to hear forced migrants own perspectives on the nature and role of resilience in their lives. The account intends to demonstrate the study's rigour along with providing evidence to support claims to its quality, trustworthiness and legitimacy.

I begin by discussing the study's aims and objectives, the underlying initial thoughts behind the study and the philosophical influences that have shaped the methodological approach. Key terminology will be defined, including the adopted stance that the resilience concept will take within this study. The research strategy will be outlined and justified and its subsequent unfolding in response to the challenges and changing circumstances encountered discussed. Three aspects of the research process that particularly highlight the methodological tensions encountered while in the field will then be reflected upon, illustrating further the requirement for methodological flexibility and responsiveness by the researcher. Despite the messiness of the research process (Stanley and Wise, 1993), the methodological principles embedded within the research strategy can still be seen to serve in directing and navigating the unfolding of this research process.

### Overview of study

The aims and objectives of this study have emerged out of both my health visiting practice experience and the literatures. The literature review has documented the dominance of pathologising, victimhood discourses surrounding forced migrants lives within the UK, shaping and reinforcing the approach, attitudes and response of society, services and policy to forced migrants and their representation. Challenges to this victimhood identity have also been identified, with competing discourses portraying notions of strength and resilience in forced migrants' lives amidst their

vulnerability. The study responds to the need for greater representation of forced migrants own accounts of their lives in order to capture the human, cultural interpretations of their experiences of risk, protection and resilience. Recognition of forced migrants own realities of lived experience challenges the oppressive forces that seek to silence and exclude their representation (Gilgun, 1996). Limited representation of forced migrant families within the Forced Migration literature and of women's voices in particular, supports the need for women's voices and accounts of family life to be sought. This study not only seeks to understand how multiple labels, static categorisations and identities attributed to forced migrant families shape and determine their daily life experiences and choices, but also to capture the richness and diversity of lived experiences that these ascribed categories fail to capture and portray.

While documentation of the hardships and challenges in forced migrants' lives are well evidenced, the meanings given to issues of risk and adversity for individuals and families, as well as to the processes of protection, are limited within the literature. This study recognises that forced migrants need to tell their stories of hardship and adversity in their own way and in their own time, giving meanings and understanding to such experiences. In particular there is a need identified from the literature to highlight and understand how oppression is experienced, understood and responded to. Exploration needs to attempt to identify how processes of oppression are managed and possibly overcome, the protective factors within these processes, and the constraints and barriers restraining their effective management. Consideration also needs to be given to the overwhelming nature of oppression, and to question how this might manifest itself in the many facets of individual and family daily life. The challenge for myself though, and for that of other researchers, has to be the acceptance that these stories may be possibly absent from participants accounts, realising that individuals are purposeful and creative in what they tell and recognise when silence is necessary (Kohli, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2002, cited Kohli, 2006, p.710).

Emphasising the importance of forced migrants' agency recognises and responds to the passive role which forced migrants have been frequently ascribed, through policy and legislation, by the reinforcement and encouragement of societal discourses and by the professionalisation and medicalisation of their experiences and problems. It also is argued that human agency seen in the power to make choices

about one's life, is central to resilient processes (Fraser et al, 1999). Within the literature some examples of forced migrants agency and control over their lives have been given with some excellent examples provided of practices seeking to promote forced migrants strengths, skills, and active agency. But also highlighted are notions of false rhetoric and empty promises of empowerment, with little to suggest that has had a positive impact upon the lives of forced migrants (Watters, 2001). The adopted methodology for this study will reflect the need to give voice to participants about the issues that relate to their daily lives. The potential complexities of managing and responding to participants' accounts, their perceptions of risk, the strategies of protection that they adopt and their own notions of what it means to be resilient, may leave us with a cultural chasm and sense of disjunction that may be difficult to negotiate and cross. While not in any way attempting to dismiss these challenges, the opportunity to be heard and understood, to challenge and inform misperceptions and facts relating to one's life and that of one's community, as well as being positioned as active agents, is argued to be for this study an important step in negotiating identified common ground and the ways forward in promoting and strengthening resilient outcomes for the Somali community and for forced migrants in general.

This study seeks to explore the extent to which agency is able to operate and how stories of daily life are situated within victim and agency frameworks. In addition, it seeks to identify the strengths that families have and use to manage their daily lives, exploring how these strengths are encouraged and built upon by the families and communities themselves and by practice and policy.

The literature suggests that a western understanding of resilience has predominated within the resilience and forced migration fields, neglecting to pay attention to, and failing to seek to understand indigenous meanings and understandings given to issues of risk, protection and resilience. The label of resilience has been seen to be one that is frequently bestowed by others who are in positions of power to do so; academics, practitioners, organisations and institutions, rather than by forced migrants themselves. This study seeks to be open to different understandings forced migrants might hold regarding what resilience might mean or how it might operate and present within the lives of forced migrant families.

While I have attempted to set out the rationale and objectives of the study, I am also conscious of Scheurich's (1997) critical stance, that the researcher 'has multiple intentions and desires, some of which are consciously known and some of

which are not' (Scheurich, 1997, p.62). The need for ongoing reflection is highlighted, so that 'complex political, ideological agendas hidden within my writing and research practice can be unmasked (Cheek, 2000, p.20). The aims of the study can be summarised as:

- To explore the notion of resilience in forced migrant lives.
- To provide a platform for women, as forced migrant's to voice their experiences of family life in the UK.
- To explore women's understanding of how they and their families manage their everyday lives.

Current approaches to forced migrants by policies, services and society generally, are premised on a problem-based model of the forced migrant as represented in the literature. At worst, these approaches undermine and diminish forced migrants own coping strategies. At best they can be considered largely irrelevant, failing to draw on or enhance forced migrants own coping mechanisms. My initial thoughts underpinning this study are that forced migrants, though inherently vulnerable as a result of their forced migrant identity and experiences, are also resilient and have resources that enable them to cope with daily life. My research question therefore seeks to ask the nature, role and salience of resilience within the lives of forced migrants.

To achieve the study's aims and objectives, stories and accounts will be invited from forced migrant women from an identified Somali community in relation to different aspects of their family life, with the intention of shedding light and understanding on the following questions: how do forced migrant families manage their daily lives; what evidence is there of forced migrants inner resources and strengths and how do they contribute to managing and negotiating risks; how are resources, both formal and informal, accessed; which resources are most important to them and are they perceived to be undermined in any way; do they still maintain some sense of agency over the risks they encounter, or are they overwhelmed by their accumulation of experiences? Unexpected themes or discussion to emerge will also be pursued for further insight into what is considered important for participants to tell about their lives and family.

Conducting cross-cultural research raises epistemological questions regarding who can know and how we can know. Contested positions are held in relation to the

appropriateness of an outsider from another ethnic group conducting research with those who do not share the same ethnic background. Criticism is made of the way researchers, particularly in relation to Anthropology, have sought out in the past the exotic and alien, stressing their differences and serving to ‘other’ and separate them from ‘us’ (Atkinson et al, 2003). Alternatively Feminist Standpoint theories have advocated that women’s shared experiences of oppression can overcome differences of culture, class or colour. Adopting a Social Constructionist approach for this study in which knowledge creation is undertaken as a collaborative venture between the researched and the researcher, offers scope for the fusing of cultures represented within the research process. It is argued that through this process of joint construction cultural mediation and cultural understanding are accomplished together (Ryen, 2001). Within this process is the need for critical reflexivity in locating my social and political position, in identifying preconceived ideas of how I understand this community to operate and the values they might hold, as well as reflecting on how I, and the culture I represent, might be viewed. A broader approach to promoting my cultural competency with forced migrants from all cultures was sought by undertaking a placement within a voluntary refugee organisation, and also by mentoring a migrant woman, a Burmese refugee doctor and her family.

The kind of knowledge I seek in this study, the processes and methods adopted to obtain it, and the purposes for which it is to be used, are shaped by my theoretical, epistemological and ontological positions. An underlying assumption is that understanding the social world and social reality requires uncovering subjective knowledge, understandings and interpretations of those people experiencing that world (Cohen et al, 2000; Patton, 2002). Multiple ‘realities’ of knowledge and truth are therefore acknowledged to exist, as opposed to seeking an objective reality of truth. In recognising forced migrants agency I as the ‘human instrument’ will seek to co-construct knowledge with participants so as to further understanding about their lives and the role of resilience within them (Patton, 2002). Accepted though is that these constructions and their representations will always be only partial and incomplete (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

Within the Forced Migration and Resilience literatures are the notion of power and power relations, specifically in relation to race, gender, and migrant status, and their determining impact upon the opportunity and extent for agency, voice and resilient outcomes in the day-to-day lives of forced migrants. Mindful of this,

theoretical perspectives that illuminate and pay attention to power relations have been drawn upon to inform and direct the study, serving to highlight the power dynamic operating both within forced migrants lives and within the research process itself. A Social Constructionist agenda seeks to recognise the multiple constructions and representations of reality, and underpins the need to allow forced migrants to contribute their own representations of 'self'. Accepting though that power is unequally distributed and that not all representations are heard or valued, this study is also influenced by Critical Theories and more recent Critical Post Modern approaches that direct the focus on identifying and illuminating voices that are constrained or silenced. Recognising the dominant role of men and associated institutions in the construction of discourses surrounding the forced migrant, this study identifies the need to hear women's voices and accounts of their daily family lives. Power dynamics within relationships though operate in complex and subtle ways in order to silence and constrain, including potentially those within forced migrant communities themselves. Attention will therefore be given to the ways in which voices may be constrained or silenced within the research process.

Feminist theories have also been influential in guiding how the research process and the relationships within it might be conducted. Emphasis given to ethical research processes, to managing inherent power inequalities within the research relationship, to researcher reflexivity as well as the need to legitimise women's voices and knowledge, have served as a focus for reflection, self-questioning and practice throughout the research process. Facilitating this process of reflection and questioning has been the use of a research diary, regular supervision sessions and the setting aside of space and time to reflect within a busy research process.

The significance of terminology and labels in relation to the forced migrant and the tensions and contentiousness surrounding them has been reviewed and discussed within Chapter One. In reflecting the unresolved nature of the field's debate, this study has adopted the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' in its title, and the use of the term 'forced migrant' in the text. This acknowledges the distinctiveness of the category 'refugee' while also giving recognition to the complexity of migratory processes occurring within a wider transnational framework (Voutira and Dona, 2007; Turton, 2003; Zetter, 2007).

An Ecological model of resilience has been adopted for the study, one which views the resilience label as interrelated and interdependent with that of the individual

forced migrant and their community, so advocating joint responsibility for resilient outcomes. This seeks to avoid the problems traditionally associated with the concept, that of victimising and portioning individual blame. Ungar's (2006) definition of resilience provides the theoretical position for the concept's use within the study. Its appropriateness is supported by its ecological orientation, its emphasis on active agency and responsibility by both individual and community, and its recognition and advocacy of the need for culturally appropriate resources and processes of protection. (See page 40).

Thornton's (1998) work highlighting the culturally specific nature of risk, protection and resilience suggesting they are to be found within the routine activities and struggles of daily life, along with Masten's (2001) echoing stance, that resilience comes from the 'everyday magic' of ordinary individuals and their communities, serve to operationalise the resilience concept within the study. Exploration is therefore focused on seeking to understand the everyday processes of family life, with attention given to the unspectacular routines and subtleties of daily activities so as to gain insight into issues related to risk, protection and resilience in participants' lives.

### **Research strategy and implementation**

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that a '...research design should be a reflexive process which operates throughout every stage of a project (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.24). Methods need to be flexible enough to accommodate and respond to the changing requirements and circumstances of the research field. For this study these requirements and circumstances were the unforeseen constraints and unexpected opportunities that arose in relation to access; recruitment and participation; my developing cultural Somali competence, and the establishment of relationships with the Somali women.

Traditionally resilience has been studied using quantitative methods; however the methodological limitations of this approach in failing to identify the meanings of risk for individuals and the processes involved in protection have been highlighted within the literature review. These limitations are further emphasised in relation to this cross-cultural study in that methods are required which are able to provide thick description, context and meaning in order to aid full understanding by myself, a white western female for whom the value systems and experiences expressed by participants may be alien. Questions need to seek to answer not only 'what is it?' but 'how, why,

what's the process, what's the significance?' of this to the participant (Hesse-Biber and Lever, 2005, cited Liampittong, 2007, p.7).

Researching with forced migrants/refugees though is understood to pose particular methodological challenges for researchers. Some suggest that the development of refugee studies is dependent upon adopting a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary framework, emphasising the use of 'bottom up' approaches and the recognition and management of the complex and contested relationship that exists between the field's advocacy and scholarship roles (Voutira and Dona, 2007). Increased critical methodological reflexivity has unveiled insights into the problematic and challenging nature of such a task (Dona, 2007). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches in relation to refugee research give rise to specific issues and hurdles requiring negotiation and management, as well as the more widely encountered problems associated with conducting cross-cultural research. A broad categorization of some of these issues includes those relating to sampling, the relationship between the participant and researcher and conducting cross-cultural research with migrants.

Problems relating to formal sampling and size of sample in part stem from the lack of available sampling frameworks within many Western countries, and the scattered nature of refugee populations. For example, the census data in the UK has limited ability in identifying individuals of certain communities and ethnic origins (Omidian, 2000; Dona, 2007). Complexities also arise in the understanding and implementation of the category 'participant' given the frequent occurrence of 'gatekeepers', 'interpreters', and 'research assistants' involvement within a study, and their role in making contributions to knowledge and shaping the research process (Dona, 2007). Traditionally accepted practices for determining the 'participant' fail to capture these other kinds of participants and the evolving networks of relationships that are known to occur within research studies involving refugees. (Dona, 2007).

Challenges in establishing research relationships highlight the particular issue of mistrust by refugees of research that involves formal processes and strangers or outsiders. This also raises concerns about obtaining data that is accurate and authentic (Dona, 2007; Mestheneos, 2006; Mackenzie et al, 2007; Tait, 2006). Refugees' past experiences in their country of origin, the asylum process, their legal status, concerns for family and friends and a lack of understanding of the nature and role of research have all been identified as contributory factors in this field. Some studies are

criticised for the small sample used. However, where there is known mistrust, it may be more valuable to gain the cooperation and trust of a smaller number of participants rather than recruit a larger number who may provide less authentic accounts (Omidian, 2000). Gender compatibility and its ability to influence the choice of techniques used and the quality of data gained has also been identified as a pertinent though sometimes unrecognised factor in the establishment of acceptable, effective research relationships (Dona, 2007).

The cross-cultural nature of refugee research has led to widely accepted research practices and commonly held assumptions being challenged. For example, assumptions of the appropriateness and universality of Western definitions of some concepts, along with the adoption of measures intended for use within a western population, have been seen in many cases to be unreliable. The identification and adoption of indigenous definitions and interpretations of the subject under study and instruments culturally calibrated to capture the cultural specifics of the participants needs are required (Ahearn, Jr., 2000). The lives of many forced migrants can be in a period of transition and upheaval, from which new understandings and interpretations of culture, behaviour and practice may emerge (Omidian, 2000). This adds to the complexity of the task of identifying patterns of social relations and cultural meanings. Research principles premised around protecting the individual participant, such as the need for privacy and ensured confidentiality within the interview setting, have been seen to sit at odds with those communities holding and valuing a collective or group identity. This may render the operation of single interviews to be problematic (Omidian, 2000). Though the challenges of undertaking research in this field can be seen to limit or undermine the quality and achievements of refugee studies, they have also prompted new research methodologies and practices as ways of overcoming some of these methodological issues.

Participatory methods adopt a refugee centred approach and seek to involve refugees as actors and agents within the research process. This enables them as the intended beneficiaries of the research to contribute to shaping the policies and practices that emerge from refugee studies. Recognising refugees' local knowledge as a valuable resource in the creation of social change is thought to lend itself to more effective and sustainable policies and interventions for their lives (Dona, 2007). Participation also promotes refugee voices to be heard and their experiences and perspectives acknowledged. This is achieved by their representation within the written

text, such as in the use of quotes and extracts, as well as through advocacy and mediation for refugees. Narrative approaches, for example using a life history framework, some forms of interview and observation, have the ability to identify the complexity and diversity that exists in the way that people voice their understand of their lives and the world around them. Their use can challenge the essentialised refugee identity and experience (Eastmond, 2007). Narratives also are known to facilitate refugees in illuminating and reaffirming ‘the self,’ through the construction of a coherent story of their life and a sense of belonging. At the same time, how the researcher should represent these stories and locate them within the wider social and political context remains a challenge. Central to both participatory approaches and the representation of refugees’ stories are issues of power and its use by researchers. Refugee research has been much criticised for the ways in which some researchers have tended to essentialise and pathologise the refugee experience and identity in the presentation of data. This may involve presenting refugees’ lives within a binary framework or viewing them as a problem or liability rather than as a resource (Dona, 2007).

For this study an incremental or developmental approach was adopted to help towards overcoming issues of mistrust; namely using focus group techniques within existing constituted women’s groups alongside in-depth interviews. These methods are recognised as valuable in aiding understanding of different cultures, as well as highlighting human needs and identifying possible ways to meet those needs (Spradley, 1979, cited Liamputtong, 2007, p.120). The adoption of ‘mixed methods’ provides some degree of flexibility which is considered important when working with a vulnerable group, as well as when working with an ‘unknown’ culture. They also are argued to more ably capture ‘the richness of human experience’, and in particular, the known complexity of the resilience concept within a cross-cultural setting (Eder and Fingerson, 2002, cited Liamputtong, 2007, p.119). That having been said, a failure to recognise or value the potentially different sorts of data that each method may yield is seen as a potential weakness of such an approach, as well as acknowledging the possibility that data created may be of a contradictory nature and therefore difficult to manage or interpret (Atkinson et al, 2003).

The use of case studies recognises the uniqueness of individuals and situations as well as their complexity and situatedness of behaviour. A case study directs the research lens on the case, a bounded phenomenon or system, such as the individual,

family, community or location, in order to obtain depth of understanding of the particular (Cohen et al, 2000). For this study, the case can be understood as an identified community of Somali women, living within a defined city location. Support for a case study style approach is provided in the need to develop a depth of knowledge and cultural understanding achievable only by focusing on one forced migrant community. More crucially though, it allows for the investment of time and of one's self to be given to developing trust and rapport with those known to be suspicious of outsiders and of research. In addition, it provides a means to actively challenge the essentialised nature of the forced migrant, seeking instead to recognise and value the unique experiences and contributions of a specific forced migrant community.

A Somali community from a city in England was identified as the basis for this study. Somali adult women who are either pregnant and/or have children under the age of eighteen in their care, regardless of legal status, and living within the study's selected setting, would be invited to participate. A focus on 'families' and individual members contrasts with the more prevalent systemic family unit approach found within the literature.

Secondary sources of national and historic data relevant to forced migration, and in particular to both the wider Somali community and to those living within the identified city were sought. These findings are presented in the following chapter as context and background to the subsequent chapter containing women's accounts of their daily lives.

### **Data gathering – stage one**

Having outlined the initial research strategy, characterised by its formality, the following section provides an account of how the research process subsequently unfolded, adopting an increasingly informal approach focusing on the spontaneous and natural social gatherings of women alongside more formally identified group and individual interviews. An ethics application (appendix 3) was prepared at the outset and included a topic schedule (appendix 2). The topic schedule consisted of six areas of Somali family life in the UK highlighted within the literature and considered pertinent for further exploration in this study. The design reflected its intended use both within the group sessions and individual interviews and in serving to inform the

women at the introductory contact session of the key areas of discussion that they would be asked to participate in.

The use of focus group techniques draws on the principles of gathering groups of people together to discuss a given subject, facilitated and led by a researcher. Data are generated through discussion and interaction between the members of the group, emphasising the social construction of knowledge and its ability to reveal cultural norms and values that the group may hold (Byrne, 2004). The method allows participants to ‘...generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms...’(Barbour and Kitzinger, 1995, cited Byrne, 2004, p.181). The plan was for established Somali women’s groups within the city to be approached and invited to participate as individual groups within their own settings. This would, it was anticipated, take advantage of the natural gatherings of women that occur, and serve in helping to navigate the complex and known tensions of the clan system. Importantly, this approach would address issues of mistrust through the familiarity of the setting and group membership and hopefully encourage and promote participants’ confidence in participating and their ease in the voicing of their experiences. Recognised potential weaknesses in using ready constituted groups include issues related to the management of group dynamics, such as the pairing and excluding of certain members, private conversations and asides taking place, or there being a conspiracy of silence which participants feel pressured to support (Morgan, 1998). Most pertinent though to this Somali community are issues of confidentiality, the extent and ease with which people are able to share in public, and the long-term consequences of sharing sensitive information. Whittaker et al’s (2005) study with Somali women found that mistrust of each other within the Somali community was a significant feature, contributed in part by the ‘paternal’ responsibility held in monitoring and sanctioning individual’s behaviour. It was anticipated that individual interviews would offset some of these focus group limitations. It was hoped that at least three different groups might participate in the study, with a maximum being six. A female research assistant, who is also a PhD student from the School of Social Sciences, could be employed to help with the running of the groups.

Contact with three group leaders identified as gatekeepers to the women’s Somali groups resulted in one refusal for group participation, one promise of meeting with the group in the future, and with the third, a small group interview consisting of three members but with no agreed follow up. Persistence with the second group

gatekeeper eventually led to my attendance at a meeting of about forty to fifty women, during which I was able to briefly present my study and outline their proposed potential role. The informality of the meeting, highlighted by members late arrival and over an hour's delay in the meeting's commencement, the occurrence of multiple private conversations taking place throughout the leader's presentation and my own, and the spontaneous, ad hoc way in which different women took on a leadership role throughout, provided some inkling of the cultural divide between my own experiences and expectations and theirs for behaviour in a meeting. This led me to question whether my requirements for a focus type group would be actually compatible, or deliverable given the potential cultural differences operating within it. It had been anticipated that following participation in the groups, these women would be asked if they would be interested also in participating in individual interviews at a later date.

Individual or 'one-to-one' interviews recognise and respond to the concern that it may not be appropriate, or participants may not feel comfortable sharing some aspects of their lives in a group setting (Mackenzie et al, 2007). Personal accounts obtained through individual interviewing are able to reveal the diversity of experiences represented by forced migrants, thus challenging notions of 'the refugee experience' found within the literature (Eastmond, 2007). In-depth interviews seek 'deep' information and understanding that focus group methods and other methods are unlikely to obtain, as well as providing opportunity for further insight and clarification of data obtained through other methods. They attempt to elicit the meanings that participants give to their experiences and accounts. Questioning, using an interview schedule, shapes the agenda of the interview, but the researcher remains open to and prioritises what the interviewee chooses to tell. Highlighted within the literature in relation to cross-cultural interviewing is the importance and challenge of interpreting and understanding non-verbal communication, and of the need for questioning cultural assumptions in relation to this. Ethnographic experience is advocated so that the researcher can relate more easily to what is said and told, as well as forewarning given to the possibility that conversations may follow 'parallel tracks, but in fact never really meet' (Ryen, 2001, p.344).

Given the women's reluctance to commit to a group session for the study, I focused instead on identifying potential individuals at the women's meeting who I thought might be interested to participate in an interview. Those who were competent

in English tended to be more confident to engage with me, and I was quick to try and develop rapport with them, before enquiring if they would like to talk with me further about their family life here in the UK. Seven women indicated an interest, and names and contact numbers were exchanged and followed up promptly. Of these, four became study participants and were interviewed, two initially agreed to participate but appointments were not kept and one woman moved out of the area. The general friendliness shown to me by the group as a whole, and the women's interest in the study was not reflected in their actual engagement and participation in the study. While 'busyness', their lack of competency in spoken English and their reluctance to get involved with something that was unfamiliar were stated or seen as barriers to their participation, it became clear that the structure that I was trying to impose on them was not something that they felt able to, or wanted to be involved in. My inability to gain the trust of the group and its individuals due to the short period of time I had with them can be seen to have contributed to and reinforced their position. Adler and Adler (2001) state that there is a greater chance of obtaining interviews if time is taken 'to get to know the people' being studied, to develop relationships with them, and to build up trust between respondents and the researcher (Adler and Adler, 2001, p.526).

Feeling somewhat disappointed and alarmed by my lack of success in recruiting women to interview and aware of the time constraints on the fieldwork, I concentrated on the few participants that had agreed to involvement, hoping to adopt a snowballing technique for recruitment by identifying other potential participants known to the participants. The initial interviews held with participants in their own homes tended to adopt a fairly formal approach in that we met at a pre-agreed time, the participant was interviewed on her own, although sometimes she was joined at the start or end of the interview by her husband, and the format followed closely the topic schedule, with participants given the choice as to order of the topics to be discussed. Some degree of rapport was established with all the participants, but to varying degrees, and this was reflected in whether women agreed to meet for subsequent interviews or not.

Visiting a voluntary organisation in an attempt to identify new gatekeepers, I encountered by chance a sewing group whose membership apart from one, was made up of about ten Somali women. Taking up their invitation to participate in this group on a weekly basis, my newly adopted participant observer role aimed to develop

relationships and trust with the women, to acquire greater cultural understanding, and to hopefully provide a spring-board to further interview recruitment, either from the group members themselves or through wider opportunities that might arise. The leader of the group that I had visited previously was a member of the sewing group and I recognised that gaining her trust and support of the research would prove vital to influencing positive responses from other women in the community. With the emphasis away from recruitment and instead focused on investing time in building relationships and trust, the group provided an enjoyable opportunity to work on our common activity sewing alongside each other, and led to us gradually feeling more at ease in each others' company (See appendix 8).

Over the five months of my attendance, many opportunities presented to join in conversations, for mutual questioning about our lives and circumstances, and for me to relate to and value the members as individuals rather than merely regarding them as potential interview 'material'. Invitations to attend additional outside activities that the women were holding were gratefully received and provided opportunity for me to come into contact with other women that I had not met or spoken to before (See appendix 7). My endorsement by the group leader, and by the displays of warmth and friendship from the sewing group members, was considered influential in encouraging new conversations and engagement with some of the other women. The group leader always announced who I was and what I was doing, and took on the responsibility of providing the most proficient English speaker to translate for me. Six women were recruited to the study for individual interviews through these social activities.

Recognising still the reluctance of the women to engage in formal interviews with me on a one-to-one basis, I realised that though I was establishing positive relationships with the women, and obtaining good background cultural knowledge and understanding which was proving vital in helping me make sense of what I was hearing in the individual interviews, I was still missing opportunities for collecting valuable data. Alongside this, on gaining insight into Somali social etiquette, I began to call on some of the participants without prior appointment. Although they were not always in, I was always welcomed into the home when they were and treated as a guest and friend. Frequently women would come and go during my visit, joining in the conversation and partaking of the hospitality. This 'open door' socialising, often congregated within key people's homes, and usually resulted in women I knew

arriving as well as women who were unknown to me. Conversations would be a mixture of English and Somali, with me waiting patiently to see if translation would be provided or not. The women would often negotiate together as well as with me the interpretation or the correct word that was needed, or they would draw on the person they considered most competent to provide fuller accounts of what they were trying to explain. They were usually very conscious of the need to translate for me, and when 'carried away' in deep conversation, would apologise afterwards for leaving me out.

### **Data gathering – stage two**

Over half way into the fieldwork, and given a limited engagement with individual interviews, following discussion with my supervisors, it was decided that it was appropriate to pursue a more ethnographic and participatory observational approach so that the data being used as contextually informative could be more formally used. Ethical approval for this revised strategy was sought and much thought and discussion was given to how I would manage issues related to informed consent. The School Ethics Committee agreed to my revised proposal, which included my strategy for obtaining informed consent. (See appendix1).

Participant observation is argued to be the key to adopting an ethnographic approach (Omidian, 2000). This involves spending time with a community and seeing how members routinely do things and how they respond to everyday events. The purpose of this observation is to understand the meanings attributed by people to their lives and activities, alongside the contexts and processes in which they occur. Identification of unusual or unexpected phenomena is also important, as is the intention of developing explanations (Maxwell, 1996, cited Omidian, 2000, p.46). That being said, it is recognised that the circumstances surrounding forced migrant lives may often reflect 'abnormal' patterns and responses to daily life (Omidian, 2000). Despite this, participant observation offers the opportunity to develop a deeper level of insight and understanding of forced migrant's lives as a result of spending time within a community. It also offers the possibility for feeding into other ethnographic methods, such as formal interviews, thereby enabling more meaningful and pertinent questions to be asked and better interpretation of the responses offered alongside the salience they should be given (Omidian, 2000). This is valuable particularly when exploring the conflicts and discrepancies that may arise between normative responses, reflecting the held ideal and actual actions and practices that are seen to occur (Eastmond, 2007).

Spending time with community members, many of whom have experienced loss and trauma, also brings to the forefront the contested issues of whether the knowledge gained from the research should be directly used for community action and the researcher's role within this action. For some, there is the belief and acceptance that being so closely involved with members of a community and 'taking' from them requires a giving back to the community in terms of taking on roles of 'social worker' and/or advocate. This may involve the researcher in a greater exposure to pain and discomfort and the possible need for debriefing and support (Eastmond, 2007).

In addition to some of the complexity and ethical/ ideological challenges involved in using an ethnographic approach, which are particularly important with forced migrants being considered an at risk population, there are also recognised limitations and constraints as to what it can achieve by observation alone. Data gained from participant observation are considered by some as needing to be used in conjunction with other ethnographic methods in order to cross check and verify their validity and accuracy. Studying refugee lives within a given context or community with its own history and culture can fail to take account of the changing and evolving nature of that community in terms of settlement and exile. In addition, transnational living and an increasingly globalised world highlight the complexities of understanding cultural practices and meanings underpinning everyday activities and day-to-day living in a local context. The many dimensions of exploration available to the researcher within a participant observation framework suggest the need for a significant investment of the researcher's time and energy, alongside the financial means to undertake and sustain such a research process (Eastmond, 2007). Despite these challenges and limitations, the adoption of participant observation as an integral part of an ethnographic approach to understanding forced migrant's lives can be seen as appropriate and valuable.

In this study, the adoption of a more explicit ethnographic approach made use of informal conversations and participant observation as sources of data. While these informal sessions did not call for the use of formal questioning of the women such as by that outlined in the topic schedule (appendix 2) the schedule none the less proved invaluable in helping me to categorise and reflect on the conversations and areas of discussion that were taking place. These were subsequently either tape-recorded on the way home, or written up promptly. Questions from the topic schedule therefore

became ones that I asked myself in relation to what I was hearing and seeing, rather than directed to the women themselves. The broad focus of the study, the everyday life experiences and activities of family life, provided a very flexible focus and emphasised the pertinence of the women's accounts and discussions which to a large extent reflected the 'every day conversations' that they might hold.

These informal sessions, although enjoyable and very insightful, also provided challenges and uneasiness in relation to issues of informed consent. It was questionable whether the women really understood what they were consenting to, or whether the informality of the sessions actually disguised or played down the formal research in which they were participating. Concern was also raised in that despite reinforcing my researcher position through seeking their consent, the informality of my participation and the nature of my relationship with some of the women potentially blurred their ability to fully understand my primary role as researcher. For example, when I informed the sewing members that I would be leaving the group at the end of the term and would not be returning until after I had finished my research study, invitations were given to me to 'pop in' for a cup of tea at the group session, or to call at someone's house for a visit, suggesting that the women saw no need to end this 'tentative friendship'.

My initial efforts to implement my planned research strategy can be considered only minimally successful with this community. Only by grasping the opportunities that presented to spend time with some of the women was I able to begin to forge relationships and trust with them. Greater understanding of Somali culture led me to being proactive in a more culturally appropriate way, by talking with pairs or small groups of women in their homes. The parallel strategies that concurrently took place, the more formal interviewing with participants along with the ethnographic, naturalistic sessions, allowed for women in different ways to have their voices heard in this study. Reflecting upon the different types of data that the methods obtained and how participants responded to the different approaches, it can be seen that data initially collected using a focus type group interview and formal in-depth interviewing generally attracted participants who were more confident and competent in their English speaking ability. Despite this, for some, participation in this way led to a rather stilted session, appearing a rather strained and probably 'perplexing' encounter. For Lana and Idil however, who both participated in three separate interviews, as well as Syrod who participated in two sessions, they appeared

increasingly more comfortable with each interview that they participated in, with the style of interview becoming more informal as the interviews progressed. These women were highly educated, spoke competent English, and clearly relished the cultural exchange and opportunity to speak English on a one-to-one basis.

Women that contributed only in the informal group interviews taking place in some women's homes, as well as those engaging with me at the sewing group, were somewhat distinguished by their shyness, their reticence in speaking English and their believed lack of ability or confidence to contribute to the study. Farhah provides an example of a participant who initially refused to be interviewed due to her perceived English incompetency and reluctance to use an interpreter. Through engagement at the sewing group and informally at peoples houses though, she was willing to and able to make a significant contribution to the study. For some women therefore, the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard in this study was only achieved as a result of making the research process more in keeping with the natural practices and informal gatherings of the women.

My revised research strategy attempted to identify and manage some of the known issues associated with researching forced migrants, but experiencing and responding to them in practice has proved challenging. A number of methodological and ethical issues encountered within the research process are further explored in the next three sections. These are working with gatekeepers in identifying and recruiting participants, the giving of information and gaining informed consent, and being an outsider and overcoming mistrust. My reflections on these three broad areas of the research process highlight the complexity of my fieldwork experience in more detail and reflect many of the issues raised in relation to undertaking refugee research and making use of an ethnographic approach. Additional detail relating to the research strategy and in particular the study's ethical considerations and management can be found in appendix 3.

### **Negotiating access to participants**

Prior professional networks established while working in the community as a health visitor were drawn on in negotiating access and identification of key gatekeepers in the Somali community. It was initially anticipated that identified gatekeepers to the groups would agree to act as go-betweens in seeking out their group's interest in participating and in providing information about the study, through

the distribution of the information letter as well as inviting me into the groups to discuss the study more fully. It was hoped that in demystifying the research process and my role within it, women's fears would be allayed, promoting understanding of the procedures and allowing opportunity for negotiation of preferences and requests to occur and be responded to. Following this information meeting, contact would be made with the group leader to arrange a focus group session.

The Somali community have an oral culture. The use of leaflets and posters, even when translated into Somali are considered to have limited success in communicating information to the community. Some members are illiterate in both Somali and English, though they may speak two or three languages. Word of mouth is therefore regarded as the most effective form of communication (Olden, 1999). The reliance on group leaders as gatekeepers was therefore regarded as an essential part of the recruitment strategy, not only in accessing the community, but also in providing information and in introducing myself to the group. The issue of gatekeepers in relation to forced migrant research is well documented, particularly in relation to their vital role in identifying individuals and groups, given the 'hidden' nature of the community, along with issues of representation and voice (Tait, 2006). Forced migrants are recognised as a vulnerable group and in need of protection from those that might seek to exploit them. Gatekeepers may be overprotective of their clients, or speak on their behalf without consulting them over their wishes, emphasising the importance attached to individual, informed consent (Stalker, 1998).

Despite feeling advantaged by having worked in the city in the past as a health visitor and having established working links with both voluntary and statutory organisations, the process of identifying potential gatekeepers, of establishing new contacts and in obtaining information about the Somali community took time and perseverance, and remained an ongoing activity throughout the research process. Accessing busy professionals for whom students are not usually considered a priority is challenging; capitalising on past connections contributed to re-establishing ties with them, increasing the likelihood that they would be willing to give me time and information. Contact with Somali gatekeepers required swiftly identifying and establishing common ground between us with the hope that initial perceptions of myself would be positive with some sense of relationship established. Emphasising shared gender, motherhood, my learner status, and our mutual contacts were facets of my identity that I frequently drew upon to legitimise who I was and my held agenda.

Pearce (1993) suggests that negotiating within the research process is about relationships. Highlighted within my experiences is how different representations of self can be used in building relationships with gatekeepers.

The resilience topic proved to be a topic that opened up and developed opportunities for me when dealing with gatekeepers. Professionals appeared to relate well to the concept, and its breadth meant that most found it relevant to some aspect of their organisation or work. Somali female contacts also warmed to the topic, relating women's strength to that of their own experiences, confirming their own views that this aspect of their lives needed to receive greater credit. I became suspicious though over time that the subject and the focus on women also served to tap into contested gender role issues simmering within the Somali community, and I realised that though subjects may 'open doors', the reasons for this are not always explicit or fully understood. None the less, the acceptance and understanding of the strengths orientation of this study was significant in establishing my network of gatekeepers and contacts.

Identifying key gatekeepers, and in particular, identifying and making contact with the leaders of the Somali groups I believed to be in the city, required the mapping of contacts and information. Though many informants were aware of local Somali groups, they were unable to provide details of meeting places or times, nor was there any available published information on them. Key Somali women identified for me were usually only known by their first name and frequently there was more than one having the same name, making identification and connection more difficult. Although I was informed that the city had five Somali groups, I could only identify three. Subsequent knowledge gained suggested that amalgamations and closure might have accounted for the discrepancy, though this remained unconfirmed.

With a very rudimentary understanding of the groups, I contacted the identified women leaders, who to varying degrees, and in different ways, gave me some form of access to themselves and their members. The initial contact with these women and their responses was pivotal in determining whether or not it would lead to contact with a number of potential participants. This highlighted my sense of powerlessness and dependency both within these negotiations, and throughout my attempts to access members via them. The dynamic and shifting power relations experienced in this process, provided insight into 'the creative ways' the less powerful are able to find to resist power inequalities (Schurich, 1997, p.71).

Group leaders adopted a brokering role in my negotiations of identifying potential participants and their recruitment. Despite requests to meet with the groups directly, this proved somewhat illusive. Unspoken questions arose as to whether the gatekeepers actually consulted all their members about the study and if they encouraged participation or not. Of the small number of participants from one group who took part in a group interview it was unclear if, and why, the gatekeeper had selected them, or why they might have volunteered themselves. A blanket refusal by another gatekeeper to participate because the women were too busy, as well as an inability to identify one individual other than herself that would consider the possibility of taking part in an individual interview, led me to suspect the members had not been consulted. Lack of forthcoming information about the groups generally, alongside not having direct access to two of them, meant that despite my dealings with gatekeepers and some successful recruitment from their groups, the groups seemed very much still hidden from me.

I became aware of other ‘layers’ of gate keeping operating within the community. Attempts by male gatekeepers to undermine or censor the women’s stories and accounts, as well as speak on behalf of women required sensitive management so as not to offend or create antagonism between the male Somali community and myself, yet still needed me to be emphatic about the study’s focus and interest in seeking women’s accounts. My lack of understanding of gender relationships within the community, as well as the authority and influence men might actually have over women, left me unsure of the actual risk these particular gatekeepers posed to the women’s recruitment and engagement with the study. Amongst some of these voiced objections, not encountered before with the women, was the suggestion of an awareness and understanding of the potential power this study had to bring about positive and negative consequences for the Somali community. I felt some relief, recognising this to be an appropriate response to the perceived or sometimes real threat that research brings. But it also served to further confirm how little understanding and experience many of the women had of research, emphasising their vulnerability in this process and the potential to take advantage of this position. Central to this study has been the recognised need to hear the voices of those who have less opportunity to represent themselves about their lives. Processes and relational power dynamics through which some forced migrant voices are constrained and silenced by other forced migrants is evidenced both by the women

gatekeepers and by male members of the community, highlighting the complexities in seeking to hear the voices of women.

In the light of unfolding complexity and unanswered questions emerging from my time with participants and conversations with gatekeepers, I felt the need to establish a Somali contact to whom I would be able to bring my questions about the Somali community. I realised that I initially had little concept of the cultural social boundaries of what was acceptable to ask, particularly in relation to clan relationships, gender issues, family structure and Islamic practice, and this made me reticent in the questions I posed and the depth of discussion I felt able to initiate with gatekeepers and participants. When answers were provided to my questions, I frequently failed to fully comprehend them, lacking insight into how they connected and wove together to form the context and overall bigger picture that I required. Opportunity to introduce my study and myself was seized, both through introductions within formal organisations and informally as women accessed these organisations, and though polite and interested the women did not seem keen to commit to helping me in this informative role. One Somali woman though, met with me on several occasions providing valuable opportunity for me to clarify, question and explore issues in relation to the community. Her non-participatory research role, as well as the development of the relationship over time contributed towards a safe learning environment. However, negotiating and determining how the nature and the role of the relationship should be ethically conducted required careful reflection and discussion with my supervisors. Questions I had to consider included identifying the boundaries and nature of the relationship, anticipating how the relationship might be brought to an end at the close of the study and how the relationship might be viewed by other Somali women.

### **Issues of informed consent**

Within research the principles of respect for persons and beneficence are enshrined and governed by ethical, legal and professional frameworks that emphasise the importance of informed consent (Mackenzie et al, 2007, p. 30; Wiles et al, 2005). Research involving forced migrants raises specific concerns in relation to this issue. Mackenzie et al (2007) suggest that informed consent is ‘premised on the assumption that participants are autonomous, understand the implications of giving consent and are in relatively equal positions of power with researchers’ (Mackenzie et al, 2007,

p302). Forced migrants vulnerability due to past trauma, status, relationship to the host country and their lack of experience and understanding of formal research processes may impinge on their ability to make an autonomous informed decision about participation.

Providing comprehensive and clear information about the research to potential participants is recognised as important in aiding informed consent. Wiles et al (2005) suggest:

*'...that researchers understand the information needs of the group that they want to research and that they use this knowledge to provide information in a way that will enable potential study participants to understand what participation may involve.'*

*(Wiles et al, 2005, p.13).*

Information letters were therefore designed (appendices 4&5) being considered clear, concise and of 'friendly' design in an attempt to ensure reader accessibility (Alderson, 2004, cited Wiles et al, 2005). University headed notepaper was used emphasising the researcher's student position and educational affiliation, hopefully assuring potential participants of its independence from Government/Immigration bodies. Information included the broad aims of the research, what it hoped to achieve, what would be expected from participants' involvement, and contact numbers and email address of the researcher and her supervisor so that potential and actual participants might contact to ask questions or discuss concerns. Assurances were also given that participation or non-participation in the study would not affect their rights to services, their status, or be likely to have any other adverse effects on themselves or their families.

It was anticipated that consent forms would require verbal reading by the researcher or research assistant to the participant and time allowed for clarification of any questions or confusion. Omidian (2000) states that individuals who have strong cultural notions of trust as well as fear in relation to official processes may feel that the request to sign a consent form undermines and insults their verbal consent to participate. The pertinence of this for this community was not fully known. Given however that ethical approval received from the University School Ethics Committee did not actually make written consent a requisite, a strategy of seeking oral consent only was based on the need to promote participants' trust and confidence in the research process and in issues related to their anonymity.

Researching with participants whose first language is not English raises particular methodological and ethical issues. Participants may not be able to fully understand what is said by the researcher or by the other participants. Introducing a third person, the interpreter, into the research relationship raises confidentiality concerns and questions as to their impact on the data. Cultural understanding of what is said is also a challenge in a cross-cultural study. Temple and Edwards (2006) highlight a lack of methodological discussion to be found within the literature regarding the role of interpreters and translators in the research process for those for whom English is not a first language. The absence is particularly noted in relation to interviewing and focus group methods.

It was initially anticipated that all potential participants would be asked their preferences in relation to informal interpreting by a group member or friend, or through a formal interpretation service. Accepting Temple and Edwards (2006) position that the interpreter makes a significant contribution in the co-construction of knowledge, it was planned that an interview would be held with the proposed formal interpreter and myself prior to commencement of duties to discuss issues related to the aims of the research, confidentiality, and to make visible the social location of the interpreter. Jacobsen and Landau (2003), highlighting the complexities of introducing interpreters to forced migrant communities suggest they may ‘incur the risk of transgressing political, social or economic fault-lines of which the researcher may not be aware’ (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, p.9); a disconcerting point given the clan fractions known to exist within the community.

As it was, the naturally occurring translation practices among the women in which each would ‘help each other out’ as well as their use of a number of women recognised for their English competency, filtered through into the research process itself. In addition some women who considered themselves unconfident in their English speaking ability responded to encouragement to engage in conversation with me and clearly thrived on the reinforcement and recognition given to their progress in speaking English. For some participants, the opportunity to practice English appeared to be a key motivating factor for their engagement with the study. Overall though, questions remain as to the extent to which, given the cultural constraints and values operating within the community, as well as the women’s role in supporting each other to contribute, participants were actually able to voice their opinions on the issues

considered important to them. This again highlights the complexities of attempting to 'give voice' to individuals.

Reflecting upon the study's objective of eliciting female forced migrants' voices, clearly only a limited number of formal participants in this study were recruited, despite my prolonged, sustained efforts. Attending social gatherings I was surprised to see how many Somali women there were in the city that I had never seen before and who had no knowledge of who I was or what I was doing. Demonstrated was the effectiveness of the Somali gatekeepers in 'protecting' their members from me. For those women that did participate in the research, these were on the whole women who were able to communicate in English, were more likely to be educated and were confident enough or curious enough to 'take a chance' in talking with me. At the same time, participants such as Awo and Lul, as well as Fatima who had hardly any English at all can be considered more surprising research participants. It was these participants who I was most pleased to have participated in the study.

While there were many similar issues and experiences provided within participants accounts, Lana and Idol, though quite different in many ways from each other, allowed for alternative understandings and responses to daily life here in the city to be voiced. Questions remain though as to how much I really understood and interpreted correctly what participants actually said and meant. The ethnographic, participant opportunities went some way to clarifying and illuminating participants' accounts, as well as emerging issues being confirmed within the literatures. Feedback from participants in relation to the findings may provide some insight as to the perceived accuracy of the representation of their voices. Tensions also are apparent in my attempts to empower participants to voice their individual accounts of family life here in the West, given the importance attached to the collective voice and identity of the community. Prominent within accounts are participants' adherence to their faith and culture, yet it remains unclear how far a sense of duty and respect for these aspects of their lives influenced what they said to an outsider. Though there remain many unanswered questions and identified limitations to my attempts to elicit forced migrant voices, insights have been gained from the accounts provided.

Walmsley (1993) suggests that central to research power relations of negotiation and access are issues of sharing information and providing explanations about one's research. Providing succinct, clear explanations about one's research study to gatekeepers and potential participants for whom English is a second

language, proved unexpectedly challenging, and left a sense of inadequacy in relation to my attempts. Translating the resilience concept from an academic vocabulary into lay language led to statements such as ‘looking at how you manage your daily life in spite of challenges and problems’; ‘looking at how families are strong’ and ‘how women are strong’. Responses to women being strong frequently led to laughter between the women and ‘in-jokes’ and comments that I thought I got the gist of but probably did not. Clearly capturing their interest, they would sometimes respond listing all the ways that Somali women were strong, dismissing my attempts to refocus the discussion by suggesting that they also experienced hardships in their lives.

Reflecting on my brief introductory phone calls to the group leaders I realised that at no point in my explanation had I mentioned the study’s connection neither with forced migrants and refugees, nor on checking was it to be found in my information letter. I realised the sensitivity of these terms and wondered if unconsciously I had thought to avoid them. Wellesley talks of the ‘fudging of explanations’ and while it is open to interpretation how much information about the study is appropriate to be provided, recognition is given to the impact my explanations would have had in shaping and influencing the data (Wellesley, 1993, p.44).

Responding to these experiences I found myself changing the way I explained my study, my use of words, my emphasis and the amount of information given, highlighting the interactive nature of this process as explanations were adapted and re-presented according to feedback received, ‘accompanied by shifting perceptions of each other’s world’ (Wellesley, 1993, p.44). Evidence of my ‘success’ in conveying the purpose of my study could be found in the explanations I heard women give to their friends as they introduced me, which commonly included, that I was writing a book about Somalia, that I was wanting to know about Somali culture, or that I was a teacher. Holman (1991) referring to the issue of informed consent suggests that this may not be possible always due to practical issues such as being unable to fully explain the nature of the study (Holman, 1991, cited Wiles et al, 2005). While this is pertinent, recognition must also be given to the fact that explanation cannot necessarily establish understanding (Wellesley, 1993).

Emphasis and care had been given to the design of the information letter. While this can be seen to reflect the values of the academic world, assumptions cannot be made that their customs and practices necessarily translate to ‘other

worlds'. Given the limitations of initial verbal explanations, I was very keen to ensure that the women leaders had both Somali and English translations of the information letter to hand out to their members. While some showed interest in receiving a supply from me, one suggested there was no need to get them to her before she met with the group as she had grasped what I was wanting. Despite her assurances, I dropped off the letters to the centre that I knew her to be attending the next day, leaving a note that I had by chance been visiting the organisation next door, so had taken the opportunity to deliver them. Even though letters were given to all Somali leaders, it appeared few women had either received them, were aware of them or had read them. I therefore always automatically gave potential participants copies of the letter when meeting them and explained who I was although I felt slightly embarrassed doing this when the leader was present.

Though I was aware of the oral tradition of information giving within the community, it had been suggested that the women would still want written information about the study. Though I had designed the letter with clarity and ease of reading in mind I realised that it was inappropriate for many of the women, only adding to the complexity of information giving. Witnessing the length of time and concentration it took for one leader with relatively substantial qualifications in English to read the letter, suggested it was the equivalent of asking the women to read an academic textbook. The question that most women asked as they looked at the letter was what was my contact number, which in fact was obscure because of the university headed notepaper. I eventually started highlighting in red key points, only contact number and name. I got the impression that when women were initially asked if they would prefer the letter in English or Somali, some asked for it in English in order to impress friends that were with them. I therefore later changed tactic and gave women both English and Somali copies. Later in a conversation with a Somali woman, referring to the large gathering of women in the hall and the similarity of their ages, she stated that all the women present had had their education disrupted by civil war. While I had initially acknowledged the possible poor literacy skills of the community, I recognised my failure in really responding to the challenges of presenting written information in more accessible ways for them.

Information giving and informed consent are integral concepts. Having outlined the issues of gaining written consent to the School Ethics Board in my initial application to them, a decision was given by them that obtaining written consent was

optional. I decided on the grounds of ensuring anonymity, as well as my lack of knowledge about personal experiences participants might have had in issues of signing formal papers, that verbal consent only would be sought. Feeling the significance of this decision, careful attention was paid to asking participants in the individual interviews if they were happy to proceed with the interview, and to making it clear that I was pleased to answer questions about any aspect of their involvement. The need though for understanding consent as an ongoing process throughout a participant's potential and actual involvement was highlighted and evidenced in this research process. While some women were very assertive and clear in their decision not to participate, usually stating that they were too busy, it seemed harder for women to be able to voice their wish to withdraw from the process once initial willingness to participate had been voiced. Some participants initially said yes, but later were not in for appointments. When subsequently met at a group meeting or event they did not make eye contact with me, or seek me out to rearrange the appointment. This required a delicate balance of following up participants to try and establish their continued interest or not, as well as the ability to read and interpret non-verbal clues and behaviour.

### **Researcher role and relationships**

A significant number of forced migrants are known to have suffered trauma to varying extents both in relation to their past experiences in their home country, their journeys to the host country and their current life experiences (Papadopoulos, 2001). No questions, it was decided, would be directly asked about their past experiences or their reasons for entry to the UK. To address possible negative associations the participants might have with interviews, gained either in their country of origin, or as a result of the asylum process, in-depth interviews would be open-ended in relation to the preset broad categories used in the discussion groups, with the aim that the participant would 'hold the floor' beyond the limits of the usual turn (Mishler, 1996, p.74).

Researching with forced migrants is a contentious and politically sensitive area with strong emotions and views held by many on the subject. Hayes and Humphries (1999) define sensitive research as 'Areas of social life that are contentious or highly conflictional' (Hayes and Humphries, 1999, p.19). Anticipating the potential harm to the Somali community caused by the study is not possible. The

study's objectives, among others, are to impact positively on the lives of Somali communities in the UK, through potentially creating greater, accurate knowledge based upon the voices of Somali people, and by influencing professional practice and policy makers. Finch (1985), however, draws attention to the concern that findings can actually worsen a situation for a community or individual, or reinforce negative assumptions and prejudices (Finch, 1985, cited Shaw, 2003, p.24). Harris (2004) in his authoritative review of the literature in relation to the Somali community in the UK suggests that qualitative research studies which portray the voice of Somali individuals 'introduce agency, open a window on the process of social life, illuminate generalisations and counter the essentialisation of groups of communities (Harris, 2004, p.17). He also highlights the emphasis placed on the self-reliant, active agency of the individual within Somali culture and its disjuncture from the problem-based, victimhood Somali/forced migrant research that predominates. The orientation of this study, the methods employed and the attention given to the research process can be argued to reflect and meet Harris's position and criteria for conducting beneficial research for the Somali community.

Personal critical reflection throughout the research process so as to identify and make transparent my social, political and cultural values and their influences upon the data was considered important, and proved particularly valuable when dealing with issues related to women's rights and independence and cultural values alien to and at times, at odds with my own value system. The challenges of making conscious ingrained, taken for granted cultural assumptions, practices and everyday 'knowledge' 'hidden' within my daily life experiences is not underestimated, nor in managing the contradiction and disjuncture found between them and the emerging data. Alongside this has also been the question as to what extent I, as the researcher, should make myself visible within the written text. The balance between ensuring the researcher's transparency and positioning participants' voices as central in the study has required careful consideration, tensions being most evident when deciding how to present the research findings. It was also considered important to ensure that emphasis was not given to more extreme accounts, or to a particular viewpoint or perspectives, but rather chosen to represent the diverse views of the community. Having said that, it was really valuable to capture the accounts of two of the participants, who stood out as different in many ways from the rest of the participants, and to locate them and make sense of what they said within the wider context of accounts progenerated.

Given the political nature of the research, a mindfulness of issues relating to future dissemination of the findings has remained throughout the research process, recognising that this may involve ambiguous or even hostile audiences. Audiences may try to render the findings invisible due to its considered lack of priority, and this is particularly relevant for the area of this study where Somali families make up only a small number of the population (Hayes and Humphries, 1999).

Anonymisation, in which an individual or group is made unidentifiable to the reader, traditionally is considered central to gaining potential participants' confidence to participate in a study and in safeguarding them from potential harm resulting from their participation (Grinyer, 2002). For forced migrants, issues relating to their status, their uneasiness with formal processes, and their activities in the host country and within their own communities, would suggest the importance of ensuring anonymity. Anonymity issues, it was decided, would need to be discussed and negotiated with the groups/individuals prior to and during the data collection process. Only participants' name and contact number would be requested from participants, with no other demographic details being specifically requested. Pseudonyms would be discussed and chosen by participants given the researchers limited knowledge of Somali names and the need for the Somali community to be able to relate to them (Grinyer, 2002). The small size of the Somali community might require the changing of individuals' characteristics in order to preserve anonymity particularly in relation to sensitive material and this, it was anticipated, would be negotiated with the participants themselves. Careful consideration though would need to be given to how the balance and integrity of the data might subsequently be affected. For most participants, these 'technical' issues relating to the research were found on the whole to be ones that they appeared to have little interest in, and this can be seen to reflect possibly their inability to grasp the overall nature and purpose of the research. For some participants, first country of EU settlement was changed along with the number of children that they had so as to aid anonymity. Questions remain as to how easily community members would be able to identify each other given a general awareness held of those who had participated, the high profile of those participants with more 'liberal' attitudes, and the group leader's prominence within the community.

It was taken that confidentiality would be assured to participants, with no information being shared with gatekeepers, organisations or family members without the prior consent of the participant. My duty to disclose any information obtained

suggesting a family member was at risk of, or had suffered significant harm would though be made clear. Attempts would be made to avoid participants' disclosing incriminating criminal information, such as that related to illegal status, involvement of smuggling activities, benefit fraud and such like, by redirecting the discussion/conversation, or if need be by asking the participant to stop (Wiles et al, 2006). This would reduce the likelihood of having to break the confidentiality agreement.

While the struggles and challenges I encountered in managing my outsider status in this community are highlighted along with my ability to gain not only entry to it, but also understanding when I did, there were some advantages to this status. Though I had had some limited experience of working with the Somali community prior to this study, I was very much seeing and hearing things throughout this research process that were unfamiliar to me, creating a freshness and newness (Clough and Nutbeam, 2002). Potential benefits included the way in which participants were more explicit with their answers and discussion having recognised my lack of understanding and background knowledge of their culture and community. Evidence in the literature highlighting the public nature of Somali women's lives and the lack of privacy within their community indicated that perhaps my outsider status may have elicited stories and accounts not normally voiced or felt safe to discuss. For example, discussion on clan and leadership tensions that arose in the individual interviews provoked frank and critical views in relation to this sensitive subject. Criticism was also given of moral behaviour and its impact on traditional Somali family structure, opinions possibly less strongly voiced amongst the community members themselves. I was also regarded as a novelty. A significant number of participants indicated that they had no friendships with British white women, with their strongest impressions of the British being associated with drunkenness and foul language. My presence therefore often aroused curiosity and prompted and encouraged engagement with me, even though this was somewhat limited at times.

But the challenges of overcoming mistrust of my outsider status, of being able to recognise or grasp meanings and hidden complexity of what I heard and saw, as well as the limitations that language barriers imposed, created a need for me to find different ways of gaining entry into this community. Increasingly I was aware of the limitations that data devoid of any connection to broader cultural contexts and knowledge of behaviour had in imparting understanding and meaning to an outsider.

My chance encounter with the Somali sewing group provided an opportunity to address this issue as well as establish relationships and trust with the women. Taking on an observer role, attention was paid to such issues as where I would sit so as to invite and attract conversation, who I sat next to, as well as watching the dynamics within the group. As a participant in the class I took on the customary starter project of making an apron and found it presented natural opportunities for engaging in conversation with the women. This often took the form of members instructing me on sewing techniques, or giving mutual support and admiration to each other's projects. Conversations were shyly initiated by them rather than always by me, as had often previously been my experience. I joined in their banter and discussions, but also sat patiently alongside them as they embarked on long, intense Somali conversations, never indicating that I expected them to share the nature or content of them, though they sometimes did. Over a period of time the Somali group leader offered invitations to me to attend special group meetings or activities that the women were holding. While I was allocated the role of guest, I also grasped opportunities to contribute to the sessions alongside the women, setting out chairs, clearing rubbish, washing up and taking opportunity for conversation or friendly exchanges in the process.

Through these different opportunities to participate in the lives of the women, I felt that issues of mistrust were diminished, though by no means eliminated. I gained opportunity to invite women to participate in the study and some were less reticent about accepting and it seemed that both the women and myself gained understanding about each others' lives. Rodgers (2004) suggests that 'hanging out' with forced migrants can show something about the lived experience of forced migration, and as such is an 'indispensable research tool' to the formation of 'informed, creative and self-critical responses' (Rodgers, 2004, p.49). However, my account of this research process has documented the challenges and complexity of actually getting to this privileged position of being allowed to 'hang out'. While I still remained a critical outsider, I experienced glimpses of what it is like to be an insider. The need though for good time management and the requirement to reflect on and manage relationship and research boundaries, continued to challenge me throughout the research process.

## **Analysis of data**

Data can be seen to have come from more formal group and individual interviews, participation in the sewing group and attendance at other social events. The range of informal conversations relating to women's daily lives highlighted and illuminated the rhythms and routines of family life. Initially these provided a backdrop to participants' more formal accounts, as well as feeding into subsequent interviews, which in turn shaped questioning and discussion within their natural settings. Subsequently, the adoption of a more explicit ethnographic approach and the use of participant observation as a method of data gathering can be seen to have contributed to enabling other women to participate, as well as providing different, but complementary data. Recognition of the different sorts and sources of data are outlined in figure 3.1. Different sized circles are used to depict the data sources and correspond to the different levels of contribution that the source made to the overall study. Pen pictures of a total of 18 women who participated in group and/or individual interviews are presented in Appendix 6.

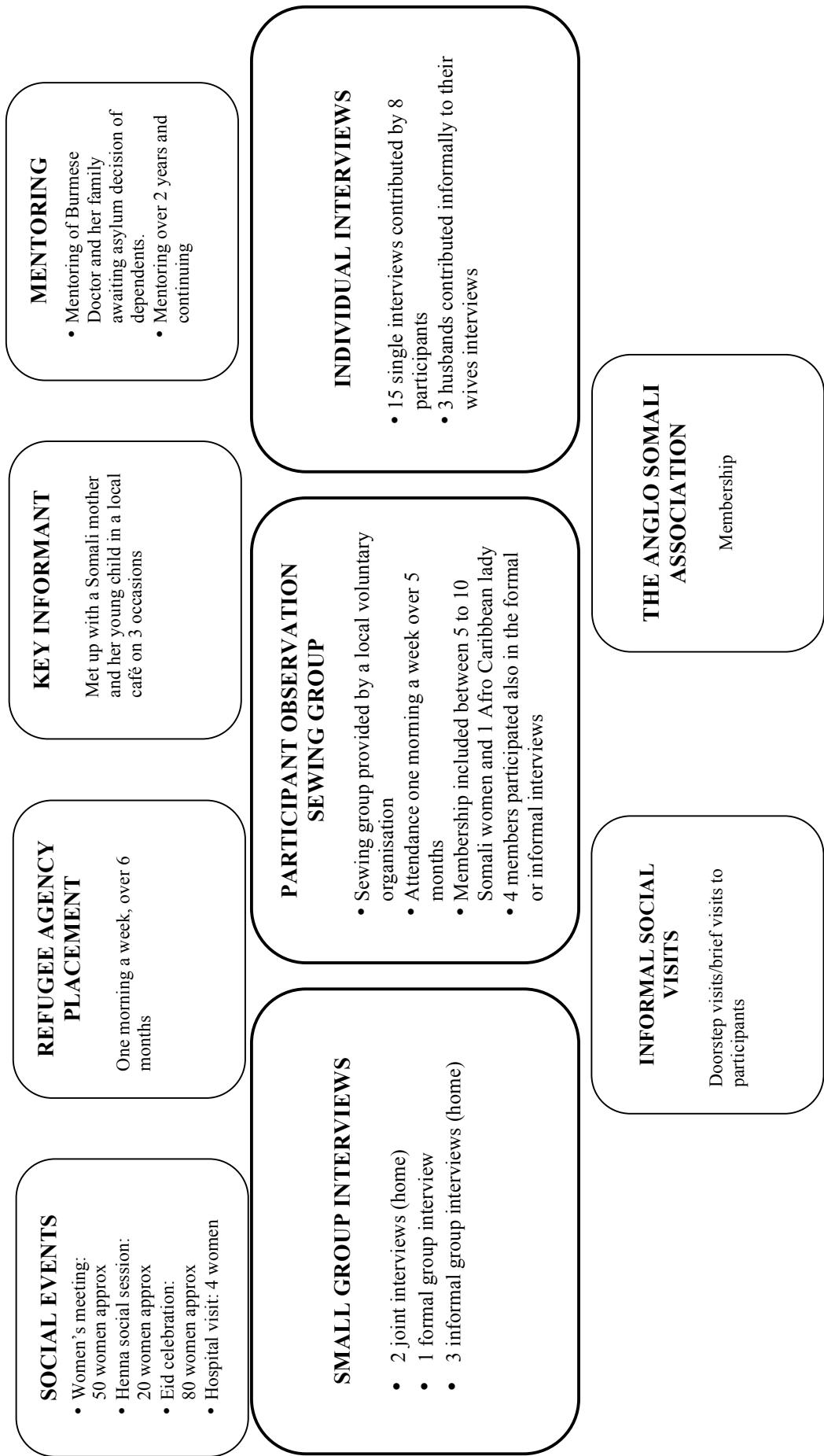
Interviews, sewing group attendances, informal visits and conversations were either audio-taped or written up promptly after they occurred. Of the 21 interview (6 group and 15 one-to-one) sessions, ten were audio-recorded and eleven had extensive notes taken. Audio-taped interviews were transcribed ad-verbatim, with many demonstrating participants varying competency in English. This made transcription at times more challenging, with some points made by participants being later found to be ambiguous in their meaning. Lana's discussion on her use of public transport demonstrates the potential for confusion in understanding participant's accounts.

*'Everything is easy but it's sometimes difficult to pick up. You know there is one bus stop there, but it comes with the stairs. I can't manage with the pushchair. I should go to the high street. Especially in the winter though it is difficult.'*

Due to the potential complexity of analysing the transcripts of participants for whom English was a second/third language, as well as a need to place specific points within the wider context of the conversation so as to aid understanding, analysis was undertaken manually rather than by using a computer software programme. All the transcripts and written notes collected from the various sources were collated together and read through, with attention given to how the different sources shaped the data both by their content and in their contribution to understanding participants' daily

Figure 3.1

## Sources contributing to data collection

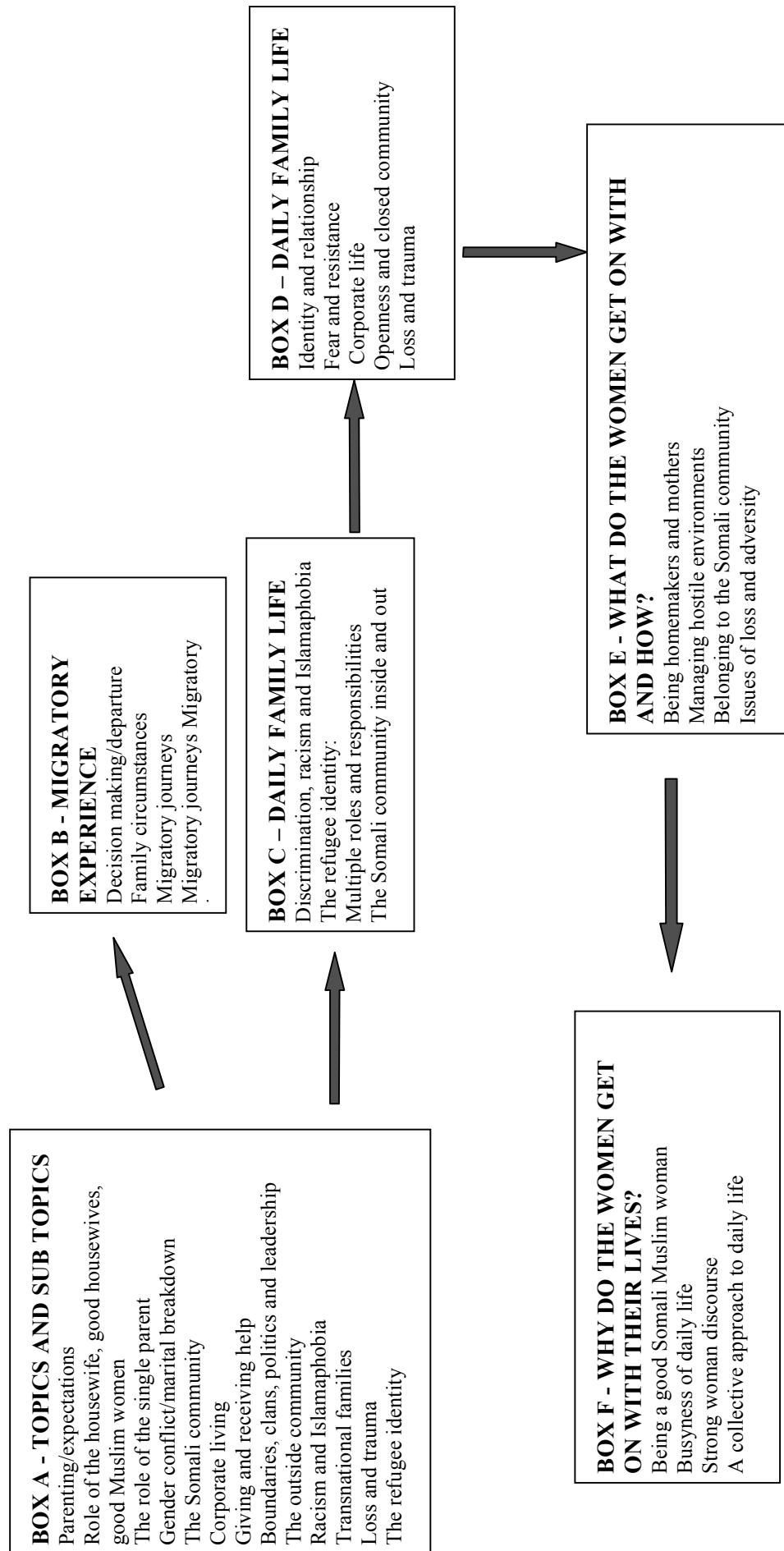


lives. This enabled me to become increasingly familiar with the data. An iterative, grounded process then followed in which data collection and analysis informed and directed each other (Charmaz, 2008). Topics emerging from the data led to the informing, development and reviewing of themes, eventually culminating in a series of questions being posed in order to present the over-arching themes identified from the data in a more structured form. The process is briefly outlined below, and presented within a flow chart in figure 3.2.

Initially broad topics or ‘chunks’ of data around a topic area in relation to family life were identified, with sub-topics forming within these (Box A). Key topics emerged and these were developed into identified themes, which in turn were further interrogated and reviewed. Data alluding to participants’ migratory journeys could be seen woven into some participants’ accounts and themes relating to these migratory journeys were identified (Box B) and are presented and discussed in the following Chapter Four. Themes relating to aspects of current day-to-day life were identified and revised in Boxes C and D. An overarching framework for the findings was then identified from these inter-related themes, serving to integrate the different strands of women’s accounts. This framework expressed as ‘women just getting on with daily family life amidst transition and change’ was then interrogated by asking the two key questions: What do women get on with and how? (Box E). These findings are discussed in Chapter Five.

In attempting to develop this thematic analysis I was very conscious of a tension of wanting to let the women’s accounts and rich descriptions of daily life take centre stage, yet at the same time needing for analysis and interpretation of their accounts to take place. Alongside this, having read all the data, I was slightly overwhelmed by my outsider status, developing a sense of dis-ease with the power that I had to speak on their behalf, as well as doubting my ability to do so, given the ‘strangeness’ of their lives to my own experiences and thoughts. However taking the overarching framework and asking ‘what’ and ‘how’ women got on with their everyday lives, allowed for the richness of women’s accounts, within the identified themes, to be portrayed as a central feature of the study. Key features identified in the ‘what’ and ‘how’ contributed to further questions being posed to reveal through further interrogation and analysis the ‘why’ behind participants’ thoughts and actions and possible meaning attributed to their day-to-day activities (Box F). The exploration and discussion of these findings can be found in Chapter Six.

**Figure 3.2**  
**Iterative analysis process**



It is anticipated that both oral and written feedback will be offered to all of the participants. Through liaison with each of the women leaders, I plan to explore with them how best to present the information so that it is accessible, useful and interesting to community members. Participants will also be invited to contribute feedback and this would be documented. Strategies and opportunities for wider dissemination across the academic and practice arena will also be explored.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the study's research strategy, outlining the underpinning principles and theory that have contributed in shaping its development. The subsequent unfolding of the research process has been discussed, with reflections provided highlighting areas of challenge, limitation and of perceived success. The following chapter sets out the historical context and background information relating to the Somali community as well as presenting participants' accounts of their migratory experiences.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOMALIA CONTEXT - PAST AND PRESENT

### Introduction

This chapter is in two parts. The first part provides the Somali historical context and history of migration, along with the wider UK asylum framework. Within this broader framework, part two of this chapter presents participants' accounts of their migratory journeys and experiences. A brief outline will be given of Somalia's troubled history, the events and wider global influences that have contributed to it becoming one of the biggest refugee-producing countries in the world today. Forced migration and asylum trends will then be presented and examined. Having contextualised Somali migration, participants' accounts in relation to their departures, family circumstances and migratory journeys will be drawn upon enabling examination of evidence in support of their forced migrant identity as well as furthering understanding of participants' past experiences. Pen pictures of participants are outlined in appendix 6. A map of Somalia is provided (figure 4.1).

### PART ONE

#### Background to Somalia

Remaining largely invisible to the West, Somalia gained brief international attention in 1992, following its state collapse and civil war in 1991, with media portraying images of its starving population and of the subsequent disastrous United Nations American troops peace intervention. Though stated as being 'one of the worst humanitarian crises faced by any people in the world', Somalia's crisis was soon overshadowed by the Rwandan genocide of 1994, and the later Kosovo crisis (Gardener and El Bushra, 2004, p.1). Somalia has only recently regained the West's attention (post 9/11) with its heightened threat to the West's security amid claims of its Islamic terrorist support and more recently, its piracy activity and threat to shipping in its northern coastal waters (Gardener and El Bushra, 2004) While it is not possible to present here the complexity of events that have occurred in Somalia, particularly in the last twenty years, a pertinent factor in the country's history for this study, is, arguably, that the West has been a significant player, engaging or disengaging according to its own self-interest. Like many African states, it bears the scars of superpower disengagement and of an imposed but unworkable and ill-

affordable centralised state system, suggesting (as Gros, 1996 argues) the emergence of ‘a fourth world’ of collapsed states (Gros, 1996, cited Griffiths, 2002, p.45). That being said, many commentators on Somalia’s history and troubles identify the root of Somalia’s problems as a return to tribalism: a response to centralised government and a key issue in the struggle for control of political and economic resources (Yahye, 2008; Griffiths, 2002). Yahye, a Somali exile, speaks passionately of the ‘cancer’ in Somalia’s midst.

*‘What is the root cause of this terrible tragedy? ...It is the relapse of the Somali nation into the old, primitive ways of the distant past is what brought about this catastrophe. It has destroyed our state, caused all kinds of misery in the last seventeen years, and made us a laughing stock in front of other nations of the world...Why did you destroy your country? I fail to give a coherent, plausible answer. But deep down, I know the root cause...could be summarised in one word, tribalism; and unless we eradicate or find a proper remedy for this cancer in our midst, our people will be suffering for many years to come.’*

(Yahye, 2008, p10).

The Somali state was created in the nineteenth century, the north being colonised by Britain who wanted to ensure the supply of meat to her Aden garrison, considered essential to the defence of India. The south was colonised by Italy, with an interest in developing it as a holiday destination as well as offering emigration opportunities for an over-populated Italy (Samatar, 1991). The British, according to Samatar, allowed their territory to fall into disrepair and neglect, while the Italians, in the south, transformed and promoted a successful and thriving economy based on commercial agriculture. In 1960, independence was granted to both colonies and the two territories united to form the Somali Republic which successfully managed to establish and maintain a democratic and internally peaceful rule for nearly a decade. However, increasing absorption with the plight of Somali minorities under alien rule, (Kenya’s Somali-inhabited northern province, Ethiopia’s Ogaden and the colonised Somalis of Djibouti by the French) and an obsession to reunite these fractured territories into a one nation Somali state, led to futile wars with the more powerful Ethiopia in 1964 and 1977, as well as the political and economic neglect of the country (Samatar, 1991).

In 1969 General Mohamed Said Barre’s military coup overthrew the democratically elected but corrupt civilian government and formed a party from

military and police officials. In 1970, he declared Somalia to be a socialist state, premised on ideological ‘Scientific Socialism’ and backed by the Soviet state. While Barre’s regime can be credited with improving women’s rights, introducing the formal written Somali language and improving national literacy levels, his government was condemned for its centralised control, its manipulation of clans to promote self interests and the brutal oppressive regime throughout the twenty one-year rule. Despite this, the West and East gave support to him, supplying money and weapons to the failing economy, recognising the strategic gains to be had during the cold war. Opposition to Barre and his predominantly Darod-based party built up over the years, particularly in response to his targeted persecution and repression of the Isaac and Hawiye clans. Attempts to overthrow his party by the Isaac were met with severe reprisals, including the aerial bombardments of Hargeisa and Burao in the north. In 1989 it was estimated that 50,000 people in the north had been killed by their own government (Gardener and El Bushra, 2004, p.40; Samatar, 1991). Barre was eventually toppled by an alliance between three armed opposition groups in Mogadishu in 1991. Following this, the coalition groups that had been united in their aim of overthrowing Barre, fragmented into warlord-led, clan-based militia territories. Civil war commenced. As many as 25,000 civilians died in the first four months of fighting in Mogadishu alone, with southern coastal areas and central agricultural areas systematically looted and destroyed as the fight for resources intensified between the clan factions (Gardener and El Bushra, p.4). Famine and disease contributed to the deaths and hardship experienced by civilians. The international response to the disaster was slow. Somalia no longer served their self-interests; the cold war was over and Somalia ceased to pose a potential threat in superpower conflict. The United Nations American task force was eventually deployed to Somalia by President Bush under humanitarian auspices, though only after several hundred thousand people had died of starvation and hunger-related diseases. Following direct open conflict with the factions and in order to avoid engagement in a war, the United Nations forces were withdrawn in 1995 (Griffiths, 2002).

Despite over fifteen peace and international reconciliation conferences, peace remains elusive for Somalia. Transitional governments formed in 2000 and 2004 have failed to establish effective control, law and order, despite military backing from Ethiopia, with Ethiopian occupation of Mogadishu for over a year. Warlords and militia groups based on clan allegiances continue to fight for territory and control of

resources, with indiscriminate attacks on civilians and densely populated areas, leading to collapse and anarchy in much of Somalia and the exodus and huge displacement of many of the civilian population. The total number of internally displaced people in Somalia, as of January 2010, is said to be 1,550,000 (UNHCR, 2010). The instability and violence within the country has led to the withdrawal of all aid agencies and foreign journalists, with aid being coordinated by agencies in neighbouring countries and operationalised by Somali staff in the area at great risk to themselves. Drought, exhausted food sources, and adverse effects from rising prices on the world food market, has led to an estimated 3.2 million people, (42% of the population), in need of emergency humanitarian assistance and/or livelihood support (The Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit, 2010, cited Home Office, UK Border Agency, 2010). In relative contrast to the south and much of central Somalia, in 1991, the north-west region of Somalia declared itself an independent state, The Republic of Somaliland. Though not recognised by the international community and consequently unable to receive international aid, it has experienced a tentative and fragile democratic, somewhat peaceful existence. In 1998, the north-eastern regions of Somalia, prompted by the lack of progress to secure peace in the south, declared themselves the Independent Puntland State of Somalia. Though achieving some stability this has been undermined by an increase in crime, kidnapping and insurgency- related killings, as well as corruption, piracy and human trafficking (United Nations report, 2007-2008, cited Doon, 2008, p.36; Home Office, UK Border Agency, 2010). While Somaliland remains the most stable region of Somalia, it has experienced tension and conflict with Puntland over the Sool and Sanaag regions concerning issues related to the prospecting of oil and natural resources. The West and China are to be found within the scramble, with financial agreements speculated (Doon, 2008). Somali people have been held as the most homogenous peoples in the world, belonging to the same ethnicity, sharing the same faith, speaking the same language and sharing the same culture and history (Yahye, 2008, p.10). Despite this, peace and unity has so far failed to be achieved.

### **Somali entry to the UK**

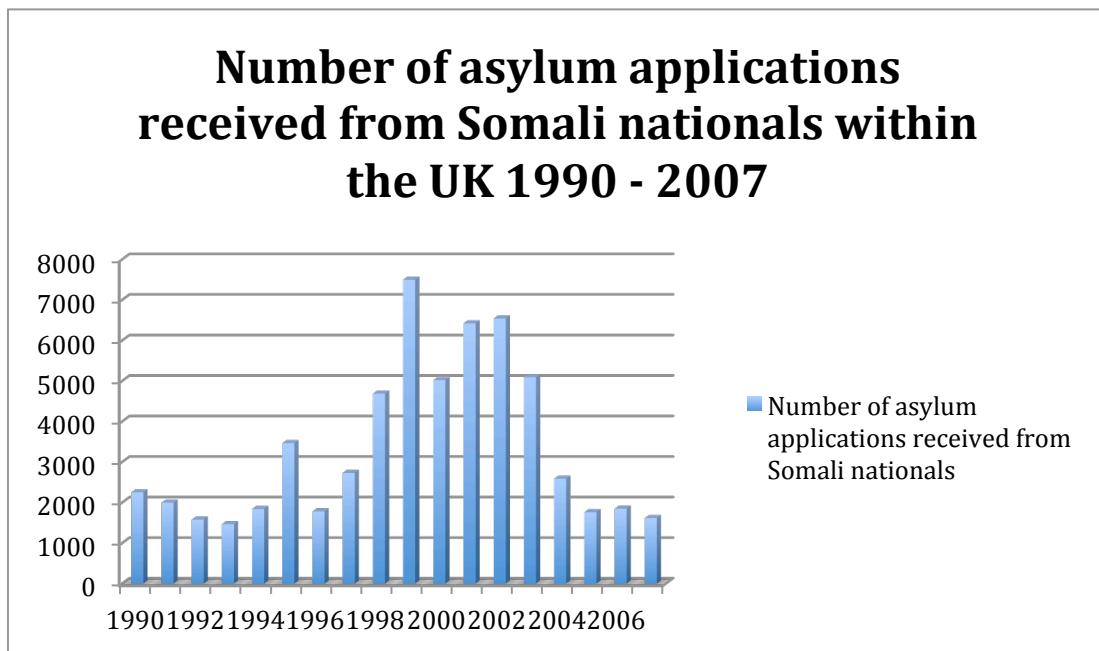
Somalis have a long association with the UK, not only as a result of the historic colonial links with Somaliland, but through the migration waves that have occurred over time. These include the early transient communities of seamen who

worked for the British Navy, Somalis who took up industrial employment opportunities in the 1960s in the north of England, following the decline of the Merchant Navy and asylum seekers entering from 1980s onwards (Griffiths, 2002). Asylum applications in the UK from Somalis fleeing the civil war and the general state of anarchy in Somalia have mirrored the events of the troubles, with a significant increase seen in 1989, when nearly 2,000 applications were filed to the UK, coinciding with the aerial bombardments in the north by Barre's regime. From 1996 to 1999 there was a consistent rise in applications reaching the largest number of 7,495 for the year 1999. Applications have since decreased (see figure 4.2) most dramatically in 2004 when there were 2,585 applications. Continuing in the same downward vein to 1,615 applications in 2007 (ICAR Statistical Snapshots Series, 2006; Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 2009). This trend may be accounted for by the increased stability in the north and due to the introduction of an asylum policy that has intended to make it more difficult for people to claim asylum. For example, the introduction of the 'Direct Airside Transit Visa' (DATV) in October 2003, which Somalis and forty-seven other nationalities require, aimed at reducing the number of asylum claims being made on transit arrival in the UK (Home Office 2006, revised Feb 2007, cited ICAR, 2007). The Home Office report its successful deterrence with the number of on arrival asylum claims having fallen by 58% since its introduction (ICAR, 2007).

Figure 4.1 Map of Somalia



**Figure 4.2**



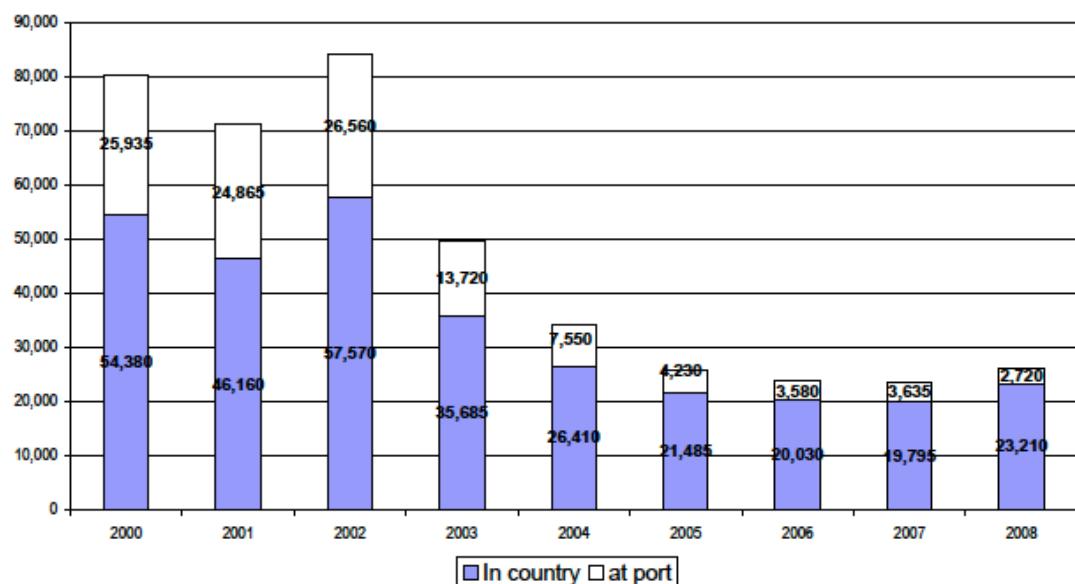
**Source: ICAR 2006 and Home Office 2008**

Between 1991 and 1997, most Somali applicants were granted Exceptional Leave To Remain, Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection, reflecting the Home Office conclusion that many Somalis did not fulfil the Refugee Convention criteria of a group suffering persecution by the state, given that regional clan-based control was mostly operating, as well as being in line with the wider trend in asylum decisions (Griffiths, 2002, p.82; Harris, 2004). From 1998 onwards, there was a higher level of refugee status awarded compared to the other forms of status given. The refusal rate from 1990-1998 was minimal or very low, under 310 applications per year. This rate rose though dramatically from the year 2000, and has continued at significant levels with 21% of claims refused in 2000, 42% in 2001, 42% in 2002, and 63% in 2003, falling again in 2006 and 2007 with 49% and 43% respectively (Harris, 2004, p.28; Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 2009). Trends may again reflect the recognised stability of northern Somalia, as well as the more stringent criteria and conditions imposed on asylum seekers as a result of increasingly restrictive immigration policy.

Examining the trends in asylum more widely within the UK, between 1990 and 1998 the number of applications for asylum in the United Kingdom averaged

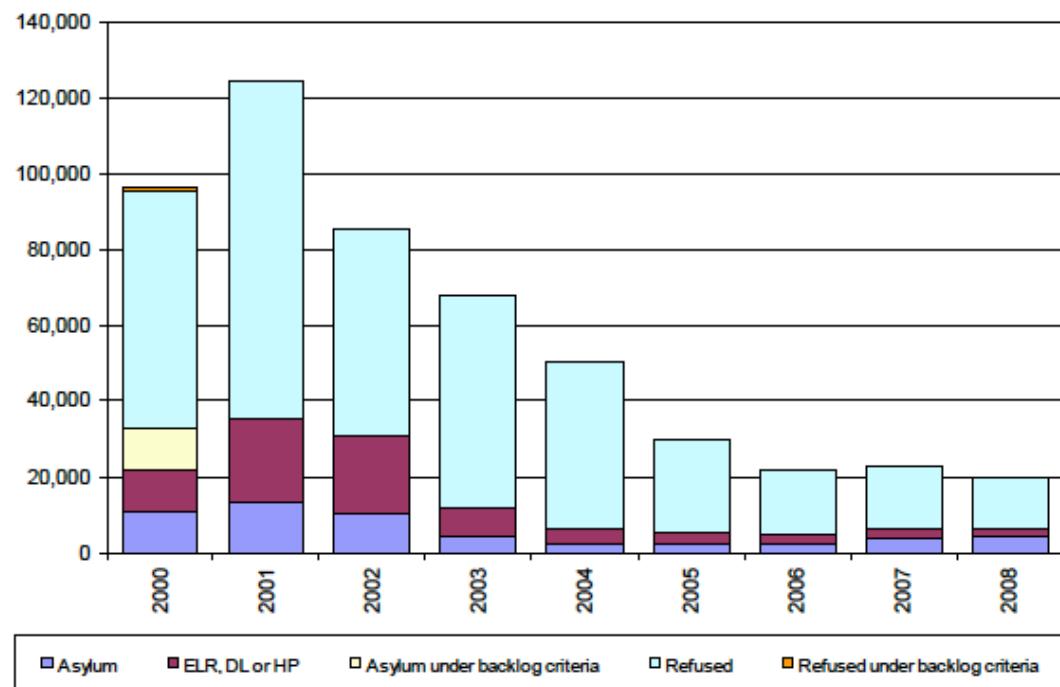
around 33,700 per year, rising significantly to 71,160 and remaining high, with the highest level ever in 2002 of 84,130. Numbers fell significantly following this, to 49,405 in 2003, tailing off at 23,430 in 2007. An increase in applications is seen for the first time since 2002 in 2008 (ICAR, 2009) - (see figure 4.3). Trends in asylum refusal rates and forms of status granted are presented in figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.3: Applications for asylum in UK excluding dependants 2000 – 2008**



**Source: ICAR December 2009**

**Figure 4.4: Asylum decisions excluding dependants 2000-2008**



**Source: ICAR December 2009**

Somalia has featured in the top ten countries of origin for asylum seekers in the UK since 1987, topping the list in 1997 and 2003 and ranking second in 2005 (ICAR Statistical Snapshots Series, 2006). This reflects the protected refugee situation in Somalia. In 2007, though seventh in the total number of asylum applications to the UK, Somalis were the second highest number of successful applicants gaining asylum (Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 2009) - (see figure 4.5) Despite the high and persistent numbers of Somalis applying for asylum in the UK and to other European and North American countries, the large majority of Somalis remain in Somalia as internally displaced persons, or have fled to and are residing in Somalia's four neighbouring countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen (Moret et al, 2006, p.83).

**Figure 4.5: Top ten nationalities of asylum applicants 2004 - 2008**

2004		2005		2006		2007		2008	
Iran	3,455	Iran	3,150	Eritrea	2,585	Afghanistan	2,500	Afghanistan	3,505
Somalia	2,585	Somalia	1,760	Afghanistan	2,400	Iran	2,210	Zimbabwe	3,165
China	2,365	Eritrea	1,760	Iran	2,375	China	2,100	Iran	2,270
Zimbabwe	2,065	China	1,730	China	1,945	Iraq	1,825	Eritrea	2,255
Iraq	1,715	Afghanista n	1,580	Somalia	1,845	Eritrea	1,810	Iraq	1,850
Pakistan	1,710	Iraq	1,415	Zimbabwe	1,650	Zimbabwe	1,800	Sri Lanka	1,475
DRC	1,475	Pakistan	1,145	Pakistan	965	Somalia	1615	China (inc. Taiwan)	1400
India	1,405	DRC	1,080	Iraq	945	Pakistan	1030	Somalia	1345
Afghanistan	1,395	Zimbabwe	1,075	Nigeria	790	Sri Lanka	990	Pakistan	1230
Sudan	1,305	Nigeria	1,025	India	680	Other M. East & North Africa	825	Nigeria	820

**Source: ICAR December 2009**

The number of Somalis living in the UK are unknown; estimates available as well as figures from the 2001 census are thought unreliable, compounded by Somalis' mobility both within the country and as secondary migrants into the UK. The limitations of the census in relation to its question on ethnic origin and the inadequacies of the ethnic categories employed, has resulted in Somalis being a hidden population (Cole and Robinson, 2003). They are thought though to be one of the largest ethnic minorities in the UK (Harris, 2004). The 2001 census stated that there were 43,515 Somali's in the UK, three quarters of whom were living in London (ICAR, 2007). Other cities with relatively large Somali populations include Sheffield, Leicester and Birmingham and there is a significantly large community in Wales. In contrast, there is a small but significant number of Somalis living in the city where this study has taken place. They are considered, however, to be one of the largest new community groups in the city, residing alongside older, more established minority groups.

## **PART TWO**

### **Departure from Somalia**

Having provided an overview of Somali entry into the UK, the second part of this chapter focuses on what is known about the study participants' migratory journeys into the UK. Whilst the emphasis of this study has been to elicit women's accounts of their day to day lives in the UK, some participants spoke of their departure from Somalia and/or their subsequent journeys to the West. Although there are insufficient data to provide a full account of each woman's migratory journey, the Pen Pictures outlined in Appendix 6 offer brief details in relation to eighteen participants. While the lack of reference to this period of their lives can be understood in relation to the main focus of the overall study, participants who had the opportunity to elaborate further, chose not to do so. One possible interpretation is that migrant strategies remain safeguarded within the Somali international networks so as to facilitate future movements. For example, Assal (year unknown) in his research with Somalis in Norway also found that participants provided very little specific detail in relation to their journeys, but indicated that their route had been via Germany into Norway.

From participants who provided such information, it is evident that departure from Somalia occurred from 1988 onwards, with a tendency for participants to have left either in the early stages of the civil war, or considerably later, such as from 2000. Those leaving early, for example, included Sarah who left Somalia eighteen years ago and Lana and Carla who left in 1990. Participants leaving at a later stage included Nadif who joined her husband in the UK in 2005, Marianne who came as a single woman in 2001 and Syrod who came as part of an arranged marriage agreement in 2003. Participants came from both the north and south of Somalia, with most of the clan families represented. Specific mention was made of Darod, Hawiye, Isaac and Rahanweyn clan families. Those migrating at a later stage were more likely to come directly to the UK; whereas earlier migrants can be seen to have had more diverse routes in reaching the UK. Awo travelled from Somalia to neighbouring Ethiopia and then on to Sweden where she gained some form of legal status, eventually coming to the UK as part of the EU open borders agreement. Lana travelled to Saudi Arabia with her husband, staying there for sixteen years despite having no formal legal status and eventually leaving her husband behind to come to the UK two years ago to join her uncle. Mya travelled to neighbouring Kenya with her father. She subsequently went

on to the Netherlands alone where she joined a relative. She successfully claimed asylum, but later came to the UK to improve her employment opportunities and to be with family. Carla's migratory trajectory provides an example of the complexity of some journeys taking place over a period of time. She left Somalia nineteen years ago just after the start of the civil war, travelling to Italy, then onto Yemen, back to Somalia, then Denmark where she obtained some form of legal status and finally coming to the UK in 2000, out of frustration with her professional qualifications as a midwife not being recognised. For some participants, their arrival in England was their third or more country of residence after fleeing Somalia. Asylum was not always claimed in the first host country, for example Kenya or Ethiopia and it was not often clear how long participants had spent in these neighbouring countries.

Some of the participants came as single women to the West, marrying Somali men later after their arrival. Others joined husbands who had left two or three years earlier after they had obtained some form of legal status. Nadif's husband for example fled in 2003 to the UK and Nadif and her children joined him in 2005. Many of the women left family members behind, elderly parents and siblings. Ubah stated the difficulties that the elderly had with travelling long distances. Siblings stayed behind, with sisters often described as the carers for elderly parents. A number of the participants' siblings were scattered around the world, suggesting that members migrated at different periods, as well as taking different migratory routes. Some family members travelled with the elderly to neighbouring Kenya, others further afield to South Africa, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and others successfully making it to Western countries, particularly the Netherlands, the UK, Scandinavian countries and North America. Van Hear (2004) states that in the late 1990's, Somali asylum applications were recorded in more than sixty countries making them one of the most widely dispersed refugee populations in the world.

Participants seemed to assume that I knew the reason for their leaving Somalia, but some made direct reference to the civil war. Others inferred the potential threat of violence to themselves when making reference to the loss of family members due to the war. Only Mya provided a very graphic and unexpected account of her traumatic experiences leading to her migration.

**Researcher...** *What made you leave when your parents and family members stayed in Somalia?*

**Mya** *My father owned a gold business. I am the eldest child, so I had to help in the shop. Everybody in Mogadishu knew me and I them. They would come to the shop. One day my father had to go away on business for the day and I was left in charge of the shop. An explosive was thrown in the shop and half the building went down. I had lots of little cuts all over my body and was bleeding. Outside of the shop fifty people lay dead or wounded. They had been shot by machine fire. I knew all those people. And they would say give me some water and as you were giving it they would 'go' it was terrible. I knew all of them. For two months afterwards I could not eat or sleep. Everything that looked like food, I kept seeing blood. I would wake up seeing blood. I lost 20 kg. And my father said this couldn't go on. You have to leave. So he took me to Kenya and then I was sent to Holland to claim asylum. I had an uncle there, so that's why I went there.*

Several participants were explicit when talking about their hopes of return as to the inhospitable and unsafe environment that Somalia presented, making return not a viable option. Fatima and Syrod highlighted the violence and fighting currently taking place within a disintegrated society that is chaotic, unpredictable, and ravaged in many parts by famine.

**Fatima** (*Yusra translating*) *When I remember, things come back. At the moment Somalia is in a very bad way. Very worrying. And there is a war everywhere.*

*People are very hungry and there is no water, there is no electricity, no money.*

*Some of the poor people are eating some things that you would not imagine.*

**Syrod** *Yes, the fighting just goes on and on. One minute it is quiet and things seem better and the next twenty people have been killed and the fighting just starts over again. Mogadishu is the worst. Some places are better. (Referring to Somaliland and Puntland).*

While refugees from both waves of migration were exposed to fighting and violence, those leaving later witnessed and lived for many years within a stateless society, one whose basic infrastructure was crumbling and for whom human rights abuses and gender-based violence was common. Syrod carries the sentiment of this loss of hope, a giving up on Somalia, a country that has no future and never will. This discussion emerged in relation to a question about return as well as in relation to recent events in the news of Somali piracy.

**Syrod** *It is not safe. The fighting erupts all the time. One minute peaceful, the next not. They have had this mentality for twenty years. When they have grown*

*up in this culture, with fighting against clans, with no education, no money or livelihood, what can you expect? That is their culture. They know no different...*

*That is the mentality of people with no education that only have known civil war for twenty years.*

### **Family circumstances**

Decisions as to which family members should stay and which should go to the West was a collective family decision and took account of not only the benefit to the individual, but that of the whole family. In this way families can be seen to proactively manage potential threats. Fatima spoke of her mother who she had not seen for a long time, and how she was unable to meet the conditions for her reunification, being a single mother and unemployed.

**Researcher** *You have not seen your mother for four to five years?*

**Fatima** *A long time.*

**Researcher** *And you speak on the phone?...*

*And when you speak on the phone is your mother happy?*

**Fatima** *Yes yes.*

**Yusra translating for Fatima** *She says can I come to you? But it is a very difficult issue.*

**Researcher** *How would that be able to happen? Could that happen? ...*

**Yusra** *Let's I mean ask Fatima, but I don't think it's helping.*

**Fatima (Yusra translating)** *If I have a job and take the responsibility she says, then she comes here. If I say I am responsible for her and have a good job then she can come but at the same time she has children. It's difficult really.*

**Researcher** *Very difficult.*

The fragmentation of families probably reflected many participants' inability to choose their country of destination. Habon spoke of her lack of choice and the restrictions that she has encountered in her attempts to reunite with family members separated by migration.

**Habon** *Also when our country, our people fled, so most of them went over the world. So sometimes you see when I lived there, my sister or my brother live here, so people they want to come together as family, so that is why I mean want to move. There (referring to America) it is difficult to move there. It is easier to move here (The UK).*

**Researcher** *And when you fled to Finland could you have any choice? Could you say I would rather come with my brother to England?*

**Habon** *No that's why. First you come and then you apply for your family. If you are young under eighteen, if you get status, leave to remain, then you can apply for your family and then it's easy. But if you are over eighteen then the only condition you can have is wife, if you get married, you can get married there, or you can bring someone, but there is no other choice.*

**Researcher** *So it's only if you have a wife there.*

**Habon** *For example, my husband, I mean he went first to Finland and then he applied me to come over.*

Participants' ability to leave Somalia and travel onward to Western countries was linked to financial security, information resources and contacts. Van Hear (2004) suggests that there is therefore a 'hierarchy of destinations' for forced migrants based upon their ability and extent to access these necessary resources. Many of the participants made reference to their family's successful financial status in Somalia predominantly achieved through business activities. Mya's family had a gold business in Mogadishu, Syrod's family were also successful in business.

**Syrod's Husband** *I am from Mogadishu, the capital. But before that I was born in Ceel Buur. So the south. Yes, my family all spoke Italian. They were business people. All my family. We had a lot of property in Somalia... My father worked in the ports...*

**Syrod** *And I am from Mogadishu. My father was in the car business.*

**Researcher** *So both of you are from business backgrounds.*

**Syrod** *Yes, but my husband's family had a much bigger business.*

Farhah who came from northern Somalia where a predominantly pastoralist, nomadic way of life existed, boasted that her family had three hundred camels. Idil spoke of her father's shop that sold everything. Many participants mentioned that their fathers had had higher education at university, or that they were professionals. Evidence suggested that participants' relatives in other countries were also potentially able to contribute financially to those who migrated in the later period. Monetary resources were necessary to bribe or pay for documents and/or for smugglers to accompany migrants to the West. Lana, when pushed, indirectly made reference to illegal smuggling.

**Researcher** *When you came to the UK was it easy to get to the UK?*

**Lana** *No it is not easy. It costs a lot.*

**Researcher** *It costs a lot.*

*It costs a lot of money? So you have to pay the people that bring you?  
They charge a lot?*

**Lana** *Yes, yes a lot.*

**Researcher** *How do you get the money to pay them?*

**Lana** *Because we used to have a job. So my husband he had a job and he could save towards.*

**Researcher** *And you came directly from Saudi to UK?*

**Lana** *I don't know the places but I think just direct.*

*Yes.*

**Researcher** *So you're in their hands. They have to look after you and bring you?*

**Lana** *Yes.*

Mya received a long phone call during my visit from her nephew who reported that he had just reached Italy after a long journey involving the crossing of many international borders. This had been necessary due to his lack of formal documentation and fear that he would not be granted asylum.

*The phone goes. It is her niece she (Mya) says.*

*But she talks about a boy. I say nephew. She says ok, they do not distinguish this in Somalia. He is in Italy. He has been travelling - from Somalia, Syria and several countries until he has reached Europe.*

**Researcher** *Why does he not just apply for asylum and come to England or Europe?*

**Mya** *Because he has not got the documents. It is not easy to come to England. Asylum is a long process and they may say no.*

*Some people they take a long journey to get here if they do not have the documents - car, plane, boat. If they set sail in a small boat it is very dangerous.*

**Researcher** *So he travels.*

**Mya** *Yes, the Somali always have only one bag.*

**Researcher** *Meaning they are always travelling.*

As well as having monetary resources, many of the participants spoke of relatives being the reason for their choice of final destination. Relatives were able to support newly arrived migrants, providing accommodation and finance as well as introducing them to a new and strange culture. Lana lived with her uncle and his family who had been in the UK for five years. She stayed a year with them before coming to this city.

**Researcher** *What was it like when you arrived in the UK?*

**Lana** *A different life, a different culture. Everything is new. And the good thing is my uncle's family accept me. They teach me to know the systems.*

**Researcher** *They showed you?*

**Lana** *How to enlist the children to school.*

*And do you know that the good is here. Everything is here, organised and good. You can get them into school.*

**Researcher** *It probably helped that your English is so good so then you could...*

**Lana** *Yes, because everything is different.*

**Researcher** *It must have been a shock.*

Those not having the benefit of relatives in their new host country were dependent on their clan family or the wider Somali community to help them settle and manage the new systems. Idil had originally been housed by NASS in Cardiff with a number of Somali women who had been based in the UK for a while and who were able therefore to pass on to her their knowledge and experience.

**Idil** *For at first it was very difficult.*

*For you know you find all different people, different homes, different way to make it, but in general when we can, the people come to you, you know NASS?*

**Researcher** *NASS, yes.*

**Idil** *It was every community with the community that we were used to, so you know we were used to live with other Somalian. So you can feel it, like you are Somalian people. You are so different if they put you with other nationalities, or something like that's why it is difficult. But Somalian people came here a long time ago so they teach me everything. So the Somalian people talking the same. They help me a lot these people (NASS). They put me in the same house with other women.*

**Researcher** *With other Somali women?*

**Idil** *Yes, with Somalian women. After that they teach me everything that I have to know.*

## **(Re)Settlement in the UK**

It can be assumed that a large number of the participants for this study, whatever their eventual status, entered Europe illegally. While only three participants spoke of travelling to neighbouring Kenya or Ethiopia. Lana spoke of their temporary situation in Saudi.

**Researcher** *And then you came to the UK? What made you move from Saudi? You were a long time in Saudi.*

**Lana** *A long time. Like 16 years.*

**Researcher** *Was that like home?*

**Lana** It's difficult you know because with Saudi Arabia, you are still not a national.

**Researcher** So they can still send you back?

**Lana** Yes, they said that you should move if you haven't any job or the children when they grow up they cannot attend university.

So it's difficult.

So most of the Somalian people move for those reasons.

**Researcher** So to get better rights?

**Lana** Yes.

They cannot give you a passport whatever you stay in the country.

**Researcher** They won't give you it?

**Lana** No.

**Researcher** So they don't give you refugee status. They just let you stay there.

**Lana** Yes.

**Researcher** So it's not really a long-term place. It's a temporary?

**Lana** It's a temporary place.

It is probable, given that Lana spoke of employment earnings paying her travel to the West, that it took the many years that Lana lived in Saudi to save up and plan for the journey to the UK. That Lana's husband decided to stay in Saudi is surprising, but if, (and it is unclear to me) Lana claimed asylum in the UK, given her minority clan status (Rahanweyn), she would most likely have been successful and her husband would be entitled to family reunification. The stilted progress of my discussion with Lana suggested that her husband might possibly have been involved with illegal work, the rewards for which outweighed the cost of separation from his family.

**Researcher** Do you think um, ... was he at university?

**Lana** Yes, yes, he has a master's degree.

**Researcher** What did he study?

**Lana** He studied media.

**Researcher** Oh, does he work?

**Lana** Sometimes or not. It depends sometimes.

**Researcher** Would he like to have more recognition of his skills?

**Lana** He like reading more.

**Researcher** What would he like to do if he had the opportunity?

**Lana** He likes to work in the media.

**Researcher** What in the media? Like the newspapers, TV?

**Lana** Yes, he likes the papers and things like this...

**Researcher** Is he working at the moment?

**Lana** He is studying.

**Researcher** Is he studying media, more media?

**Lana** Yes.

(Laughter by both.)

And a conversation held at a later interview suggested her husband was working with a business partner.

**Researcher** *And your husband could not come and get a job in England?*

*Is he a business man, or maybe...?*

**Lana** *He is working with somebody.*

**Researcher** *Right.*

While I can only speculate as to the vagueness and contradictions within these accounts, it might be argued that this is another example of the ‘secret lives’ that forced migrants continue to live with in their daily lives.

A significant number of participants came from large towns, but those from the north would have identified with the traditional pastoral, nomadic lifestyle that the desert conditions required. For others, nomadism can be seen as the imagined Somali identity that they affectionately hold onto and value, representing ‘continuity and images of being adventurous, tough and independent rather than marginalised, displaced and helpless’ (Kleist, 2004, p.11). Prominent throughout the data as a whole is a sense of movement and journeying both prior to their forced migration and after settlement. For example Syrod studied in Yemen, Lana’s husband had studied in Egypt, Habon’s mother lived between Kenya and America and Habon herself returned to Kenya for one year following her settlement in Denmark. During the course of the fieldwork, border crossing continued to occur as holidays, family visits or for religious festivals. Many participants also had future plans, with several stating they wanted to return to Somalia to live. However, others talked of settling elsewhere in Europe, for example Idil wanted to settle in France, and Farhah wished she could return to live in Sweden.

**Researcher** *Do you want to stay in the UK or move?*

**Idil** *If I have a choice I want to live in France. I like France because I want to learn more French...*

**Researcher** *What would be your dream? What would you like to be doing in ten or twenty year’s time?*

**Idil** *laughing. I would like to be on a cruise travelling.*

**Researcher** *Travelling?*

**Idil** *Yes, that my dream but I get seasick.  
(Laughter.)*

I mentioned to Habon in an interview that took place towards the end of the fieldwork my puzzlement and surprise at participants' mobility. In response she said:

**Researcher** *The Somali people travel.*

**Habon** *Everywhere. They go Holland then they come here, Sweden, Finland, America, everywhere.*

**Researcher** *And like for holidays to see family.*

**Habon** *Yes, yes, to see family.*

**Researcher** *They say that they are like nomad, moving.*

**Habon** *Yes, nomad. (Laughing.)*

**Researcher** *I suppose that is like the traditional when clans moved ?*

**Habon** *What do we say, there isn't migration. (Laughing.)*

Idil and her husband spoke of the mobility of her friends.

**Researcher** *Do you want to go and live back in Cardiff?*

**Idil** *No, no. Many of my friends have gone elsewhere now. I don't want to live there, but I want to go back for a holiday.*

**Idil's husband** *They are nomads.*

**Researcher** *Yes, nomads always moving trying to find water and pasture for the cattle.*

**Idil** *(Idil laughs. She says she was trying to think of the word in English.)*

*Yes, someone says, ...is good and they all move to.... Then someone says Bristol is good and off they go again. (They both laugh at this portrayal.)*

Over three-quarters of the participants can be seen as 'continued movers' to the UK, having left European countries of settlement to join with family members, gain English-speaking skills for their family and enhance their employment opportunities. Kleist (2004) states 'In the words of many Somalis the movement to Britain is a result of the 'nomadic spirit', a wish to keep on looking for 'greener pastures' (Kleist, 2004, p.11).

## Conclusion

This chapter has served to outline the historical context surrounding participants' migratory movements, and the broader asylum framework through which many Somalis have sought asylum and settlement in the UK. Within participant accounts can be seen a diverse array of circumstances and experiences which have led to and governed the border crossings undertaken by them. What they share in common, though, is a homeland that has been, and continues to be characterised by

political and social instability, violence and economic crisis, making permanent return home unviable for most. Achieving sanctuary in the West bears witness to the resourcefulness, strategic planning and transnational cooperation that exists within the Somali community and Diaspora enabling border crossings to successfully occur despite a policy framework of considerable constraint. While fear, secrecy and fragmentation feature in participants' migratory journeys, the complexity and fluidity of their continued movements and border crossings are underlined. Having examined the wider context of Somali migration and the more specific accounts of the migratory experiences of this study's participants, the next two chapters look in more detail at these women's accounts of daily life in the UK.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS OF THEIR EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES**

### **Introduction**

In presenting the findings of this study, I have sought to reflect the study's given priority and objective, that of listening to and giving voice to the participants so that they might be able to give their own stories and accounts of their daily lives living here in the UK. The analysis process (as discussed within the methodology chapter) has taken an iterative, grounded approach, during which the development and exploration of common themes have emerged and taken place. Within these common themes can be found the women's approach to daily life, captured in an attitude of 'just getting on with it'. This is a strong and persistent thread that governs and channels their thoughts, actions and the negotiation of daily family life. Though showing a sense of shared value and common thought, there is also to be found in their accounts complexity, difference, contradiction, disjunction and my uncertainty in interpreting unfamiliar traditions and cultural meanings. In an attempt to reveal and understand the women's daily lives and ultimately so that these findings might be examined in relation to the concept of resilience, in this chapter I will present the findings through posing and answering the following questions.

- What do the women get on with in their daily lives?
- How do they do this?

Four broad areas can be identified from the data that capture something of the essence of how women's time and energies are absorbed within the day-to-day activities of getting on with family life. These relate to:

- Carrying out their roles and responsibilities as homemakers and mothers
- Managing hostile environments
- Belonging to the Somali community
- Coping with and overcoming issues of loss and adversity.

Each of these four identified areas will now be explored in relation to the questions posed above.

## **Homemakers and mothers**

Women's roles and responsibilities within the family highlight some of the challenges and tensions that have resulted from the demands and pressures that Western life and forced migration has placed upon them. While varied responses can be seen to be linked to this, participants' core practices reflect the priority given to their role of homemaker and mother. Their days can be seen to be taken up with looking after the home, shopping and food preparation and attending to child responsibilities and reflect a sense of busyness and ongoing demand upon them. The loss for many of traditional support systems, namely extended family and servants with which they could formerly share the domestic workload, highlights and accentuates the lone burden of women's responsibilities here in the West. Marianne illustrates the busyness of daily life.

**Researcher** *What do you do in the family? ...*

**Marianne** *I am very busy with my housework. (Laughs.)*

**Researcher** *Yes.*

**Marianne** *Feeding my children, cleaning, cooking, taking my children to the school, bring back. Go to college. Shopping. Things like that.*

The women get on with shopping and providing fresh healthy meals for their families. Food preparation was stated to take up considerable time and seen on occasions to impinge on women's social activity, as seen when participants arrived late or left early from the sewing group as a result of it. Meal provision, though demanding, was seen in the light of cultural practices in Somalia where an absence of refrigeration required sometimes twice daily market trips for fresh food.

**Lul** *Yes, they cook everyday, home cooking, not convenience.*

*Lul was asked how long all the cooking took her.*

*Sometimes 1 hour, sometimes 2 hours.*

*(Lul, translated by her husband.)*

Organisation and cooperation were evident as participants spoke of sharing car lifts on supermarket trips, as well as for example, in the practice of bulk buying and sharing of cheap fruit and vegetables at the end of a day from the local market. Participants demonstrated competence and resourcefulness in their culinary skills, shopping on a budget and in drawing on each other as a resource. In visits to

participants' homes it was common to encounter the smell of food cooking. On occasions I would sit in the kitchen alongside visiting women and chat informally as food preparation was underway, illustrating the social, collective nature of the task. Single lone women were seen to be involved in family life, providing both valuable practical support for mothers as well as in reducing their own sense of isolation and family loss.

Fresh food was associated with good health, and it was common for women to distance themselves from 'junk food', which, they viewed with disdain. Only Lana mentioned her children had regular trips to fast-food restaurants once a week.

**Researcher** *How do you and your family keep well?*

**Su** *Yes, we have all fresh. No junk food. No burgers. It is all fresh and good.*

**Lana** *Once a week we go out. McDonalds or Pizza Hut...*

**Researcher** *And the rest of the time are you cooking yourself?*

**Lana** *I try to cook before they come from school because sometimes they come in and nothing is ready and then they have crisps and things.*

Many of the participants welcomed me into their homes, and were keen to show me around. Participants got on with maintaining tidy, clean and welcoming homes for family and guests, despite the often sub-standard conditions of private rented accommodation. These conditions contrasted sharply with many participants' Scandinavian experiences of high quality State housing provision; this was an aspect of daily life that the women still missed and found difficult to accept. Sparse furnishings, carefully chosen and frequently reflecting Arabic culture, along with a notable absence of possessions, appeared incompatible with the known overcrowding and large number of children residing within the home. Some participants had undertaken small DIY projects in an effort to make private rented accommodation more homely amidst living conditions that included damp, inadequate heating and unsafe conditions. Farhah was proud to point out her efforts in improving her home despite the very poor conditions of the place.

**Farhah** *I did put this here. This is my carpet.*

*I painted this and this (pointing to some poorly constructed kitchen cupboards, and the skirting board).*

Syrod's account reflects the ongoing repetitive nature of the women's home duties, squeezed into an increasingly busy day.

**Syrod** *I have to do things, to get things done before I can sit down. My husband says Syrod come to bed now. But I say I will just finish the kitchen floor then I will come. The house always needs to be tidied and then it is messy again, It is a circle. My mother says Syrod, housework will go on forever but your life won't.*

Homemaking and childcare roles were viewed as taking priority over outside employment which was seen as incompatible and conflicting with fulfilling their duties as mothers and homemakers. Only two of the nineteen participants were known to have part-time employment, this consisting of unskilled, evening lone cleaning work. Supportive partners who were willing to undertake some childcare and domestic responsibilities were said to make this possible for these participants.

Some participants, when asked, spoke of future employment possibilities once children had left the home. Mya however, who had come to the UK from Holland to be near to her aunt and to find better employment opportunities, was the only participant looking for full-time employment, hoping to get off state benefit. Her aunt's offer of childcare appeared to make employment viable for her. Lana also spoke of negative feelings in relation to her financial dependency on the state, but was unwilling to compromise her parenting/homemaking role.

It was not only paid employment outside the home that was seen to threaten women's roles and responsibilities as mothers and homemakers. Sagal, the community leader, spoke one day of resigning as leader due to the pressures that it put on herself and consequently on her ability to look after her family.

**Sagal** *But I am no longer community leader.*

**Researcher** *What?...*

**Sagal** *I am too tired and stressed. I am too busy. Then you suffer and your family suffer. I have to learn what is good for me.*

**Researcher** *You mean learn to put yourself and family first for a change.*

**Sagal** *Exactly.*

Participants can be seen to have clear priorities in their daily life, ones that they are protective of and unwilling to compromise on, despite wider societal pressures for them to do so.

Traditional gender role responsibilities are culturally clearly delineated, with women responsible for duties in the home and men responsible for activity outside the home.

**Researcher** *What would the man normally do in the household?*

**Sarah** *The man would go out and earn the money, take the children to school do the shopping. The women would be in the home doing the cooking, cleaning, washing.*

Participants spoke of taking on outside responsibilities in addition to their traditional 'home' duties and this included taking children to school, shopping and dealing with outside agencies. This was accepted grudgingly by many participants and commonly regarded as a consequence of men's failure to adjust to the demands of their Western environments both in terms of finding employment and in taking on new family responsibilities outside the home. Participants' additional duties impacted in varying ways on their lives, but commonly stated were the lost opportunity for leisure activities and socialising, for taking up of English classes, as well as many experiencing tiredness and a sense of being overburdened and too busy. While women's lives felt overburdened, men in contrast were portrayed as being lazy and unproductive, sleeping or socialising in the local Somali café.

**Researcher** *So what do they (the husbands) do then as many of them are not working?*

**Lana** *They are just ruling and strolling everywhere. I do not know what they are doing...*

*For the mothers it is different, she clean and cooking and looking after the babies. It's difficult, everything.*

While women managed these role conflicts differently, there was evidence that women experienced conflict both individually and collectively in relation to gender relations. Arguing, shouting and fighting between partners were explicitly referred to, with the suggestion that men refused to cooperate and resisted women's demands. Lana provides an account of her friend's experience trying to get her husband to cooperate and pick up their daughter from school.

**Lana** *...She just come from school at eleven thirty. And she said (to her husband) you can get up at eleven and pick her up and I will be until twelve at home. He said, no, just one day I can go and pick her up. But you can't do that. And he hasn't got any job. He just sleeps.*

In contrast, some participants stated that some partners worked excessively long hours, some holding down two jobs due to the financial pressures of living in the

West. The loss of shared resources by extended families increased the lone sense of financial burden.

A few men did adapt to new ways of working and managing family life. Spontaneous and informal couple interviews provided opportunity to talk with a few men about their lives here in the UK, as well as to observe relational dynamics and 'new' behaviours. Men were seen cooking, taking care of the baby, providing me with hospitality, taking over from the wife when they were tired, as well as holding down outside employment. Habon and her husband exemplified this partnership approach to domestic duties.

**Researcher** *Who does all the cooking and shopping?*

**Habon** *We do it together.*

**Researcher** *You and your husband?*

**Habon** *Yes (Laughter) together.*

**Researcher** *Does he cook?*

**Habon** *Yes.*

**Researcher** *Is that traditional?*

**Habon** *He always try. He say I can do. You're tired. Sleep I can do.*

**Researcher** *Is that unusual for a Somali man?*

**Habon** *Before in our country the men their position is they go to work, bring money in, feed family and buy everything. But here most things you can do together...*

Just over half of the participants were single mothers. Reasons stated for this included that, their husbands had deserted the women, they had 'kicked' or 'thrown' out their husbands, or their husbands lived in another country. While some women were said to put up with the shortcomings of their husbands for the sake of their children's long-term well-being, others justified leaving husbands to escape the harmful influences bad fathers had on their children. New family structures of female lone-headed families, considered a new phenomenon to the Somali community, resulted in single mothers playing both the father and the mother roles in their children's lives.

Heavy responsibilities, a sense of isolation, as well as having no-one to draw upon in times of crisis, were most commonly presented as being the downside of lone parenthood. Episodes of family illness further highlighted single mothers' sense of isolation. Idil described taking her toddler to the chemist to get some antibiotics, during which time she suffered a miscarriage.

*Idil ... when I had a miscarriage, he was very sick. I went to the chemical to buy something for him. So that's why I lost my baby. Also my back went very bad. I have to change him, I have to go to the chemist to buy something for him. So I took him as I can't stay here. We have to go out together.*

**Researcher** Yes.

*Idil It's very hard.*

*Take this steps third floor. (Referring to her flat on the third floor.) Every two steps we have to stop.*

*Some days it's very, very difficult. You have no one to help you.*

In contrast, some of the single mothers spoke of receiving help from sisters when they asked for it, highlighting the differing experiences of everyday lone parenting. Yusra's sister came to live with her, helping her manage the home and family so that Yusra could give time to her sick young daughter who was under the care of a London hospital. Awo's sister was said to sleep over at her flat several times a week so that she could help out following the death of Awo's husband.

While there was an overall almost cavalier approach to women 'getting rid of lazy men', one or two participants reflected briefly on the challenges of trying to play two roles, recognising that however hard they tried, it was impossible to meet their children's needs as well as two parents could.

*Lana I know that the mothers and fathers are so important for the children. It is so important. You can't play the two roles.*

*You can't be so strict with them and gentle with them.*

In spite of this, overall there was very limited talk on remarriage and new relationships among the lone mothers, with the focus appearing to be on meeting the children's practical needs. The experiences of lone parenting differ, but an overall sense of determination and of getting on with the demanding job of bringing up children to the best of their ability was strongly evidenced by the women.

An extension of women's homemaking responsibilities was seen in their role acting as hostess and in providing hospitality to guests, both informally in their homes and when meeting as a group. This was particularly evident with those women living in the centre of town who enjoyed an 'open door' policy into each other's homes, highlighting the sense of communal ownership central to women's socialising practices. Lana's account of her experience of receiving hospitality vividly illustrates the rights, entitlements and duties that operate within such a system.

**Lana** One time I was with Sagal to help her when she moved. And she said come, come, we will take lunch. And I said where, I said, we didn't make anything. And she said come, and just knocked on a door.

*Laughter*

**Lana** And she said we want lunch. Ok Ok.

*The fruits, everything. And then she said I want tea. I said Sagal. She said, what she said, do not be shy. And she said no, no it is your house. We eat like in Somalia.*

Providing food and drink, attending promptly to guests' needs, as well as providing a relaxed atmosphere for the women to gather together to socialise were the requirements and expectations held of the role.

### **Managing hostile environments**

There is a strong overall sense, both overtly stated and in more muted expression, that the women experience and understand their daily family life as taking place within a hostile, threatening environment. Their interpretation and management of this lived fear is captured most vividly in relation to parenting their children, in their relationship with the non-Somali community, and lastly in their experiences and responses to racist, Islamophobic and discriminatory behaviour.

For most of the participants, parenting children in a Western environment was very different to their own experiences of being parented in Somalia, where they experienced freedom and independence, their mothers secure in the knowledge that the community would be watching out on their behalf for any problems. Here in the West, there were recognised tensions between Somali values of corporate responsibility in relation to children and Western values that emphasised family responsibility and individuality.

**Farhah** ... back at home, if children are outside and play and they are fighting each other, the first parent, even if he is not the parent of the children, they are shouting at them and say stop and I will tell your mother of it...

**Researcher** And that's missing here?

**Farhah** Yes

...But if you see children in Western society doing bad things and you say stop don't do that, his father is coming out and shouting saying why are you bothering my son or my daughter. We are totally different.

Despite this tension, some elements of corporate parenting operated and along with the perceived relative safety of this small city, contributed to provide a relatively safe environment for children. But still there was a strong sense of mothers needing to protect their children from exposure to Western values and behaviours that would contaminate or undermine their cultural/religious values. Parenting practices therefore can be seen to focus on creating pockets of safety where children's religious and cultural identities could be nurtured and immersed in Islamic/Somali values, as well as investing in their general education as a means of long term protection for them.

But women also had to accept and manage the fact that their children's daily lives inevitably involved navigating two complex and very different cultural/value systems. As first generation forced migrant parents, they can be seen to respond to the challenging task of managing their children's perceived threatening environments and previously un navigated territory, both individually and corporately, in different ways and with recognised differing degrees of 'success'. Providing good role models, teaching and instruction, monitoring, constraining play activity and whereabouts, all are adopted as strategies in participants' pursuit to protect from and hold back the 'dangers' of the environment.

Children were said to attend Somali language and religious classes from a young age. Though taking up significant time, up to three hours every day in the school holidays, parents viewed it as an enjoyable time for children to spend together. Having like-minded peers was considered important in helping withstand pressures from outside cultures. One mother was known to have moved her children from the local school where there was only one other Somali child, to the city school in order to provide support in this way; a 'costly' strategy, that involved the mother, who had six children, collecting them every afternoon by bus, leaving her tired and with little time for socialising with friends. Providing good role models was seen as imperative by parents if their children were to adopt appropriate and good behaviours.

*Fatima (Yusra translates) She says good things come from out of the house. I mean, good people that goodness comes from their mum and their dad. Because if you have bad, your child will also be bad.*

**Researcher** So it's example?

**Yusra** It's example.

Communicating with children from an early age and instructing them on what was expected from them was seen as important, but, as Lana pointed out, challenging if not impossible to do, given many mothers had five or six children. Instilling pride and trust were believed to produce good children who would be able to resist adopting bad behaviours encountered in their environment. Respect for one's elders was considered the foundation of child/adult relations, and was instilled in children from a young age.

Investing in children's education was regarded as a means of protecting children long-term. Lana captures the drive of this value and belief.

*Lana But you will see when you come here, they force the children to learn, learn, learn. Even the daughters. We say the money is gone, but the education stay with you for ever.*

Though many of the participants had had disrupted educational experiences as a result of civil war, participants held themselves responsible for their children's education. Supervising additional homework, buying revision books, attempting to secure private tutors or homework groups, as well as their efforts to forge active links with their child's school, all reflected endeavours to progress their child's educational achievement.

*Faham ... You have to push, for example children are achieving in school 40%. You have to help them 60% in home...*

*Faham I give them time when they are coming home. After a couple of hours they have to take rest, and then they start their education. I have different tests that I buy in the shops...*

*I have a lot of books and even tests*

*Researcher...*

*Faham Nearly 100 pound (worth).*

Despite participants' attempts to protect their children through cultural/religious and educational immersion, children's contact with the outside community and with those with differing values could not be avoided, provoking anxiety and fear in mothers. A substantial concern for many was in relation to drugs and alcohol, which participants strongly associated with Western behaviour. Contacts with non-Somali friends were thought to lead to tensions and fights developing with possible police involvement. Faham, a single mother, managed these fears by only allowing her sons, who attended

senior school, to play outside if she was able to watch them. Girls she felt were less vulnerable as they were happy to play indoors.

**Faham** ...*They like boisterous, football, and they like to go out. And I didn't restrain them, I said ok you can go out and I watch them every time.*

**Researcher** So you watch them play?

**Faham** ...*I have to watch them if they play here in the outside... Because there is too much drugs in the city. So I have to watch boys carefully.*

Participants also can be seen to respond to and manage their failure, or fear of failure, in achieving the desired behaviours and outcomes for their children's lives very differently, presenting an overall contradictory picture; on the one hand community focused, determined and successful in protecting their children, and on the other, struggling, denying to varying degrees both privately and publicly, the complexity and enormity of their task.

While participants' protective parenting practices were presented as successful, a few participants voiced criticisms that parents were overly constraining, which, they believed, would lead to rebellion and abandonment by children of their values.

**Syrod** *And some parents try to hold them in, to keep everything out. And then the youths do it, they just leave... You have to work with them. ... They have to understand the values. And there has to be some compromise, otherwise they will just break free completely.*

Some acknowledged that the teenagers were adopting Western antisocial behaviours. Sagal comically presented the issue of teenage alcohol abuse.

**Sagal** *Acting this conversation out. (Teenage children with their parents.)*

**Sagal** *Yes, I am fine, I am being good. Bye- bye parents. Their parents' backs are turned and out comes the alcohol, secretly, out of their parents' sight. The bottle is raised to their mouths and they drown the contents. The youths laugh at their ability to deceive their parents.*

Though less dramatic than alcohol abuse, the corrosive, insidious seeping in of everyday Western values into children's lives, such as individualism, materialism and the erosion of respect for adults, highlighted participants' powerlessness in holding

back the tide of Western values, leading to a prevailing sense of underlying fear among participants.

**Faham** *For example they say, 'this is my things'. We don't use this 'my things', we share everything. But they say 'that's my book, don't do that. You have to ask me if you wanted to do something'. We don't have that.*

The participants also refer to their relationships with the non-Somali, non-Muslim local community, revealing their day-to-day responses and strategies for responding as Black Muslim minority women, within a multicultural, but dominant white non-Muslim community. Perceived hostility represents and operates to varying extents and in different ways as barriers to exclude participants from developing positive relationships with outsiders, as well as in turn to keep outsiders out. Within that, other factors identified at play combine to reinforce participants' positions. Different and conflicting values, lack of time, opportunity and motivation to meet and mix with non-Somali women and to develop confidence in spoken English, as well as an opinion of British women being reserved and unfriendly, reflected participants' experiences, perceptions and constraints in forming closer relations with outsiders.

For most participants, their contact with outsiders was through formal activities such as college, local adult classes, or Sure Start, or through brief contact with neighbours on the estate; few had established 'outside' friendships, and I was for many the 'closest' non-Muslim white 'friend' that they had here in the UK. In this sense the women get on to a significant extent with living and maintaining separate lives from those of their wider community, their alienation further contributing to reinforce stereotypical held images of Western individuals and their associated excesses. Marianne's account captured the sense of separateness and disconnection that participants spoke of in terms of their relations with outsiders.

**Marianne** ...My only friends are Somali...

**Researcher** Do you have any white friends?

**Marianne** Yes one girl. We are same class as City College. She come to my house two or three weeks ago.

**Researcher** Is it hard to make friends with people other than Somali women?

**Marianne** Yes, because these people you don't understand, you don't speak the same language. It's very difficult to understand and you are not even the same culture. We are different, we have a different culture. It's very difficult to make a friend.

Distant or superficial relations between participants and the non-Somali community were for many though a new experience, contrasting sharply with the known warmth and friendship experienced in their past, as illustrated by Farhah.

**Farhah** ...*But I miss Sweden. In Sweden I lived with lots of Swedish families and they would be popping in and out my house. We would eat together and have coffee.*

Two participants can be seen to have challenged, and to some extent, overcome some of the identified social barriers, gaining friendships and for Lana in particular, feeling able to draw upon and view the wider community as somewhat supportive and enriching. Lana, living away from the centre of town and driven by feelings of loneliness, after several months had established a variety of friendships through attending local toddler groups, and through visits to the local park. Having a good friendship with her Indian neighbour, and still retaining close links with the Somali women, her social activities can be seen to weave between the different cultural groups. Idil, identifying herself as on the fringes of the Somali women's group, had established a close friendship with a Congolese woman, though her efforts to engage with local activities on her estate had been less successful.

Group leaders spoke of their formal engagement with the outside community, directly forging links on behalf of the Somali community through being a school governor, helping out on school trips and sitting as members on community/voluntary councils. Some participants also spoke quite proudly of their young children's mixed cultural friendships at school, though became less encouraging of this as children got older.

**Awo** *There are four Somali children in his class. But he is best friend with a Somali boy, an English boy and Pakistani boy.*

Non-Somali friendships and engagement with the outside community are portrayed as coming at a cost, accentuating periods of loneliness, of being on the fringes of one's community and of having to confront and manage conflicting values and practices. A dynamic tension is also evident, one in which the benefits of a tight

supportive female Somali community is potentially weakened and threatened in its effectiveness as, and if, relationships and time are shared with outsiders.

Racist, Islamophobic and discriminatory experiences and women's management and understanding of such, were a muted, absent or 'hidden' thread of women's lives, uncovered only through my direct questioning of the subject area. Though incidents were downplayed, being minimised as general anti-social behaviour, women and their families clearly encountered frightening experiences, both verbal and physical in nature, that were racist and/or Islamophobic and that made them fearful in their local environments. Accounts of abuse were predominantly verbal, though at times women were also physically attacked or threatened. Derogatory remarks consistently made included that they should go back to their own countries; that they were terrorists and reference was made to their skin colour.

**Fatima** '*They were drinking and using foul language. I thought they were going to attack me. They poured beer over my head and said 'fucking Bin Laden, go back to your own country.'*

More subtle incidents of racism and discrimination were also encountered though were not framed by the women as such for what they were, but rather seen as social problems taking the form of bullying or vandalism for example. Women also acknowledged their belief and experiences of racism being ingrained within their local services and in their dealings with professionals. Fatima voiced her confusion over whether her perceived poor service from her GP was the experience of all English women or just hers.

**Fatima** *Most of the time I am not feeling well, but I continue. But when I go to the doctor he tells me just have a glass of water. I don't know if it's only us or if English people also have the same problem?*

**Yusra** *She does not understand if it is different from that country (healthcare in Sweden) or the doctors are not helping her at all.*

**Researcher** *So whether it is happening to just her or to everybody?*

Despite women's own personal negative experiences, they can be seen to embrace a positive and 'can do' approach for their children, seeking to provide good role models and identify strategies that would equip children to manage and overcome

the barriers that racism, Islamophobia and discrimination create. Ultimately though, their children's fates were in the hands of Allah.

**Researcher** *What about some of the problems he is going to face outside the home? Racism, being a young Black Muslim in this society.*

**Idil** *But he is clever. He can do what he wants.*

**Researcher** *So he can overcome that?*

**Idil** *Yes he can, yes. But if he say, ah, the other people block me, or I can't do nothing then he will stay the same level as the others.*

Responding to these different levels and forms of oppression reveals the resources that women draw upon from themselves, their families and their Somali community, as well as highlighting their reluctance to formalise responses to such incidents. Practical strategies in dealing with incidents involved avoiding isolated public places, seeking comfort from family members and providing listening support and encouragement in the face of racist experiences. Faham, following a personal racist attack, changed her journey route, and consciously sought to present an air of friendliness and openness, calculating that a friendly exchange would reduce the likelihood of hostile behaviour.

**Faham** *One day I went to Gordon Road. I went this way (pointing). But now I am scared to go this way. Now I go a different way as there are not a lot of people this way.*

Marianne saw her need to provide support to other women, encouraging them to take a positive response to abusive experiences, putting it behind them and focusing instead on the good things in their lives.

**Researcher** *Do your friends have experiences (abusive) do you know?*

**Marianne** *Yes, absolutely.*

**Researcher** *How do you help them in that situation?*

**Marianne** *I listen to them. I try to come down there and explain the good things.*

**Researcher** *What to, what good things do you explain to them?*

**Marianne** *I don't like to show people bad things.*

**Researcher** *So you try to look at ...the positives about their situation?*

**Marianne** *Yes.*

Where participants' children were involved with incidents at school, mothers would liaise with staff in order to bring an end to the problem. An incident involving Fatima's son who experienced racially motivated bullying by some girls, highlighted Fatima's negotiation skills with the school as well as her attitude of forgiveness.

*Fatima So one of the girls was expelled...So I went to the school and said if the girl realised that she had done wrong then please let her come back to the school. The girl came back to the school and after all that they were friends. From that day they were friends. They say hi to each other.*

Participants can be seen to manage and make sense of their experiences of racism and discriminatory abuse mainly independently, being reluctant to involve professional agencies and outsiders as well as resisting adopting a victim status.

### **Belonging to the Somali community**

Being a female member of the local Somali community can be seen to operate in and impact upon participants' daily life on a number of different levels. At an individual level, women provide and receive practical support and help, information sharing advice and friendship from each other, their lives closely woven and predominately interdependent in managing the demands of daily life. These informal networks of support are facilitated by participants' close living proximity, their lack of outside employment and by their religious/cultural values that motivate their behaviour and action.

*Marianne We help each other if for example we have an appointment with the doctor. I have to phone my friend and say come I have an appointment with the doctor. Can you bring my children at school please if I am late? If my little one is sick and I have to go to ... I have to bring my other one to my friend to look after her.*

*And if I am sick we will cook for each other...*

But the dynamics of being a member of this support/social network can be seen as complex and subtle. Support can be seen to operate on different levels suggesting inherent underlying tensions; levels include that of friendship, corporate community responsibility and formal support facilitated by community leaders. Support based on reciprocal friendship appeared to be given and accepted freely whereas support in response to obligated duty to the community held mixed attitudes. Lana's frustration

at being asked to act as interpreter for many of the women at formal appointments illustrated the tension she felt between her obligated duty and her own family's needs.

**Lana** *Like if a woman cannot manage to deal with the schools  
It's difficult...*

**Researcher** *Ah. Do they phone you?*

**Lana** *Yes.*

**Researcher** *You have to go and help?*

**Lana** *Yes, but it's difficult as I have a daughter.*

**Researcher** *Sometimes they want someone to translate for them ...*

**Lana** *Yes, but then, I am surprised when she has been here four or five years  
and she can't manage to do this.*

While limited community involvement through personal choice, moving away from the city centre, or being engaged in full time education/employment appeared to reduce opportunity to experience the full benefits of the support networks, other subtle factors, namely clan affiliation, personality and behaviour also influenced the availability and quality of support offered or experienced. Idil's choice not to take up the women's offer of friendship and engagement when she first arrived, along with her minority clan status and outspoken personality, all contributed she believed to her 'outsider' status and accounted for the lack of practical support given to her during her health crisis and hospital admission. For Idil and for Lana who was also from a minority clan and lived away from the city centre, limited community support necessitated them seeking out additional outside support. That been said, overall there was clearly among the women, a blanket sense of security and protection provided by their informal support systems.

While women's lives appeared closely connected and shared on a practical and social level, on the personal level their lives were closely contained and at times secretive from each other. It was considered necessary to keep personal problems to oneself and manage them independently, rather than openly express and discuss them. Yusra and Zahara highlighted the cultural shame associated with exposing 'private' problems.

**Researcher** *And um... do the women share together when they feel sad?*

**Zahara** *No.*

**Yusra** *Not most of the time.*

**Researcher** *So women keep it quiet?*

**Zahara.** Keep quiet. Yes.

**Yusra** In Somali tradition, talking about problems is shameful...

**Researcher** Is that any problems are shameful.. ?

**Yusra** Some are more than others, as everywhere. There are things, very private things that you, not everyone can talk about this, it's very difficult to talk.

Mya cried as she told me of her estranged relationship with her husband but swore me to secrecy that I would not tell the other women. At the same time, there was evidence of some participants re-valuating this emotionally contained stance, recognising that their new circumstances as forced migrants and as single parents perhaps pushed them to find new ways of coping, such as 'letting it all out' and talking. Yusra's past experiences of working with Mental Health services had led her to be more open about her problems with her family and also with close friends.

**Yusra** er, talking's the best way. Er er how do you call, expressing yourself, outing your problems. And I would recommend, I tell everyone whether it is a daughter, a brother or sister, friends. Most of the time friends, your best friends I've used.

**Zahara** If you talk it is better, you feel better.

**Yusra** You feel better yes.

Lana as a single mother felt that her circumstances forced her to adopt new ways of coping.

**Researcher** Are there women you can talk to?

**Lana** ...You know when you are on your own and it is still new, to have a few friends that you can talk to it's good.

Before I can't tell anybody anything, just keep it to myself. I tell my husband. But now I, my husband is not here, I just tell somebody else I get mad.

From these examples we see yet again a tension and renegotiation of Western and Somali values and culture as part of an ongoing transitional process, as women work out how they should best get on with managing their daily lives, straddled between two very different 'worlds' of thought and experience.

At the corporate level, the women can be seen to operate a degree of monitoring each others behaviour and standards in relation to dress code and religious

observance and in relation to fulfilling their duties as mothers and wives. Habon illustrates the community's role.

**Habon** *If a woman is dressed in western clothes, they will say to her, you know Allah does not want you to dress like this. The Koran says this, this is what we should be doing. And they choose to follow what the Koran says. It's choice.*

While seen in a supportive light by many participants as a means by which women might be instructed and encouraged to maintain the highest standards possible, Lana and Ifrah demonstrate resistance to the infringement of their rights to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for their own actions.

**Lana** *That's the problems with us. If they see some problem with you they (the women) are just like this. Sometimes you need to be gentle when you are interacting. You should know your limit. Sometimes we are just involved with each other in everything. I don't like that...*

**Researcher** *How easy is it to have boundaries around your personal and family life?*

**Lana** *If you are away from the area you can manage to be, to have the line. But if you are the same area you just fight, fight and argue, especially if you don't understand or don't take what they want easily.*

Underlying and overt tensions and confrontation are therefore evident as part of some women's daily lives, as they negotiate and find ways to manage and resist this corporate power and influence on their activities and behaviour.

**Idil** *When you dress differently it is very difficult at all to be accepted. There are a lot of people who didn't say hello when they saw me... But I don't care because I like that way so.*

Resistance to community control and monitoring is also illustrated by Lana's continued practice of buying Christmas cards and presents for teachers and staff. Her account suggests the need for changing practices in a Western context. For others, the continuity and steadfastness of governing life principles that serve to guide and support them in this 'sea' of alienness, can be seen to be threatened, requiring stricter reinforcement and commitment both personally and collectively, in order to deter such threat.

**Lana** I buy everything, chocolates, gifts and small things...But the others said no, no, no. You are not allowed to do this. I said why? Jesus and Mohammed are brothers. She said even at the school I don't like my children to do this. But I said I give my children cards to give. She said that is up to you. But she got cross with me.. And when you argue with them it doesn't help. I said why are you coming here? You could just stay in Sweden or Somalia.

While monitoring and admonishment is directed at the individual, at the corporate level of analysis lie questions for the women about what it means to be good Muslim women in a secular society. Though given the appearance of continuity, repetitiveness and the busy rhythm of family daily life, there is also to be found a subtle but persistent thread of change to be found and uncertainty that the women get on with and respond to in different ways.

Though an appearance was given and an assumption made that participants' finances were very limited, there was not a sense of worry over money, nor did money seem to dominate participants' thoughts and conversations. Despite women lives evidencing hardship, such as being cold because they could not afford the heating bill, they also had unexpected luxuries. Marianne's husband had a fully-paid for luxury taxi; Sagal received massages from the beauty parlour for her joint pains and Awo, a single mother, was having driving lessons. Lana explained that larger items in need of purchase were bought using a financial cooperative that the women organised and invested in together.

**Lana** ...We make like a group, women's like this. And we pay every month.

**Researcher** Is it a Somali system?

**Lana** Yes.

**Researcher** Is it an Islamic system or just Somali?

**Lana** Everywhere.

**Researcher** Where you can borrow and pay?

**Lana** We pay every month like two hundred or one hundred, according to what you can .. and then every month, one take this money.

Money was also seen to operate transnationally among extended families. Relatives paid for air tickets so participants and their families could visit or attend religious festivals abroad. Remittances were sent back to family in Somalia. Ultimately though,

a corporate financial safety net was suggested to operate by the community for those women in severe difficulties as Idil highlights.

***Idil** Because Somali families they sometimes help when you don't get money. For example the lady who was with me the last time you saw. She didn't get anything. So we helped. Everybody helped her. We took (gave) ten pounds/twenty pounds or something like that.*

A story of division, political power battles and conflict emerged as the backdrop to participants' lives as members of this Somali community. As an outsider, though hearing and witnessing these struggles played out, I was limited in my ability to interpret their meanings, recognising the layers of subtle cultural and historical complexity represented within the behaviour.

However, participants though influenced by clan/leadership allegiances and ties in the ways they socialised, drew upon community resources and identified as a community group. Clan affiliation connected individuals, creating unifying ties based upon past shared geographical space, history and blood. For many of the women clan membership created a sense of identity and belonging and a means by which reconnections could be made with the severed past. But for Lana and Idil though who were from minority clans, their outsider status relative to the other women, was reinforced by their lack of past social connections as well as by their dialects.

***Idil** They are cousins; they know relatives, all of them they know.*

***Researcher** So they are all connected.*

***Idil** Yes, they are connected?*

***Researcher** But they are not all the same clan though, they are different clans?*

***Idil** Different clans but they are all from the same ancestor. They are different from me. Me I am Isaac. The area of Dhat area. Yes, I am different.*

***Idil** ...So when they talk, hey your father was like that. But they know nothing to talk about you so they have nothing to talk when you are with them ...*

***Lana** They welcome me but some of them can't understand me. (Laughter.)*

***Researcher** They don't understand their Somali language?*

***Lana** No they can understand me but I can't understand them. They speak the North, the original Somali.*

While participants' lives appeared to be focused on getting on with the present, it also became clear that the past was very much part of that present. The

legacy of sustained civil war and bitter tribalism for over twenty years in Somalia seen to have been carried with participants in their forced migrant and ongoing journeys. Clan tensions and divisions were said to have impacted upon the community's ability to gain financial resources, as well as creating territorial divisions that made some resources 'no go' areas.

**Researcher** ... *Would they come to Sure Start? ...*

**Yusra** *Well there is a group of Somali who bring them regularly to Sure Start. But those group doesn't accept the other group to come to Sure Start. So some people don't dare to come to Sure Start.*

Enmeshed within the clan tensions appeared also leadership and power struggles. Sagal talked very despondently to me one time at the sewing group about her frustrations with the community.

*Sagal has a big group of women but some of the women are not committed and she does not trust them all. Like the meetings, some women go just to spy or see what is on. Then they go back to their other group and they say things and make things up, whatever they want to say that would be damaging...*

Four broad approaches can be identified in participants' responses to their everyday relational conflicts. First they challenged and actively ignored the issues; secondly they adopted a flexible approach to the groups and their leaders; thirdly they conducted superficial, but cordial relationships with each other and lastly, they denied any knowledge of divisions. The following extracts exemplify some of these different positions.

**Lana** *Still now when they go 'where are you from in Somalia which clan are you from?' I say forget it! The point is we are both from Somalia that is enough.*

**Idil** *Sagal she is a good lady, she does a lot of good things for the children. But if Yusra does lots of good things for the children I will go there as well... I go anywhere.*

**Habon** *I greet everybody, I say hi. On that level we are fine socially. But when it comes to working together on different things, then I can't manage that. It doesn't go any deeper in terms of working together and working things through.*

Managing relational conflict and power dynamics in attempts to find ways of living together as a community in this city, are the challenges that participants address, leading some to evidence personal growth and others, resignation and acceptance that conflict is an integral of being a Somali.

### **Issues of loss and adversity**

Participants can be seen to have experienced and managed multi-faceted, cumulative loss and adversity in their lives, as evidenced through their migratory journeys in chapter four. Family bereavement, enforced separation from family, friends and home and a loss of independence and status, social, professional and financial, reflect somewhat the nature of their personal losses. References to death though scattered throughout the transcripts, were always brief and presented as factual information. Yusra referred to the loss of family members as well as the fragmentation of the family.

***Yusra*** *I have a sister and a brother in England. The rest of my family is in Somalia. We have lost a lot of members of my family, brother, my mum, in the war in Somalia.*

Idil, discussing baby names referred briefly to her brother's death, but did not linger on the subject, despite my attempts to encourage her to do so.

***Idil*** *My mum wanted me to call him Mohammed...My brother's name was Mohammed. He is dead now, but we still like that name.*

***Researcher*** *Oh, that's sad, he must have been very young.*

***Idil*** *He was 32. He was killed in Somalia with the trouble. He had a wife too. We are five girls and one brother and we lost him*

***Researcher*** *Your mum and dad must have been very sad to lose their only son.*

***Idil*** *Well my dad is dead now, but my mum lives in Holland.*

*(Idil moves the conversation on.)*

While families scattered across Europe had possibilities for reuniting, those in America or Canada were cut off by stringent immigration policies. Habon, though able to visit her brother, recognised that over time the likelihood of reunification as a family was increasingly unlikely as both became established and constrained by their

new lives. In this sense some participants had to come to terms with letting go of dreams and hopes, recognising that families' lives had moved on.

**Habon** ...For example part of my family live in America. In 2005 I went to visit them. One of my brother live in England. So people are separate. I tried to move to America to live with my brother but it was impossible.

**Researcher** Would the ones from America come here in order for them to be with you?

**Habon** They are happy there. I mean they have been there 14 or 15 years. They have a business there. My brother has a gas station. One of them has a shop. So it's not easy for them to come here. (Laughter.)

**Habon** They say to me you come, but it's not easy to be there...

Several of the participants mentioned the significant loss in their lives of not having their mothers with them.

**Awo** My mother lives still in Somalia. She lives in the south.

**Researcher** She must miss you a lot.

**Awo** Yes, I miss her very much. Every one needs their mother...

**Awo** ...I phone her every week. I tell her all about the children. I send her photographs of them.

The loss of independence, of managing daily life, of being financially independent as well as the loss of recognition given to previously acquired skills, were daily reminders for many participants of things that had gone from their lives.

**Researcher** Do you feel like a refugee?

**Lana** Yes sometimes when I have to get something. Because in my country we have money in my hand. We support ourselves. It is difficult when you come here and other people support you. It is difficult.

**Researcher** So that loss of independence. Feeling dependent.

**Lana** Yes and it is difficult to get work without no certificates. Big problems.

Responses to loss and adversity take an overall approach of acceptance of adversity in life, an absence of public emotional expression and a sense of moving on and looking forward. Awo's matter of fact approach to the death of her husband from a heart attack just eighteen months before, left me floundering in my known cultural responses to tragic news, highlighting a sense of emotional/social misalignment between us.

**Researcher** Where is your husband then, in Somalia?

**Awo** No he has passed away.

**Researcher** I am so sorry to hear this. When did he die?

**Awo** About 18 months ago. He had a heart attack.

**Researcher** How old was he? Was he ill?

**Awo** No he was 39.

*She then begins to recount what happened, acting it out.*

*The ambulance came. They said he is dead.*

**Researcher** You must have been so shocked. He is very young to die.

**Awo** Every one must die.

**Researcher** Yes of course, we must all die. It just seems so sudden and unexpected.

**Awo** In my religion Islam it says that all can die.

Though there was a strong sense of women not dwelling on the past or publicly engaging emotionally with feelings of loss and adversity, Lana revealed a little about the sadness and despair that accompanies cumulative loss in life, though she moved quite quickly on to discuss practical responses in relation to it.

**Researcher** You know something that comes through is a lot of loss.

**Lana** Sometimes you can cry. (Laughs.) Sometimes you have big problems in your life, and you are alone, you feel like alone...

In contrast, the communal shared fear and sadness felt for family and friends left behind in Somalia, a country currently ravaged by civil war, anarchy and famine, revealed a sense of collective fear and helplessness that at times overwhelmed participants with sadness and tears. Participants kept in touch with events in Somalia on a daily basis. Bad news triggered feelings of fear, of feeling depressed and with a need to check on the safety of their relatives.

**Mya** When you are there, you can cope with it. You just get on with it and manage. But when you are away from it and you hear that this person has left and this person is dead, you just feel helpless. What can you do?

*I call my mum every day.*

**Mya** ...Every morning I ring my mum, are you all right, what is happening?

While concern focused intensely on individual families and friends, Fatima highlighted the sense of collective grief and sadness that all the women shared for Somalia.

**Fatima** (*Yusra translating*) *It's very sad and you watch the TV and you just start crying and you can't stop.*

**Yusra** *I mean it's general. Everybody, every Somali feels sad. Every Somali is very sad and hurt.*

Despite participants' recognition of their own safety, the burden of worry was seen as something integral to being a Somali forced migrant and therefore something to be got on with as part of daily life.

**Habon** *You are still not completely free over here (UK) because there is a part of you left behind; you leave part of yourself, your missing part of yourself. And you worry. You never stop worrying. You hear of a bomb going off or trouble in such and such and you immediately have to phone. I have grandparents. I have to phone. Are you ok? When did it happen? Are you safe? You never are free of that worry, although you are safe. Your family is not safe. You live with that worry everyday.*

Participants also demonstrate though their attempts to overcome the loss and fragmentation caused as a consequence of forced migration and increasingly restrictive immigration policies. Attempts to reunite fractured families occurred both formally and informally through immigration channels and Somali networks. Competent adoption of telecommunications and transportation can be seen to facilitate transnational family life and communication on a day-to-day basis. Many participants spoke of daily or weekly phone contact with family members and in times of crisis or feeling 'down' mothers and family members were regarded as 'just at the other end of the phone'.

**Mya** *Somalia has very good telecommunication - telephone, internet. Everywhere now in Somalia. They also have MSN and such things. It's about three hours difference time-wise between the two countries. Telephone is expensive so sometimes a relative will email and say go on MSN now. Many have web cameras so they can see each other as well.*

There was a general sense of travelling, with families, husbands or participants regularly taking extended visits abroad to see family members scattered throughout the world. Several participants spoke of having returned to relatively safe areas in Somalia, (Somaliland or Puntland), though others met up with elderly relatives in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia or Kenya. For Faham, even though she

returned to Somalia for a visit, it still did not compensate her loss and separation from home.

**Researcher** *Have they (the children) been back to Somalia?*

**Faham** *Yes they have been back to Somali...Puntland.*

**Faham** *And there was fantastic, they like it. It's really different because I grew up in Mogadishu. Language is different but their culture is still the respect for the parent.*

**Researcher** *Was it strange?*

**Faham** *Somehow because I did not see my neighbours, I did not see the place that I lived in. There is different because I have never been there.*

**Faham** *That's a new town and new people.*

**Researcher** *So not your home.*

Although managing new ways of families staying connected, many participants ultimately dreamed that they would return home to Somalia. These dreams, however were tempered by the stark reality of the country's situation and an acceptance that return would be many years away. At the same time, participants recognised that their perceptions of 'home' were diverse, according to where people felt they belonged and wanted to return. Young people wanted to live where they had been born, where they had spent most of their lives rather than go to a country that they hardly knew. Fatima illustrated the intergenerational tensions, as well as highlighting potential further loss and family fragmentation that they may have to encounter in the future.

**Fatima** *I hope and I dream that my children all grown up, all educated and going back to my country one day.*

**Researcher** *Somalia?*

**Fatima** *Yes.*

**Researcher** *To live or for a holiday?*

**Yusra** *Her children are born in Europe, they just need to be here, as it's their home here. (Laughter.) But people who are grown up in Somalia and without we will have grown up, our schools everything. We would like to go back some day, I don't know when.*

For second generation Somalis born in Europe, the concerns and hopes experienced by their parents for Somalia was something which they were unable or unwilling to share in. Habon poignantly spoke of her children's disinterest in Somalia

and of her experiences of suffering, suggesting a painful chasm between the generations.

**Habon** *You know I tell my children about the issues, the things that have happened in Somalia to us, but you know that they are just hearing it, they don't know it, don't experience it. It means nothing to them. That's just what happened to us. And that causes problems with the young people, when they don't pay attention to it.*

In this sense, the burden of fear and grief carried in relation to Somalia and the hope of future return is one which the women share and manage together.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a largely descriptive account of women's everyday lives in exile in relation to their roles and responsibilities as mothers and homemakers, their management of a hostile environment, their membership of the Somali community and lastly, coping and overcoming issues of loss and adversity. Within these descriptions of prominent aspects of daily life, a number of themes emerge which provide insight into how and why the women manage their lives. Such a focus provides a means by which to interrogate and explore the meanings attributed to women's activities. The following chapter presents these themes alongside analytical insights and discussion that surround them.

## CHAPTER SIX: WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS OF GETTING ON WITH DAILY LIFE

### Introduction

Having presented the key aspects of women's accounts of 'just getting on with it', this chapter addresses the 'Why' question. Asking the question why do the women just get on with their lives the way that their accounts suggest provides opportunity for exploring the meanings of this activity and what enables them to get on with their daily life. The four aspects identified in response to this further interrogation are as follows:

- Being a good Somali Muslim woman
- The busyness of daily life
- Strength and independence
- A corporate approach to life.

### A good Somali Muslim woman

In exploring this feature, two key aspects are identified as contributing to being a good Somali woman. It is an integral part of both individual and collective cultural identity-to be Somali is to be Muslim. Secondly it represents a personal position of faith. Syrod highlights these differing (though not mutually exclusive) stances.

*Syrod The people, they say yes Islam is wearing a scarf, knowing and looking after my family. But Islam means peace, you do not know the Koran. They only know the culture. They do not know the Islam faith.*

Maintaining and strengthening a strong cultural religious identity for themselves, family and community is central to women's lives. It serves to maintain and reinforce a common bond of understanding, mutual values and common purpose, providing both familiarity, a sense of continuity, as well as refuge from the threatening and alienating values and practices of the host society.

*Syrod When I am with a Somali I just know that they understand me. They understand how I think and my values and we (pause)... we connect.*

Cultural religious practices serve to distinguish and maintain a sense of separateness, with practices related to wearing the hijab providing an example of a visible marker of difference from the ‘outside’ community. Women’s energies are directed towards defending their families from contaminating Western values infiltrating or undermining their own cultural/religious values, believing themselves to be instrumental in ensuring their children’s adherence to Islam. Concerns that children are being sucked into Western society reinforce the need for women to provide good role models.

**Syrod** *You have to show them what they must behave like.*

Idil and Lana can be seen to introduce challenging new thought and religious behaviour to the women’s accepted practices, rattling the sense of security and familiarity that the women have established from the re-creation of their shared past. In turn this forces the acknowledgment and management of religious difference within the community itself, further adding to the simmering conflict already present from clan and leadership issues.

**Idil** *Yes, when I first came here it was very difficult for me because they are all on their own, you have put scarfs on, you have to be like them. Because they came also from the same area.*

**Researcher** *So they all think the same?*

**Idil** *Yes, the same area so they are the same...*

**Idil** *Yes, I think they are scared when they see you are different.*

**Lana** *...And they cannot accept the other’s difficulties. They just stick with each other.*

Islamic principles can be seen to provide a framework for living, but the women are met with the challenge of knowing how to apply them within a Western context.

**Yusra** *... Er... religion is behind every good thing. The respect, the parents, education, good behave, everything, for the neighbours and society, to show good, I mean good habits. The religion first tells everything.*

Asking and working through the question how should good Muslim women live is a key feature of many of their lives as they negotiate new opportunities and experiences here in the West. Individual responses such as Lana's adoption of giving Christmas presents and Marianne's desire for her daughter to have further education, highlights the sense of threat posed to the collective thinking of the women suggesting that this question has provoked and encouraged individual responses; a position itself more in tune with Western values emphasising individual thought and rights.

**Marianne** *After maybe they get degrees to get married. They can have a degree but they have got to be married and have children.*

**Researcher** *Are all Somali women and parents thinking like that?*

**Marianne** *No, No. Yes, it's very good to educate. My opinion. Educate first and after that get married. That's my opinion. Just my opinion. Not all Somali.*

A clash of religious traditions with Western culture is seen. The breakdown of marriages, challenge to polygamous practices, women taking on non-traditional outside roles and responsibilities, suggests the challenging need for greater flexibility of thought in relation to how women should live. Women can be seen to be looking for an acceptable balance and compromise between new and old practices and ways of living without undermining adherence to their faith.

**Mya** *Yes, it is difficult. It is hard to meet the expectations when there are two cultures involved, the Somali culture and Western.*

**Mya** *...In our culture a man can have four wives, but we do not want that. That can't work any more here. It is not possible to care and provide for more than one wife and family in the Western world.*

Corporate responsibility to ensure good religious living appears in part a response to the belief that the community needs to atone for the past sins of their country. Adoption of and stricter adherence to traditional interpretations of Islamic teaching as a corporate response to this belief can be seen to reinforce the community-monitoring role that instructs individuals on appropriate behaviour and admonishes instances of perceived failure. Monitoring, though, can also be interpreted as the response of a community that recognises the threat to its cultural religious integrity by a corrosive and powerfully influential environment.

**Habon** *After you know people return to God. They said maybe we do something wrong. That's why we have a war. So we just become more traditional.*

Accepting Islamic teaching can be seen to equip participants to be able to get on with and move on from challenges in life. Responses to loss, suffering and injustice reflect the spoken acceptance of Allah's will and His greater plan for their lives, leaving little room for questioning and emotional engagement. Instead, energies are concentrated on meeting the practical demands of family life and embracing the future. Resignation and acceptance of Allah's will enables some participants to cope with worries, which they perceive they have little control over. Mya appeared to hold a sense of peace and acceptance concerning the fears she held for her father's safety living in war-torn Mogadishu.

**Researcher** *And your parents, did they not want to come with you (from Mogadishu)?*

**Mya** *I wanted them to. But they wouldn't. My dad said everybody has his or her time. ... Everybody has his or her time to die. It does not matter where you are. When it is your time, it is your time. You cannot change that.*

**Researcher** *Right, so whether he is in a dangerous city like Mogadishu, or the UK, when the time for him comes he will die?*

**Mya** *Yes.*

Syrod believed that ultimately her children's lives were in Allah's hands; He would decide their fate.

**Syrod** *Well all I can do is my best to give them good values and a role model. The rest is up to Allah*

**Researcher** *What, do you mean Allah determines what happens?*

**Syrod** *Yes, we believe that it is in Allah's hands. You have to do your best, to do your bit. But Allah decides what happens and has it planned.*

While a fatalistic approach to life's challenges suggests a sense of passivity and loss of agency, linked to this position is also individual responsibility and accountability. This may explain in part why there is a strong emphasis on the women taking responsibility for their own lives and problems, rather than seeking to blame or change the systems that constrain them. This is exemplified in the way women manage incidents of racism and discriminatory behaviour. While accepting that such behaviour will occur, women still strategically manage their responses as well as

seeking to make sense of such incidents. By avoiding further conflict or seeking personal retribution, they can be seen to rise above the level of the abuser. Living in a Islamophobic society may encourage women to present the peaceful face of Islam to the outside community, but perhaps even more important is their need to pass on to their children the skills and attitudes required to survive in a hostile environment. Fatima's account of the racism her son had experienced at school served to illustrate that not all Muslims are bad. Syrod emphasised the community's desire for peace with the outside community.

**Researcher** *That was a very forgiving attitude.*

**Fatima** Yes.

**Yusra** *Some people are very forgiving and very nice. People are not the same everywhere.*

**Syrod** *And there was this white person and she was from Sure Start. She came up to me and said I heard and saw all of that. You should report her to the police. ...But I didn't.*

**Researcher** *Why didn't you?*

**Syrod** *We just want to be peaceful. We do not want to fight and cause trouble with people.*

Early socialisation and parental pressure contributed to women being very clear of the religious cultural roles and responsibilities they were expected to fulfil as good Muslim women.

**Syrod** *My mother said, I learn you lots of things. But, first you must always be a good wife and mother. You must cook for your husband and look after the house...*

While demanding in nature, valuable personal gains can be seen from such roles bringing the women power, status, dependency of family members and pride. Wider community recognition was given to those women perceived as good wives and hostesses, highlighting the value and high esteem held in relation to these qualities.

In exploring within the participants' why there is such an emphasis on being good Somali Muslim, the evidence would suggest that it reflects that it is woven into their many strands of daily life, in sustaining cultural identity and as a personal source

of guidance, comfort and inspiration. It could also be concluded that its prominence is as a result of the women's desire to show an 'outsider' how Islam operates in their daily lives. What is evident is that being good Somali Muslim women contributes to their ability to make sense of, and to manage their forced migrant experiences, but alongside this, it brings challenge, conflict and fear within the day-to-day of living in a Western environment.

### **Busyness of daily life**

Participants' increasing sense of busyness in relation to their daily lives can be explained in part by their extensive traditional responsibilities as well as new responsibilities and roles that have resulted from living here in the West. The costs of these relentless demands are borne out in the women's long and tiring days.

**Marianne** *Very busy really very busy. I go to bed about 11 or 12 at midnight. I am very tired. I feel very tired.*

**Syrod** *You know the women are busy, sometimes with five or seven children. They are doing the cooking, shopping, going to college or courses. They don't have time to get to know English women. Everything seems so much more busy.*

While acknowledging these real costs, there was also the suggestion that it serves to contribute in some ways to helping them manage their lives.

There was the suggestion that participants placed less value and emphasis upon emotional development and emotional engagement, supported, for example, by a visible absence of toys and lack of emphasis on play for young children and by a tendency to give priority to practical tasks over and above talking about feelings. While taking into account these cultural differences and nuances, women's busyness can be seen to serve in shielding them somewhat from having to engage with emotions associated with multifaceted, cumulative loss and adversity.

**Researcher** *Sometimes it feels like everyone is too busy to be sad. Do you think that sometimes the busyness is helpful?*

**Marianne** *Yes, ( laugh), you don't have to think about much.*

Lana, showing me her crocheting suggested it helped her relax.

**Researcher** You know what we call this, we call it a doily...

**Lana** You know it keep you busy. It is relaxing.

The demands of the day, highly structured and with a sense of regular rhythm can be seen to occupy women's minds and time, allowing limited opportunity to dwell upon the past.

**Lana** ...but you know the issue is now about children, about family, about the life in the present...

**Fatima** (Yusra translating) When I remember, things come back.

Despite this busyness, there remained a background of ongoing anxiety, sadness and nostalgia in women's lives. Fatima spoke of how she missed her eldest son who had stayed on in Sweden to attend university.

**Fatima** (Yusra translating)... He said I am not coming with you I am staying here to study...

**Researcher** Does that make her sad?

**Fatima** (Yusra translating) Yes, I think all the time. I miss him she says.

Habon spoke of the gnawing worry she carried for her family's safety in Somalia.

**Habon** And you worry. You never stop worrying... Your family is not safe. You live with that worry everyday.

Syrod spoke of the nostalgia she felt for 'home'.

**Syrod** You know Africa and UK are two different worlds. I miss the weather, the fresh food, the way of life, everything. It is completely different.

Sadness and worry spoken of in relation to Somalia and family left behind suggested that this alone was more than some women could bear to cope with. Busyness, therefore, can be understood as a means by which women regulate the level and extent to which difficult, painful emotions are able to infiltrate and intrude into daily life, avoiding an oversaturation of despair and sadness, while in no way extinguishing them altogether. It also arguably facilitates the high level of public emotional containment found among the participants. That being said, new experiences and

appreciation of the benefits of being more open with feelings and problems within the community, suggested some women were discovering alternative or additional ways to contribute to managing this aspect of their lives.

Many of the demands on women's time and energy can be seen to stem from the responsibilities they carry as mothers and homemakers. Activities related to these duties can be seen to reflect women's own priorities for their lives at this time. In contrast, several participants who had migrated from Scandinavian countries spoke of the pressures they encountered when trying to combine compulsory employment with their homemaking/parenting duties.

*Fathai But it was very hard to get the children all out the door in the morning. Everyone had to have lots of warm clothes on as it was very cold. In the evening we would all get in together. I would have to get the dinner within the hour, do all the housework and jobs and the children would need to get to bed. There was no time for them. I could not teach them Somali then as I did not have time to talk to them. They just learnt Danish.*

While many factors can be identified that contributed to participants' decisions to avoid paid part-time employment here in the UK, there was an overriding sense that they viewed their homemaking role as valuable and satisfying. In examining the contribution of busyness to these women's lives, an element of choice, a sense of agency, power and general fulfilment can be seen to stem from the activities that they manage within their busy day. The gains for some women can be viewed as delicately balanced against the negative impact of managing an overburdened, increasing workload where neither the division of labour, no compromise are options.

Busyness, it can be suggested, acts as a diversion from the 'bigger' challenges and issues that they face as a community here in the West, preventing them having to question, address (and for some), even acknowledge their existence. The absence of open discussion and communal response to the crises or potential tensions of their young people, the little insight shown or questioning raised regarding the disengagement of Somali men from family life, the continuing underlying tensions and clan friction in the community as the troubles of Somalia are re-enacted within the West, all remained largely buried beneath the surface of women's accounts, simmering amidst the whirl of daily life. There has however, to be an element of caution in interpreting this data, given the lack of clarity regarding the impact of

‘cultural shame’ upon participants’ contributions to the study. The following accounts though suggest the depth of the problems and the community’s sense of collective inertia to them.

**Researcher** *But in Somalia the women stay married don’t they?*

**Lana** *You know, the community absorbs the anger of the couple in Somalia ... But here they are just stuck in the home...*

**Lana** *You know there is no Somalian support in this issue. Family issues. You know we need something like this...*

**Syrod** *You know we need to help each other in the community. Sometimes a teenager will listen and show respect to another person, not his family. But it is difficult though because we have nowhere to meet to talk about these problems.*

**Sagal** *The troubles that we have in Somalia we have just brought with us. All the tensions have just come.*

Women’s busyness can also be interpreted as providing a legitimate means to avoid the harsh realities of integrating into what many have found to be a somewhat hostile and closed society. Lack of time to develop English language competency, to undertake outside employment, to make friendships within the wider community, all serve to reinforce the relatively comfortable position of maintaining daily living largely within the confines of the safety of the community. Busyness can be seen to help the women avoid posing and answering challenging questions as to why their behaviours and practices are so different from other Somali communities and from their previous experiences of living in other parts of Europe.

**Idil** *Only the people here, not all the Somali because they are different you know.*

*All the people in this city live in community only, but if you go to London or if you go another way such as Cardiff or something like that, you can see the Somali integrate very well. They have a lot of friends.*

**Sarah** *But in Norway we all would meet together. The (Norwegian) women would knock on my door, and come in my house and we would have coffee and meet together and chat all the time.*

**Researcher** *So it’s different here. Why is that?*

**Sarah** *I don’t know. (Conversation moves on.)*

The increasing busyness of women’s lives can be seen to act for many, consciously or unconsciously, as a mechanism of support in managing daily life as a forced migrant within this community. While arguably appearing to provide some

protection in the immediacy, long-term it may contribute to actually increasing and intensifying the risks to which this community is exposed.

### **Strength and independence**

A ‘strong woman’ discourse runs as a theme throughout the women’s accounts. In examining why it features so prominently, strength and independence can be seen to operate as core factors that enable women to get on with managing their lives, serving to motivate, to inspire self-belief, to sustain determination and to demonstrate competency. In striking contrast, women’s accounts of Somali men portray weakness and incompetence further serving to accentuate their strong woman discourse.

Somali women’s strength is viewed as both a cultural, and innate characteristic recognisable in all Somali women’s lives from the way they get on with and cope with life’s challenges. Many appear to hold a strong belief that as women they are more capable than men and more able to cope with life’s challenges. Fatima, referring to the demands on her as a single parent, highlights the distinguishing features of strength, perseverance and determination exemplified in Somali women’s daily lives. Such a position suggests a sense of cultural pride and a reinforcement of women’s capabilities against all odds, but at the same time it can be seen to create a certain standard and expectation that has to be attained.

*Fatima (Yusra translating) It is not easy, an easy job to be a mother and father at the same time but I am doing my best. Six in the morning till ten o’clock in the evening I am still standing. Till the last person goes to bed I am still there.*

*That’s the way we are. Every Somalian mother that I know.*

Circumstances here in the West have demanded that many women operate independently either because their husbands are away for long periods travelling, they are in long-distance relationships, or they are single mothers. All this is in the context of loss of traditional extended family support. For many women, their time in the West has led to and developed new competencies and confidence in their ability to cope and manage family life independently of men. This has contributed to women’s new position; one of being able to challenge men’s perceived failings and to choose whether to continue within a relationship.

**Sagal** ...But a man has to care properly for all his wives and the children. He has to fulfil his responsibilities to them. If he doesn't then she should kick him out the door. (Sagal acted out kicking the husband out the door. Everyone laughed.)

Being strong and independent, therefore, can be seen to underpin the redefining of gender relations and reveals the tensions that are created as this dynamic operates in new and different ways within family life. For Lana, women's new-found sense of independence is understood to undermine men, marginalising their role within the home.

**Researcher** Do you think it's because they (men) are unhappy with their role ...?

**Lana** I don't know. But sometime I think it depends on the women. Who give them any responsibility? Because they (the women) do everything by yourself. **Lana** She should share her problem with the man. Don't hide everything from him. Sometimes she hide everything when the children grow up. They make some wrong thing and she say whisper whisper...

For Idil, life mainly as a single parent while her partner worked in London, has meant that independence has given her a new sense of freedom.

**Idil** I like to live here on my own.

**Researcher** Do you?

**Idil** Yes.

I am quite strong and I like to manage it myself. Quite independent. Yes, that's what I like.

The prominence of this strong woman discourse has also to be seen within the traditional cultural context from which it emerges. Idil, asked why some of the Somali women were unable to speak English after several years of living in the UK, illustrated the cultural dimensions in determining what it means to be strong and independent, as well as how they may culturally operate. Lana captures the nature of the tension.

**Idil** Most of them their husband is doing everything for her. So they stay at home.

**Researcher** Right.

**Idil** She go to shopping, they do everything so when she needs an interpreter he go with her. So he takes care of everything.

**Lana** *You know now the Somali women is so strong... she rule the home, rule the man, she has a good personality. She is doing well. Sometimes she hasn't the time to go to school because all the family depend on her.*

It can be concluded that women are negotiating and for some, incorporating new understandings and possibilities for exercising their strengths and independence in daily life here in the West. The assessment of the long-term costs, however, as opposed to merely the gains of this changing dynamic, appears as yet not fully explored or understood by the women.

Although the impression is given that women's strength is natural and effortless in negotiating daily life, rather, in reality it can be seen as a direct act of will by the women, as Mya, a single mother illustrates.

**Mya** *Yes, I am independent. I see it as a challenge. I set myself the goal that I have to cope...  
You just have to get on..*

Ingrained cultural values, circumstances, a lack of alternative options, all contribute to the women 'just getting on with it', but the biggest factor underpinning this approach to life appears to be the impetus women gain from needing to respond to their children's needs and in convincing them of and contributing towards, a better life in the future for them.

**Yusra** *Most Somalian men desert their children. Ladies with children you see everywhere. But they are strong, they have decided to be strong for their children, don't I mean, just look back and be sad, they just can't afford that.*

**Lana**.... *You should stop thinking like that (looking back on past loss). Especially for your children. You should be strong in front of them and feed them the future will be more acceptable.*

Questions remain as to how acceptable it is to reveal weakness and vulnerability both to an outsider and within the community. Mya's surprising request for me to identify books on single parenthood, hinted at a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty in her new role. However, while vulnerability may be inferred or interpreted from the data, few explicit references are made portraying women as weak or overwhelmed. Of these, their helplessness in relation to the current crisis in

Somalia, their daily fear of encountering racist/Islamophobic attacks and the acceptance that institutional racism is too powerful for them to challenge, highlights their recognition that strength and determination alone cannot overcome or manage all of life's challenges. Alongside this, Yusra, a community leader, shows recognition of the tense relationship between a community's strengths and capabilities and the legitimacy of being allocated scarce resources. She advocates explicitly on behalf of her community for help; one of the very few direct requests for support received from participants throughout the study.

***Yusra*** ...Somalian ladies are quite strong but um we need a lot of help. We are still struggling. Everything is new for them, children ah, too many for them. They manage trying to manage, to stay strong for them, but I think they need a lot of help. In many ways.

### **A corporate approach in life**

While women's individual strength and self-sufficiency is a prominent theme, equally, participants attached importance to sharing and living communal interdependent lives. At odds with Western cultural values of privacy, individual rights and responsibilities, tensions can be seen as participants manage and negotiate these different value systems within their daily lives. The contribution that this collective value makes to enabling individuals to cope with life in the West, reiterates why it remains a central feature of daily life.

Responsibilities, decision-making and accountabilities culturally operate within a transnational extended kinship/clan/community framework. Within this, the expectation of a right to support as well as a duty to provide support to each other highlights the legitimacy of asking for and receiving support from this extended pool of resources. Further to this, a strong sense of duty and corporate responsibility avoids individuals being framed or framing themselves as 'helpless', but rather reinforces their expected role as contributors and resource providers.

**Researcher** What was it like when you arrived in the UK?

**Lana** A different life, a different culture. Everything is new. And the good thing is my uncle's family accept me. They teach me to know the systems.

**Researcher**...Is that part of your way of thinking as Somali women that you have a duty to help each other?

**Marianne** Yes, it's expected. My friend if she is sick she is expecting me to help her so I have to.

This corporate sense of duty and rights can be seen to contribute to participants' ability to manage some of the practical challenges that they encounter in daily life, as well as reducing some of the impact that the loss of traditional support structures creates. A sense of cultural pride as well as community independence can be seen to stem from such practices, adding to the image of a strong, self resourcing, independent community.

**Sarah** The Somali women help each other. That is the one thing we do. A midwife said to me, 'why do you all help each other?' I said that is our way.

The significant number of single mothers, the tendency to exclude fathers from managing children's behaviour, as well as experiencing new challenges in parenting children in the West, can all be seen to reinforce the need and value of traditional practices of corporate parenting by the community. Of particular value to the mothers was the perceived added protection it provided for their children, as well as the supportive mediating and monitoring role that was played.

**Lana** If someone has a problem with a child they come and speak with this child. They tell him what is right what is wrong. ...Because sometimes your son can become difficult.

**Researcher** And they don't see that as interfering?

**Lana** No because first of all you ask this. And sometimes without you asking she can just stop him in the street. And he respects her...

Central to the concept of corporate parenting is the value of unquestionable, lifelong respect by children and young people for adults. Schools and society in general though, were thought to have undermined this value, being seen in the challenge to and erosion of authority parents and adults were experiencing, as Lana illustrates.

**Lana** Since we come here, my sons listen to me. So if I say now close the TV and we have homework , our homework, not school work he do it. After two years here I say this he say why, he start to argue to me...

**Researcher** Do you think it's because he is getting older?

**Lana** *The problem is the children they just sit on the chair they have no respect for the teacher...*

Challenges to corporate parenting are evident, as adults attempt to manage the changing shifts in adult/child relations. Children appear to straddle not only competing cultures, but also conflicting power structures that operate within them; the 'taste' for agency, rights and individual choice needing to be balanced and curtailed within a cultural framework that emphasises unquestionable respect and obedience for adults.

Little suggestion of a strategic response to parenting issues was evident, though small pockets of the community were seen working together organising leisure and cultural activities. While the practices of corporate parenting were portrayed with cultural pride, it appeared very much an underdeveloped resource, not fully explained by their 'not having their own building'.

The women clearly found social support from the sense of shared ownership of their homes, their open-door system encouraging time to be spent together visiting. Lana though benefiting from this open-door system when she visited the women in the city, seemed though to distance herself both geographically and culturally from the women, recognising her new values of family privacy and personal space.

**Lana** *You know I can't live as before. And when I go to St John's it is a different culture.*

**Researcher** *Is it?*

**Lana** *It is, just think out of England. (Laughter.) Maybe it is good if somebody comes. But it is difficult, you have children, they want to relax, you want time together.*

Corporate ownership and the sharing of possessions, including money, was a confusing value for an outsider to really understand. Assessing the extent of hardship and the ways it impacted upon family life was challenging, but corporate ownership can be seen to draw upon and encourage cooperation, trust and respect within the community, contributing to an overall sense of being able to manage independently. Frugal living, a rejection of materialism, as well as corporately managing what they have effectively, leaves an impression of a community that is able to adjust and work within the resource constraints that they encounter.

Corporate living can be seen to bring many benefits to the women's lives. Though an impression is gained of a people that are governed by principles of cooperation and group interest, underlying this appearance, clan and leadership rivalry can be seen to undermine this community's ability to really harness its potential strength and resourcefulness for the good of all.

*Sagal They are more interested going one way or another rather than collectively trying to help each other and manage what is best for the community as a whole.*

## Conclusion

The above aspects identified within participants' lives can be understood to contribute somewhat to sustaining the women's resilience as forced migrants here in the UK. At the same time, they also can be seen to carry risks for the women, serving to undermine and threaten their ability to manage their lives as good Muslim women, who are constantly busy, show strength and independence and adopt a communal approach to living together.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AS 'FORCED MIGRANTS'

### Introduction

This chapter draws on findings from previous chapters to explore further the experiences of Somali women living in exile in the UK. It seeks to demonstrate the study's contribution in broadening and adding to our understanding of the 'forced migrant' concept. This will be addressed by focusing on three significant areas identified within the findings: evidencing and illuminating the complexity of the forced migrant concept, examining the significance and relevance of the 'refugee/forced migrant' label to the participants and exploring the role of the transnational family/ transnational Somali community in migratory processes. It reconsiders the forced migrant concept arguing the need for a more dynamic understanding of the experience and a more considered use of this term. The chapter goes on to explore the possible meanings of women's busyness of everyday life, the role of religion and living as part of a constantly evolving community. Finally, the ways in which women portray themselves as both strong and 'getting on with it' are discussed.

### The push and pull of migration

The increasing complexities, ambiguities and contradictions found within the academic literature in relation to defining and enabling distinction between the refugee and forced migrant, are mirrored and played out within the findings of this study. For example, many of the participants can be understood to have fulfilled Shacknove's (1985) criteria for 'the essence of refugee-hood', namely, 'the absence of physical security, vital subsistence and liberty of political participation and physical movement'. This though sits disconcertingly at odds with participants' accounts of return visits home to Somalia, when placed alongside the principles and legal obligations of non-refoulement enshrined within the Geneva Convention (1951) and UN Protocol (1967) in response to experiencing threat and persecution. Further insights gleaned into how such complexity and contradiction may operate within migratory trajectories, challenges simplistic dichotomised thinking in determining and understanding voluntary and involuntary movements. This supports the argument for the need to view migratory movements as fluid, dynamic and complex processes.

The Somali community in the UK is widely assumed and referred to within some academic and practice circles as a refugee or forced migrant population.

Emergence during the fieldwork that as many as three-quarters of the participants of this study might be more appropriately categorised as secondary migrants, having left European countries of settlement with EU citizenship and resettled within the UK, was therefore both surprising and disconcerting. While this finding highlights incorrect assumptions lying behind readily accepted labels it serves pertinently to illustrate the homogenisation of migrants/migrant groups that scholars criticise (Hynes, 2003; Kohli and Mather, 2003). It also demonstrates the tendency to assume that simple re-categorisation and relabeling is unproblematic and captures the essence of who a person is and why they are 'here'.

Kunz's (1973) model of 'push/ pull motivational factors in aiding distinction between voluntary and forced migrants, when used in conjunction with participants' accounts, demonstrates the arbitrary nature of such distinctions. Throughout, participants' movements can be viewed as both pulled and pushed by circumstances and personal goals. This study's findings suggest that participants were drawn onward to the UK from the Scandinavian countries, where many had obtained asylum and citizenship, in order to have the opportunity to develop English language competency. The drive to reunite and connect with family scattered throughout the world necessitating English competency, a universal language, can be seen to reflect the high value placed on family and kinship by the women. Yusra and Zahara stated, 'Family is first'; 'Family is everything'. Participants referred to the need for greater flexibility and choice in undertaking outside employment, and in facilitating reunification with family and friends. These therefore can be seen as 'pull' factors. Alternatively, participants' continued movement to the UK can be viewed as a response to unacceptable cultural threat and danger posed by the erosion and perceived undermining of their Somali cultural identity. The 'cost' of sacrificing their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers, of failing to be able to establish their children's religious and cultural identity or to protect them from exposure at an early age to the 'outside' world, suggests a level of demand for adaptation and change unable to be reconciled or integrated into their lives; participants therefore were pushed or forced to up root and move on.

Continued movement to the UK may be understood in part, as an attempt to return to old familiar ways and practices, of strengthening a weakened cultural identity coupled with a desire to 'rebuild part of what had been lost'. Yet it cannot be assumed that the motivation for such movements is simply the desire to achieve a

better life for their families. Many of the women experienced a reduced standard of living in the UK alongside the loss of mutual friendships with local Scandinavian neighbours. This was felt as a significant blow to their quality of life, serving as a source of loss and regret, managed by nostalgic accounts of 'good times' and the hope of return 'home', be it Somalia or Scandinavia, one day. Furthermore, participants' accounts of their own and their families' success and respected status within the homeland served to reinforce the belief that life had deteriorated rather than improved in many ways. While the refugee identity is captured in the desire to 'rebuild', the simple distinction that immigrants, in contrast, are influenced by hope of a better life, undermines the painful losses and compromises that they make and continue to manage throughout their lives. This reinforces the necessity of examining 'push' and 'pull' factors in the broader cultural contexts of individuals' lives in order to capture the cultural meanings attributed to their border crossings, and to notions of 'safety', 'a better life' and 'home', accepting that these may also be dynamic and at times contradictory. Malkki's (1995) reference to the need to place forced migration within the wider context of socio-political and social processes, including 'cultural and religious identities, travel and Diaspora' rather than as the backdrop to the occurrence, reflects elements of this stance.

Turton (2003) suggests that 'the language of migration...is spoken from a sedentary, or state-centric perspective'; it is how *we* talk about *them*'. Throughout the data, the notion of movement and travel is consistently reflected within participants' accounts. Reference by several participants to the Somali nomadic heritage, with its imagery of Somali strength and adventure, highlights the way in which migrants may frame their understandings of movement and border crossings in ways and in language very different from 'ours'. As Habon states, 'there isn't migration' for Somalis. Echoes of this active stance can be found in Gozziak's (2002) reference to Bosnians who referred to themselves as 'experiencing a series of hosts' rather than as refugees with its connotations of victimhood. Western frameworks and conceptual representations of Somali movements therefore may be considered inadequate in fully capturing the meanings attributed to such concepts as settlement, uprooting and border crossings. Evident from the findings is the suggestion that participants' migratory journeys can be viewed as a series of 'stepping stones' occurring throughout the continuum of their life course rather than as a final stopping point. That is not to suggest that participants' continued movements were not painful in

terms of feelings of loss; for many they clearly were, but that these need to be understood in the context of the bigger picture of their lives and their cultural histories and values. In doing so, we are able to identify and grasp the uniqueness and complexity of lives that lie behind traditional labels and commonly held assumptions about forced migrants.

Given the challenges and ambiguities, how significant and relevant is it to participants as to how they are labelled and viewed within society? In responding to Turton (2003) and also McGhee (2005), who draw attention to the way forced migrants are labelled by others rather than by themselves, throughout the fieldwork for this study the terms 'forced migrant' and 'refugee' were distinctly absent from the everyday conversations and interviews of participants. On the rare occasion that I questioned participants directly about 'being a refugee', their association with that label was significant only to one or two, highlighting their financial dependency on the State and loss of independence. Participants, though, made frequent reference to their gender, nationality and religion, and it was by these that they proudly spoke of themselves, viewing these as pertinent to their identity and everyday lives.

Looking to the wider community, many outsiders framed and perceived participants, with their distinctive, visible Islamic dress as an unwanted threat and as potential terrorists, demonstrating racist and Islamophobic behaviour towards the women. Despite having resided in the UK as EU citizens (some for over fifteen years), participants were still constructed as 'malign outsiders bearing the imminent threat of violence and subversion' (Marfleet, 2006, p.265). As McGhee (2008) suggests, Muslims are increasingly marked out as members of a 'suspect community' in the West. For these participants, the legitimacy of their legal status and right to reside here in this country had little bearing on the responses encountered by some outsiders to their presence.

While the forced migrant identity/ refugee label was rarely directly referred to by the women in their everyday conversations that I was party to, nor did it appear to have bearing on how they were perceived by the wider community, the refugee / forced migrant identity is evidenced to be very much a significant part of their everyday lives. Though there was an absence of publically displayed victimhood within women's daily lives and accounts, the sense of cumulative loss and adversity, shrouded beneath a cultural veil of emotional containment, bore testament to their sadness, vulnerability and lingering emotional 'scars'. The persistent daily sense of

fear that many of the women struggled to manage and contain in relation to loved ones left behind, along with a growing sense of hopelessness and despair felt for their ravaged, disintegrating homeland, highlighted the limitations for these women of securing psychological ‘refuge’ and security within the confines of our ‘safe’ borders. The shared hope of return home one day, served as a reminder to the forced nature of the women’s initial departures, though years in exile had created for some a distinction between the concept of ‘home’ and homeland. Returning to the homeland was about reconnecting with their past memories, relationships and places, rather than necessarily returning home to live. Finally, there was the impression of secrecy and concealment surrounding accounts of migratory movements and circumstances, creating personal questioning of the legitimacy and integrity of their accounts and actions, and serving as an uncomfortable reminder of westerners perception of them as ‘bogus’ and ‘undeserving’. Paradoxically then, while on the one hand this study supports and illustrates the limitations and increasing difficulties of defining and distinguishing boundaries between voluntary and involuntary migrants, it also argues the continuing significance for these participants of the refugee identity regardless of their formal legal status, suggesting that the refugee identity travels onward with them in their journeying. There is however, a danger of failing to recognise or to distinguish this important aspect of the women’s identity and its impact upon their daily lives due to the ‘fuzziness’ of complex migratory trajectories, and the women’s own resistance to conformity to society’s expected ‘feminised traumatised victim’ in legitimising their ‘refugeeness’.

Turton (2003) suggests the need to focus on thinking about forced migrants as purposeful actors in migratory processes, and a greater need to understand their decision-making processes and use of resources during this process. The findings from this study provide insights into the ways in which transnational processes operate in securing successful migration to the West and in facilitating settlement. The corporate sharing of knowledge, decision-making and pooling of resources among family, kin and clan is evidenced. This highlights a corporate sense of agency and purposefulness in their endeavours to assist migration to Europe and the challenging of the victim framework commonly associated with this period within the Therapeutic, Trauma and wider literatures. It is suggested that, central to the efficiency of the Somali networks is the accumulation of experience and knowledge acquired from the different migratory waves that have taken place, resulting in the

establishment of a transnational community throughout Europe and North America. While the development of global community networks is recognised as a key contributory factor to the continued growth of Forced Migration (Marfleet, 2006; Horst, 2006), the specific cultural values underpinning the operation and effectiveness of Somali transnational networks, namely clan rights and obligations, often go unrecognised or accredited as a community strength. This to a degree echoes Thornton's (1998) stance, that indigenous protective resources are not always distinguished or appreciated. Despite some of the participants having lived in the West for a number of years, the cultural tradition of the right and the responsibility to support one's fellow Somali was very much evident. This was particularly apparent in accounts given by participants of the challenges they faced on arriving in the UK, and the help they received in negotiating this from community members.

In summarising how the study's findings contribute to our understanding of the forced migrant concept, confirmation and further evidence is provided of the complexity and contradiction inherent in such a concept. Such evidence suggests the need to look beyond static characteristics and distinctions of a migrant label, to the dynamic, fluid nature of movements and border crossings, their attributed meanings and cultural understandings, and the ways in which these may be woven into participants' everyday lives and conversations. The role of the transnational family and global Somali community is also a prominent feature of Somali border crossings, facilitated by the opportunities presented in an increasingly globalised world, yet driven and underpinned by a deeply ingrained cultural value and commitment to engage with and fulfil one's entitlements, responsibilities and duties to family, kin and clan.

### **Activity and busyness: continuity and contradiction**

Activity and busyness is a central theme both in this study's findings and the wider literature. Women, regardless of the main focus for their activity, have to manage an increased workload in the context of exile. What is striking within the literature is the very different focus for women's activity, with a clear distinction between women who are engaged in the public arena in outside employment, and those who predominantly maintain a private identity within the home as homemakers and mothers. Both arenas bring benefits to the women enabling them to adjust and

maintain a clear sense of purpose and focus for their lives. However, such distinct and competing positions require further analysis of the meaning and significance of these different roles and how elements of both constraint and opportunity operate in shaping and determining forced migrant women's adoption of a predominantly public or private work identity.

This study's participants' predominantly private role within the home can be understood as strongly influenced by ideology held in relation to 'the good Muslim woman' as well, it might be suggested, as to their vocational calling as mothers and home makers. The feasibility of such an identity within the UK can be seen to stem from the State financial assistance women receive, making part time/fulltime employment unnecessary for economic survival of their families. It is customary in the West to view State welfare beneficiaries in terms of financial dependence and as accompanying a position on the fringes of society, often racialized as the white working class or black underclass. Thus, welfare dependency may be assumed to constrain women's opportunities and life chances. However, for the women in this study it can be understood to provide the opportunity of securing their financial independence from men, the choice and feasibility of leaving unsatisfactory marital relationships and of bringing up the children as lone mothers, and the ability to pursue their ideological goals. Though this private identity carries strong associations of exclusion, constraint and submission, exemplified for example by the Bangladeshi women in Summerfield's study of Somali and Bangladeshi women (1993), for these women, financial dependency and independence can be understood as not mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent and interrelated with each other. That is not to say that some participants were not uncomfortable with the associated victimhood connotations that State dependency carried, but rather, the opportunities and benefits that it brought outweighed the constraints and any discomfort experienced.

The women appeared to attach little significance to their social status and social standing, nor gave any priority to attempting to improve it. The majority of participants seemed resistant, or at least ambivalent to societal pressure to gain economic activity, alongside appearing unperturbed or perhaps even unaware, of the undermining discourses associated with the 'housewife' role within our society. However, further examination of the evidence would challenge such a conclusion. Social status can be seen as something the women were very conscious of, both for themselves and their children, being sought after and achieved to a significant extent

through their roles as mothers and homemakers. Such social standing and appreciation received from the community for this role, stands in sharp contrast to the lack of value given to women employed in menial, unskilled, and often unregulated work, known to characterise female forced migrant employment. While this raises important questions regarding social structural constraint, these women, within such existing constraints, appear to undertake roles and activity premised on maximising and obtaining the greatest meaningful reward possible for themselves: public recognition, self esteem, power and status. The Somali women in Summerfield's (1993) study adopted a public identity through taking on outside employment that their men folk refused because it carried low status. For these participants, however, status and social position appear to be something they are unwilling to compromise. The social standing they achieved in the Somali community as homemakers carried greater salience than any status that would be ascribed to them through outside employment and more than compensated for society's demeaning attitude towards their homemaking role, and therefore was not to be jeopardised. Opportunities can be seen to operate within the context of wider constraints, but need to be identified, weighed up, seized and guarded; arguably this is something the participants understood and did.

While the women appeared satisfied with their own status within the community, their children's future position within the host society was an important concern. Investment of time, energy and money into their children's education, as well as developing their children's 'can do' attitude to life, is seen to be underpinned, in part, by the women's ambitions for their children's future prospects. Eastmond (1993) suggested that the Chilean women saw their lives as a sacrifice for their men's political ambitions. In many respects, these participants' lives carry a strong image of self-sacrifice with regard to their children, though not their husbands. Nurturing, protecting and educating their children and the personal sacrifices and costs associated with this is compatible with the women's overall attitude and understanding of their own lives, where duty and obligation can be seen to play such a significant part. However, participants' commitment as mothers and homemakers can be seen to go beyond mere duty, reflecting personal investment, one that would secure care and provision for them in their old age. Participants' adoption of a largely private identity and the activities undertaken in relation to mothering, represents the long term goal of securing social status and security for their children, and in turn, their own security and reward.

Such an analysis serves only to add to and highlight the complexities of any attempts to determine whether or not life in exile raises or reduces forced migrant women's status and position in society. Nevertheless, regard for social status and position can be argued to play a significant part in the adoption of participants' identities, roles and activities. Poignantly, speculation might lead to the suggestion that some women may yet still look back in times to come, and view their lives through a lens of sacrifice, as unshakable belief in their children's fulfilment of obligation and duty fail to reach fruition, dashed against the competing opportunities and demands in which western life ensnares them.

A sense of fear underlies participants' accounts of daily life, and this can be seen as a factor that both motivates and sustains women in their roles as mothers and homemakers, as well as serving to confine and restrain them. For the women, sustaining their private identity can be understood to take on even greater urgency and significance, becoming a visible symbol of their ability to 'swim against the tide' in the context of their articulated fears of being sucked into and absorbed by the Western lifestyles and values that surround them. Buijs (2003) suggests that women forced migrants adjust more readily to life in exile because they carry a sense of contentment gained from their private identity as homemakers. While this study to a large extent supports such a position, for these participants it highlights the questionable nature of the relationship between fear and contentment. That being said, a sense of contentment does not amply capture the quiet, unspoken sense of triumph that surrounds the women's accounts of their private role; one that they recognise they fulfil against many odds.

Abdullrahim (1993) suggested that the Palestinian women and their community felt themselves protected and insulated from the host society as a consequence of women adopting a private identity. The participants also give the impression of being cocooned, to a large extent, within the social and physical borders of their own community. The extent to which this can be understood as a consequence of women's busyness and private activity or as a deliberate strategy to minimise their exposure to discrimination and the conflicting values of the host society remains unclear. Though having strong reason to fear 'outside' threat, puzzlingly the women appear unaware of the significant threat from within the community itself to the undermining of their idealised private identity. Gender tensions, resulting from men's reluctance to take on their traditional roles and responsibilities, has been seen to lead

to women having to adopt a more public role within exile. In the main, this did not result in them taking on public employment, although additional activities such as shopping, taking children to school, added to the burden women already carried as they attempted to maintain traditional domestic practices and routines amidst the change and transformation of family life.

A sense of weariness and chronic tiredness permeating women's daily lives and activities raises questions as to how feasible it will be for these women to continue to sustain daily routines as they know them, despite their reluctance to reduce personal / community standards and expectations, or to lose familiar patterns of life. For a few of the participants their wider engagement with the host society, along with their increasing ability to manage the demands of public life, can be seen to be a result of new opportunities and the development of skills and confidence. For many, outside demands merely constrain the energies and time available to give to those activities they consider most valuable and significant in their lives. Constraint and opportunity can be seen to operate in perplexing and unexpected ways in shaping these women's roles and activity. Ambiguity and contradiction are evident in the ways that these factors become important in shaping their individual day-to-day lives.

Busyness has been suggested to act as a shield in these participants' lives by contributing to the regulation of emotional pain and sadness that they are consciously exposed to during the day-to-day demands of managing family life. While appearing to have some success in that the women are able to maintain and carry out their approach of 'just getting on with it', evaluation is difficult due to other dynamic factors at play such as emotional containment, a fatalistic approach to life events, and the notion of community shame and pride that appears to govern the exposure of 'mental distress'. There is, though, a hint that emotional recovery from the adversities of forced migration and exile is merely suspended in time, rather than actually achieved. Though brief reference is made to the new strategies adopted by some participants in helping deal with stress and personal unease, through confiding and talking with family members and friends, speculation might suggest this to be a subtle turning point from which significant community transformation and reconstructions of identity may evolve. Emotional containment has arguably played a significant role in participants' reluctance and ability to refuse to adopt a victim identity. As the emotional need for busyness diminishes, being replaced in time by the sharing of personal sadness, loss and worry, so too the community's identity may be subtly

reconstructed, allowing for acknowledgment, acceptance and space to be given in accommodating the notion of victimhood in their lives and identities.

Activity and busyness can be seen to be a feature of these migrant women's lives. Though different roles and identities suggest very diverse experiences, this study lends support to the suggestion that similar common advantages may be obtained in exile via these differing paths; yet determining the salience of each is a complex task. Through examining these women's lives both constraints and opportunities with regard to their role identities can be observed. That being said, structural social constraints, such as racism and discrimination, to which women are exposed to within their neighbourhoods and from public institutions, are by no means intended to be down played or undermined in terms of their influence and constraint on women's choices. Within this however, there is a very clear sense that women manoeuvre around these constraints, strategically and skilfully as they assess the obstacles and opportunities that are presented to them within daily life. The literature has highlighted the notion of strength characterising Somali women's lives. Participants' engagement in managing and fulfilling their private roles and responsibilities as mothers and homemakers is suggested by this study to play a significant part in the operation and sustaining of that strength within their daily lives.

Paradoxically, these women's predominantly private identities as active and busy homemakers can be seen to represent 'opportunity' while simultaneously carrying the 'mark' of constraint in their lives. It has also been suggested that busyness serves some purpose in regulating emotional distress although, as new strategies emerge within the community for dealing with this, the erosion of emotional containment may give rise to new forms of understanding and expression of women's experiences, in relation to both their departure from Somalia and life in exile.

### **The role of religion in forced migrants lives**

The literature suggests that religion has a significant contribution to make in enabling migrants to move forward with their lives in exile, by helping to make sense of past experiences, providing a sense of continuity and security amidst change and fracture, and by giving direction and purpose to life (Gozdziak, 2008). 'Moving on' has been closely associated with Somali women, as seen in Whittaker's et al's study (2005) among others, where it is evidenced as a characteristic of their resilience. In

critically examining the role of religion in assisting forced migrant women to move forward with their lives, this study's findings suggest that this notion of 'moving on' is complex with its application ambiguous, 'messy' and unresolved. The binary presented of moving forward or looking back, fails to capture the fluidity, contradiction and overlap between these two polarised positions.

For many of the women, their migration to the UK following settlement in Europe was driven significantly by their need to establish a 'safe' place in which they and their families could return to living lives more fully able to meet the requirements and ideals of their Islamic faith without imposed conflicting demands restraining them. In this sense, Islam significantly provides the impetus, direction and motivation for the women to uproot from the relative comfort and security of their lives in order to move on to an environment compatible with their goals and values. This can be seen as an attempt to turn back to the past, rejecting the new found lifestyle and level of integration that they had achieved in Scandinavia. This encompassed fluency of language, employment and financial independence, the establishment of meaningful and valued friendships with local indigenous neighbours and an appreciation and enjoyment of many aspects of life. While the women's lives in the UK returned to more traditional Islamic practices as a result of their roles as mothers and home makers and by their relative insulation from outside Western influence, there was none the less within this, evidence of moving on; the past could not be recaptured as it had been known or imagined as threat and change had to be negotiated in the context of working out how to be good Muslim women in a secular society. For some women, moving on was evidenced overtly as they stepped outside the confines of the community to tentatively embrace new ways of doing things, while for others moving on was subtler, evidenced as they grappled and found compromise in balancing ideological ideals and values with competing opportunities and practices. At the same time some women moved on in their desire and ability to be good Muslim women by becoming increasingly traditional and fundamental in their approach to daily life. While Islam can be seen to provide a thread of continuity for the women's lives, it does not allow for these women to stand still or to stay the same. Even in turning back, in their attempts to capture and recreate the past, they can be seen to be 'pushed' or 'pulled' to continue to move forward, creating both resistance and compromise, but none the less change.

The theme of religion, enabling forced migrants to overcome and move on from trauma and past adversity identified within the literature is echoed within the study's findings. For participants, the notion of 'getting on with life', emotional containment and suppression and the acceptance of God's will can be understood as cultural responses that enable the women to make sense of, manage and appear to move on from their difficult experiences. Acknowledgement of the disjuncture between our culturally accepted notions of emotional recovery and wellness through both formal and informal 'talking therapies', with that of emotional containment must be made and can be seen to reflect the wider debate within the literature on the pathological/medicalisation of forced migrants' trauma. Papadopoulos (2002) encourages us to consider the role that purposeful silence and containment plays in allowing healing from adversity to take place (Papadopoulos, 2002, cited Kolhi, 2006, p.710). While such consideration gives space and acknowledgement of alternative frameworks for responding to trauma, it arguably fails to capture the role and significance of religious belief within participants' lives in enabling them to move forward and get on with life. Silence and containment in relation to the women's profound loss and adversity can be interpreted not as a result of chosen silence, or solely reflecting the cultural tradition of emotional containment, but rather can be seen to reflect their firmly held, unquestionable and unshaken trust in Allah 's will for their lives, recognising and accepting His sovereign power and purpose. Personal past adversity carried the implied suggestion of having been 'dealt with', allowing energies to concentrate on getting on with daily life, alongside looking to the future. Examining the evidence to support this 'moving on', there is the suggestion of personal growth in the women's lives, characterised by enhanced relationships, new meaning and purpose in life and deepened spiritual belief (McCrone et al, 2005; Turner et l, 2003; Cadell and Stallard, 2004). Participants can be seen to have found renewed purpose as mothers and homemakers, providing stark contrast to the accounts provided by participants' suggesting men's general lack of purpose and vision in life. Enhanced relationships are apparent in the close-knit support networks of the women, which in many respects appear to serve as replacements for their own fragmented families. New understandings and insight into past sufferings and their country's troubled times can be seen to contribute to a wider collective community response -of adopting increasingly traditional interpretations of Islamic teaching in attempts to be better devotees, suggesting personal growth.

Although an impression might be given that Islam enables ‘moving on’ from trauma to be a struggle-free process, there was still an underlying hint of sadness in the women’s lives. Some aspects of their lives are seen to be more difficult to negotiate, despite clear religious guidance and direction. Despite accepting the requirement for forgiveness within Islamic teaching, for some it remained a desirable yet elusive goal. For example, it was suggested that ongoing tensions and clan hostility resulted from carrying grievances and bitterness with them into their ‘new’ lives in exile, recreating the problems and troubles of Somalia thought left behind. Looking back and moving forward can be understood therefore to operate and coexist simultaneously, reflecting also a tension existing between the desire to move forward and the ability to actually do so.

The literature has suggested religion has acted as a mechanism in Muslim women’s lives, serving to control and maintain cultural group distinctiveness as well as providing a means of measurement to which adherence to Islamic law is achieved. The emphasis placed upon the notion of the ideal, good Muslim woman, with a need to achieve and maintain a high standard of behaviour in the context of a ‘corrupting’ Westernised society, is prominent both within the literature and the study’s findings. In examining the findings, this suggestion of control and underlying oppression can be further critically assessed to uncover the different interpretations that surround women’s need to be good Muslim women.

Being members of a very small community of Somali women concentrated in a specific area of the city, the women, by the very nature of their dress presented a very public, distinctive and collective identity, one representing both their ethnicity and religious status. While needing and aiming to distinguish themselves from the host society, equally important for these participants is the suggested symbolic historical significance that is attached to their ‘sameness’. This can be understood to stem from their shared histories including that of location, clan, and connection to family members and friends. In resisting changes in dress, absorbing their lives and activities around each other and their families and in aspiring to the same Islamic ideals and values, these women confirm their allegiance to their past, to each other and to the distinctive identity that it gives them. While Islam can be seen to act as the ‘glue’ that seals and to a large extent, unifies these women’s lives, its significance appears to be less about control and more about its ability as a mechanism to hold onto something of their shared past. New religious interpretation and different practice by outsiders

such as Idil and Lana, serve, though as a conscious reminder of its fragility and vulnerability in surviving the tide of change.

The literature suggests that religion has often served as a political force within forced migrant communities, with women inclined to play a less prominent, public role than men within this. The private role that many migrant women adopt as homemaker and carer, and the requirement to support men in their traditionally assigned public political role, is thought to account in part for this less prominent place on the political ‘stage’. In examining the findings, it can be suggested that delineation between the public and private spaces in which political activity takes place, is actually a false dichotomy. Rather, political ideologies, discourses and counter discourses can be seen to permeate both into and out from the women’s lives, making them carriers of a political symbol of Islam within both private and public spheres.

Participants’ political role can be understood in different ways. It can be viewed as a role that is assigned to them. Society at large can be seen to have marked Muslim women out, juxtaposing their distinctive Muslim dress with that of ‘suspicion, ‘threat’ and ‘incompatible cultural differences’. At the same time, the women consciously adopted a political role, challenging and resisting these powerful representations by consciously adopting an alternative discourse of the Muslim as peaceful, forgiving, wanting to live in harmony with one’s ‘neighbour’; a political resistance seen also facilitated and transmitted through the research relationship and engagement with this study. Also, it can be understood as a role that was an integral and inseparable part of a participant’s identity. The all-consuming nature of Islam with a desire to be good Muslim women, alongside a convergence of Islam and the political, suggests a political facet inherent within participants’ identity as Somali Muslim women. Within these differing perspectives religion as a political force and marker can be viewed as highly significant, being an intrinsic part of the women’s daily lives. This significance though needs to be understood and viewed within the wider historical, social context in which Islam has emerged on the political world stage.

This discussion has focused on illuminating some of the complexity, contradiction and ‘messiness’ that lies behind the religious practice and thought of this study’s participants. Gozdiak (2008) suggests that religion ‘operates in compelling, competing and contradictory ways’ and this study’s findings bring further

understanding to this view. Simplistic and assumed binaries and dichotomies have been challenged, demonstrating instead the myriad positions and interpretations that can be identified within women's accounts, attempting to capture 'the subtle shades of meaning and perceptions with which migrant women view the world' (Buijs, 1993, p.12). Religion operating at the personal, individual level appears to be encapsulated by women's efforts and aim in life, to be a 'good Muslim woman'. From such ambition and drive stems fulfilling roles and clear direction in their lives as mothers and homemakers, a strong sense of cultural identity and distinctiveness, political agency and 'voice', and assistance in managing grief and encountered adversity. Though these may be understood to be the personal effects of religion, they can also be considered to operate as collective features of the women's corporate identity, being that of 'good Somali Muslim women'.

Findings here largely confirm the accepted position that Islam and religious practices serve both to strengthen and enable migrant women to manage life in exile. At the same time, they bring additional challenges and constraints. Thus, they add new depth, highlighting additional complexity to the ways in which we can view and understand the role of religion in influencing and operating within the women's daily lives, and the ways in which it serves to strengthen them.

### **Transformations of corporate living: weighing up losses and gains**

Religion has been seen to operate at the corporate, community level as well as at a personal one and is illustrated in the community monitoring of religious behaviour and observance occurring among the women. This has been understood to play a role in contributing to sustaining the community's cultural distinction, as well as regulating and maintaining to some extent, women's social position within the Somali/ Muslim community and the wider society. This, some would argue, is confirmatory of the patriarchal, oppressive nature of the 'regime'. However, monitoring in this study was portrayed very much as being a role that the women assigned to themselves, as part of their religious responsibility towards their fellow 'sister'.

It is questionable the extent to which monitoring impacted upon individuals' choices and behaviour or curtailed opinion and public expression on matters and decisions relating to everyday life. Lana and Idil were the only two participants who openly and explicitly resisted the women's demands regarding religious practice and

behaviour, encountering hostility at times towards them as a result. Some participants expressed individual positions on certain issues, such as the further education of girls, but appeared cautious, and at pains to point out that this was a personal opinion rather than the community's position. There is the appearance that the women though, as a corporate body, were very influential and effective in their monitoring role, and that resistance was difficult or muffled. A similar finding was evident in Eastmond's study (1993) where Chilean families escaped religious community monitoring only by distancing themselves from communal day-to-day living. Gozdiak (2008) highlighted the contribution made by a female refugee attending a Refugee Women's Network conference in America, who stated that women found organised religion to be oppressive, distinguishing this from their experiences of faith and spirituality. Organised, formal religion can be argued to take many different guises, including operating through the informal structures of a community, as for example, through the women's monitoring. The 'institutional' force of power which, it may be seen to mimic, can be understood as oppressive in nature, impacting to a varying extent and responded to in different ways by the women.

A contradiction and tension is evident within this community monitoring in that though seeking to promote good role models and ensure adherence to religious standards, it left unchallenged attitudes that supported, and even encouraged women to leave their husbands. Lone mothers were not stigmatised by the women, being readily accepted into the heart of the female community, though one or two participants privately voiced disquiet over the trend in marital breakdown within the community. The notion of the 'good Muslim woman', suggests that this is an ideology regarded by the women, overall, as separate and independent from that of the 'dependent good Muslim wife'. Speculation might conclude that these ideologies and gender identities are imagined and reconstructed within the community and adopted by those whose interests they serve. Though men occupy a muted and less visible presence in this study, there is the suggestion running throughout the accounts that the men folk failed to live up to the women's ideals and expectations of the 'good Muslim male'. In contrast to the women, there appeared to be an absence of community monitoring and pressure from within the male community in challenging behaviours and attitudes the women commonly referred to. In maintaining the customs and culture of the community, Dumper (2004) suggests that women rather than men have been assigned this responsibility. As a part of that responsibility, these

women can be seen to carry the burden of living up to, and maintaining, the symbolic image of 'the good Muslim woman'. Such a role implies both a personal individual responsibility as well as a collective one.

Evidence suggests that the role of the transnational family plays a significant part in the day-to-day lives of many of the participants. Although the appearance gained is one of living quite frugally, participants had the technical resources to enable them to maintain communications with family members and kin, as well as available finances to travel abroad relatively frequently. In this way the family can be seen to operate and think within a global framework in relation to obtaining support, acquiring information, planning and coordinating movements, and maintaining close ties with family members. For example Fatima contacted her mother in Somalia when she felt sad, and Idil drew upon her sister in Belgium for support when ill. The use of telecommunications can also be seen as central to participants' lives in managing issues in relation to loss, fragmentation and sadness. An appearance is given that these Somali families function on a day to day level in a global framework unperturbed or restrained by borders, exemplifying the flux and flow characteristic of an increasingly globalised, transnational, world. Paradoxically, at the same time, participants are both preoccupied and driven in attempts to break down and out manoeuvre ever-increasing barriers placed in the way of reuniting their fractured families by Western Immigration and Asylum polices. For some there is the reluctant acceptance that this dream is unachievable, recognising that certain borders are impenetrable.

It is apparent from these accounts that participants and their families, benefitted as a result of shared and corporate community life. While the gains in relation to achieving and managing the practicalities of everyday life are the more obvious benefits, additional benefits can be seen specific to the context of exile. Holding onto idealised perceptions of homeland and culture as well as keeping memories alive, appears to operate through a mutual and shared corporate investment of time and energy, ensuring greater sustainability as well as a more vital and energised living account of the past. That being said, it is also, apparently made more difficult for some women to consciously choose to 'move on' from the past to embrace more Western aspects of life, or sub consciously, to allow for time to give rise to the natural 'dimming' and letting go of the past. For those women who chose to step out to the fringes of the women's community, or who were placed there by the

women, there were both personal losses and gains experienced as a result of their more limited inclusion within community life.

The corporate sense of grief, loss and anxiety between the women gives rise to the sense of companionship within ‘their personal stories’, even though for many, they appeared to be unspoken. At the same time, it is questionable whether this compensated for the disjuncture to be found between the young people and their mothers in relation to young people’s unwillingness to understand, share and value their mother’s memories and sadness. In a similar vein, the gains that the women achieve from their corporate practices as women could be interpreted as being achieved at the expense of their marital relationships. Corporate living may have taken on far greater significance and function for these women in relation to managing daily life in exile, reflecting perhaps for some, the belief and acceptance of the diminishing role and value of men within family life. This contrasts with the Chilean community studied by Eastmond (1993), which transformed from that of a close-knit supportive network to one that provided more of an interactional social network.

The overall impression gained from this study’s participants is of the very real and valuable resource created via corporate values and practices that contributed to enabling these women to get on with life. Although there were tensions and frictions, as well as some members benefitting more than others, acknowledgement must be given to the community’s ability to sustain such practices given the competing and powerful ideological values that contest these within the West. The women’s practices and that of their families overall appeared very much to provide a pool of resources that continued to offer practical, social and to some extent, psychological support to each other.

### **Pre migratory sources of strength: role and significance in settlement.**

Alongside the dominant discourses surrounding the female forced migrant as passive victim, there is a competing discourse of ‘the strong female migrant’ within the literature. Empirical evidence to support such a discourse has appeared limited contributing in part to the prompting of this study. In particular, the portrayal of the ‘strong Somali woman’ raises questions as to the extent to which this portrayal is real or imagined; an image perhaps carried by tradition and ingrained cultural discourse rather than the reality of daily life in exile? At the same time, polarised discourses of

either strength or vulnerability commonly found within the literature in relation to Somali women and forced migrant women more generally, have been argued to be misleading. In the following chapter, the notion of strength and vulnerability will be further discussed using the concepts of resilience, risk and protection. Here the focus will be on exploring the pertinence of Moussa's (1993) suggestion of the need to recognise the sources of strength that forced migrant women bring from their pre-migratory experiences into exile. The literature has highlighted the tendency to focus on challenges and vulnerabilities in relation to the settlement of forced migrant women; arguably this has been at the expense of seeking to identify and understand more fully the resources that they bring and draw upon. The findings from this study make some steps towards identifying and understanding such sources.

For the participants, sources of pre-migratory strength can be seen to take both symbolic and cultural forms, as well as an acquired 'hardiness' gained from the experiences of living in a harsh environment. Numerous references by participants to the 'strong Somali woman' can be seen to echo the broader symbolic image of Somali strength portrayed within the literature. More specifically, it appears to refer to a symbolic notion of strength unique and specific to Somali women, 'carried' both individually and collectively by Somali women into exile. Taking the form of a mantra, it might be suggested to serve the women by reminding them of the strong women that they represent, as well as by reassuring and reinforcing their ability as Somali women, to 'get on with life'. The centrality of this symbolism in the women's lives, while being a source of strength, can also create tensions as they struggle to negotiate and match the symbolic identity with the reality of daily life and the challenges they encounter. That being said, it is possible that this symbolism has always been just that, with a dissonance between the idealised notion of strength and the reality of the challenges and vulnerabilities experienced both pre and post migration.

Speculation might suggest that this dissonance takes on greater significance in exile, becoming less comfortable or easy to negotiate. Publicly admitting struggle and vulnerability may carry with it not only a sense of dishonour or threat to the symbolic identity of the 'Somali woman' but may also weaken or destroy idealised images held both individually and collectively of heritage and homeland. It may be that the symbolism of Somali women's strength attains greater influence and bearing on women's daily lives the longer they are in exile. This may be understood as

another contributing factor to the largely muted and hidden sense of vulnerability that surrounds the women's lives and that of their families and community.

Though women seem to carry with them and draw upon this symbolism of strength for their lives in exile, Somali men are given the appearance of having lost sight of their 'Somali identity' and the adventurous, nomadic, strong image it represents. As negotiations take place within gender relationships, the resulting dynamic, contested and often-problematic shifts occurring within them highlight, for many, women's new-found independence and confidence. This in turn serves only to lend weight to the suggestion of men's poor adjustment and inability to refashion the ways in which they might see themselves as strong within the context of exile. Men's general overall reluctance to take on domestic 'female' tasks can therefore be understood to represent for some the struggle to resist in letting go of the traditional symbolic Somali male identity they have carried into exile, even though they may be confronted with the chasm between that image and the reality of their daily lives.

While symbolic strength creates for the women an image and mantra that inspires them and, to varying degrees, pressurises them to get on with daily life, characteristics and attitudes which are culturally influenced can also be seen to operate, echoing other studies involving Somali women. Moving on, getting on with life, resourcefulness, a strong sense of responsibility and duty, and a value placed on strength and self reliance (within the context of interdependence and clan affiliation), can be understood to represent characteristics and cultural values borne out of the harsh conditions of nomadic life and more latterly, civil war. Such sources of strength can be understood to be a cultural response to life in general, though also clearly a valuable asset within the context of forced migration and life in exile. While this notion of cultural strength has been identified within other Somali studies, the bearing it has in relation to other female forced migrant communities is unclear. There is an overall sense that the thoughts, values and characteristics shared by this study's participants in relation to themselves and their daily family life, serve as a public representation of 'Somali women', paying testimony to the unique cultural histories and identities, which, 'belong to them'. The findings highlight the potential richness in exploring the sources of strength that women bring with them in migration, alongside examining the changing dynamics and tensions that may evolve over time in relation to their operation and significance in exile.

The women's approach and ability to get on with daily life signifies a sense of 'hardiness', a characteristic acquired from difficult life experiences, the accumulation of survival skills, and a strong mixture of both self-sufficiency and interdependence well honed as a result of civil war. Such factors are suggested to contribute towards equipping women in managing and getting on with the challenges of life. Though 'hardiness' conjures up the impression of an acquired trait that is both accumulative and reliable, many of the factors that underpin it can be seen to be dynamic and evolving in response to the demands and influences placed upon them in a Western society. Notions of women's strength, independence, interdependence with other women, while in themselves remaining core concepts and values, can be seen and understood in diverse ways in relation to family and community life. Taking, for example the women's new-found independence, some women would have already had experience in managing their family in Somalia for long periods while their husbands were involved in fighting, or had migrated ahead of the family. Independence per se may not be so 'new' to them as might be assumed; rather it is the new meanings and connotations that 'independence' has come to signify that has changed, resulting in a new relational power dynamic for a number of women. At the same time parallel notions of independence and strength can be seen running at odds with each other, yet still are compatible and acceptable within some of the participants' world views. The suggestion and appearance of hardiness, therefore, can be viewed as a source of strength that the women bring with them, but factors that have been suggested to contribute to it are clearly changing in diverse and contested ways.

For example, while some may see the adoption of a single parent role as a sign of new strength and confidence for women, it might also be interpreted as both individual and communal failure in addressing the relationship issues understood to have emerged within the context of exile, making families (and children in particular) potentially vulnerable on a number of levels. The muted and hidden challenges encountered in responding to the needs of the young people in the community may continue to reflect 'successful parenting', the adherence of young people to religious and cultural values, as well as reinforcing the image of the self sufficient community, but also potentially serving to further increase young peoples' vulnerability. Sources of pre-migratory strength that women bring can therefore be understood as just that; they can be used to strengthen and sustain individuals, families and the community in

exile, but they can also be used in ways that create or exacerbate vulnerability. The challenge though is managing the ambiguity and contradiction in relation to the very concepts themselves and to their perceived effects.

This discussion has examined the issue of pre-migratory strengths and their operation and significance for the women within the context of exile and settlement. The symbolic image of the ‘strong Somali woman’ has been seen to be a core component of the women’s identity, having a significant influence within their daily lives. The extent to which this image is real or imagined is difficult to determine given the muted expression of vulnerability and weakness within the findings. It can be said, though, that this image is very ‘real’ in the minds of the women as individuals, as well as for the corporate body. The importance of such thinking and belief for the women can be suggested to serve different purposes. It may psychologically sustain them in the context of great challenge and vulnerability, both pre and post migration. It also may serve to reinforce and strengthen links with their heritage, culture and Somali identity amidst the vulnerability to which these elements are exposed to in exile. In focusing on the symbolic strength of Somali women, attention has been drawn to Somali men’s apparent weakness and vulnerability. Reinterpreted as resistance, in part, to the loss of their own symbolic ‘male strength’, the coexistence of both strength and vulnerability can be understood to emerge out of such symbolism. Cultural values suggest women’s ‘getting on with it attitude’ reflects the familiar and well-trodden path of daily life, be it in Somalia or in exile. At the same time, the factors that have contributed to women’s hardiness emerge as changing, diverse and contested. While there is evidence to suggest that the women draw upon their pre-migratory sources of strength, the extent to which these serve to strengthen and reinforce family life in exile, or undermine it, remains inconclusive and open to further exploration and speculation.

## **Conclusion**

Discussion in this chapter has focused on two main areas in relation to the findings; the forced migrant concept and more specifically women as forced migrants. Both areas of focus have yielded recurring themes of complexity, where movement and fluidity, continuity and change, loss and gains have been recurring themes. Attention has been given to ‘unpacking’ and illuminating these themes thereby exposing both ambiguity and contradiction. Running throughout the discussion of

these findings has been the explicit or inferred suggestion of participants' and their family's strength and vulnerability. In the following chapter the focus of the discussion is on examining how this study's findings can contribute to furthering our knowledge and understanding of the nature and role of resilience within these migrant women's lives.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: RESILIENCE, RISK AND PROTECTION

### Introduction

This chapter focuses discussion on resilience, risk and protection in the day-to-day family lives of women in exile. The notion of migrant women's strength has been identified as a prominent theme within participants' accounts and the wider literature. This is evident in the pre-migratory strengths women carry with them into exile, as well as in the 'getting on with life' attitude they hold in relation to managing family life. The resilience concept though complex and contested in terms of its diverse conceptualisations and operation, carries an underlying theme of strength. On this basis, it has been argued to be a concept capable of capturing and illuminating the complexity of migrant women's family life. The chapter will assess the merits and limitations of the strengths orientation of this study, drawing on the different approaches to understanding resilience outlined in chapter two. It will be argued that whilst each approach has merit in its own right, there is a need for the re-conceptualisation of the concept that captures the fluidity and complexity of resilience. The chapter concludes with a discussion that explores this study's findings in relation to practice and policy issues. A model that encompasses a more holistic approach is outlined as a potential tool to aid the complex task of resilience assessment.

### A strengths orientation

A strengths orientation provides a counter approach to understanding forced migrants and serves to turn the framing of their lives from that of being one of problems and deficiencies, to one that looks for evidence of strength and growth. Such an approach has contributed to capturing evidence of participants' strength, determination and personal growth, providing insights into their significance and operation within daily family life. However, as the findings from this study suggest, such an approach also carries potential limitations and dangers. With an emphasis on the notion of strength in people's lives there is the possible risk of excluding or undermining factors or aspects of life related to vulnerability and adversity. Participants' experiences of adversity, for example, involving often pain, suffering and struggle, can be easily overlooked or undervalued in an eagerness to discover and capture the strengths arising from such experiences; a point illustrated in relation to

participants' accounts of managing racism and Islamophobia. A strengths orientation to understanding forced migrants can therefore be suggested to encourage or allow for 'an agenda' that insulates and shields practitioners and policy makers from people's experiences of adversity and vulnerability, potentially relieving them of the responsibility to respond to issues of oppression and difficulties encountered in settlement.

The ecological approach to resilience has emphasised the coexistence of both strength and vulnerability within migrants' lives. The findings in this study serve to highlight the complex, dynamic relationship that exists between strength and vulnerability, risk and protection. This underlines the limitations of focusing solely on aspects of strength and resistance in understanding migrants' lives. That being said, a strengths orientation is common to all approaches despite their conceptual and operational variations. It also can be seen to have facilitated the evidencing and reframing of forced migrant women as strong and resilient in exile. Recognition of women's resilience, alongside an awareness and understanding of the sources that enable them to be strong in the context of exile, assumes the potential ability to target resources effectively and to build upon existing strengths within an individual or community. Yet, as Yusra so insightfully recognised, communities that are considered strong, capable and self-resourcing are potentially least likely to be allocated resources, or to capture the sympathies of the public at large. There is also the possibility that such an approach merely encourages and reinforces a false dichotomy of the forced migrants' assumed strength or vulnerability, which may contribute in perpetuating misunderstanding of forced migrants, and undermine attempts to improve their lives.

A strengths orientation clearly resonated with participants' own frameworks for understanding their lives and experiences as woman in exile. At the same time it highlights and accentuates the disjuncture between the way in which these participants chose to represent themselves and how forced migrant women are largely perceived by society and within the literature. The aim of allowing 'space' to hear and give recognition to migrants' potential accounts of strength within the context of adversity, can also be seen to have created a tension in so far as these women appeared unable, or found it unnecessary to publically acknowledge and accommodate the notion of 'victimhood' and 'vulnerability' as a facet of their own, and their community's lives. While complex factors have been identified and

discussed in chapter seven as to why there is the need to maintain this very powerful and convincing public image of women's strength, the strengths orientation of the study may have served to further reinforce and maintain this need.

### **An ecological perspective**

The complexity revealed from the participants' accounts of their daily activities and family life in exile has necessitated the use of each of the different approaches to resilience outlined in chapter two to aid both illumination and interpretation. The ecological approach, encouraging the identification and critical assessment of the contexts and environments that participants and their family members inhabit, and the relationships that they hold in relation to them, helps to identify core features of participants' local environments, transnational life, gender segregation, and a relatively insular community within the wider community. Within this framework, participants can be seen to operate within the local and global Somali community and, to a lesser extent, the wider local community.

The changing and diverse attitudes held by the women towards the resources within their environments and the perceived risks and protection that they offer, suggest that a person's context or environments needs to be understood as both dynamic and fluid, thereby requiring ongoing assessment and evaluation in order to fully capture often subtle changes in the way they are viewed. For example, the extent, to which culture and religion can be understood to shape people's environments and strongly influence their relations and responses to the resources within them, is clearly demonstrated by the findings. Shared culture and religious values suggests a uniformity of beliefs and practices, but the study has highlighted the diversity among the women, contributed in part by evolving and contested understandings and interpretations of how to live as a good Muslim woman within a Western environment. Thus, the significance of cultural dimensions within environments revealed here reinforces Ungar's (2006,) position that a cultural dimension must be considered an intrinsic component of an ecological approach.

This study suggests that a number of protective resources operate within these women's lives: through their informal supportive networks, their transnational practices, their home environment where they find role and purpose, and their religious belief and practices. While these protective sources and processes can be understood to a significant extent as enabling them to manage or overcome challenges

in exile, they also expose vulnerability and highlight potential risks to themselves and/or for their family members. Religion, for example, can be seen to provide many of the participants with a sense of direction for their lives and a source of internal strength, in addition to allowing links with their past to be recreated and sustained within exile. At the same time, Islamic dress and practices mark these women out, exposing many to hostility and discrimination within their daily environments.

Likewise, the relatively isolated nature of the community, though providing in the main positive experiences of caring supportive relationships, and a perceived 'safe' environment for their children and young people, can also be understood to increase or accentuate the challenges faced by their children in managing the transitions and tensions of their competing environments and contexts. Such evidence supports the position that risk and protective factors are a false dichotomy. A potentially protective factor may hold elements of risk depending on the individual and context.

Interpretations and perceptions of risk and protection are seen to be significantly influenced by cultural values, traditions and practices and are assessed in terms of perceived or experienced gains and losses that reflect an individual's own priorities and interpretations of these factors. For the women in this study, holding onto and strengthening their Islamic and Somali cultural identity appears to carry greater value and priority, than that of responding to the risks and vulnerability it exposes them to in terms of wider community isolation and an overall sense of disjunction, unease and alienation with their Western environment.

Participants' accounts of their isolation and self-containment within the host community raise questions as to why this Somali community appears to have experienced such limited integration compared to other Somali groups within the UK. (Idil suggested that the Somali community were better integrated elsewhere). More perplexing are participants' accounts of their past experiences of positive relations with non-Muslim women in the Scandinavian communities. This study suggests that the extent to which people engage with and take up resources within their environments, in the context of adversity, is a complex matter where local, specific factors and dynamics play a part. An ecological perspective can be seen to help uncover subtle relational dynamics operating within a local community. However, meaningful and relevant assessment of a family or community using this ecological approach is dependent not only upon identifying sources of risk and protection, but also on the assessor's ability to interpret and respond to what is discovered.

Evident within the findings, is the sense of hostility and fear with which women view their western environment and culture. Efforts to contain and limit the influence of Western values upon their children can be seen as a significant part of women's daily lives. At the same time, a few participants voiced their concerns that parents were failing children in helping them manage and negotiate their different cultural worlds. The muted nature of concerns, along with the prevalent respectful, obedient child discourse, highlights one of the potential challenges of seeking to jointly assess a community's sources of risk and protection. The framing and public presentation of vulnerability and weakness can be seen for this community, to be both complex and culturally influenced. A need for open discussion and transparency regarding the issues that effect community members is a basic prerequisite of an ecological perspective to promoting resilience. Resilience and strength can be seen as an important values and goals held by these women for themselves and their families. However, the ways in which they understand the achievement and operation of such goals suggests that these may sit at odds with those of outside agencies and policy makers seeking to improve migrants' lives (Phinney et al, 2001; Burnett and Peel, 2001; Lie et al, 2004). Goals in promoting resilience, protection and the reduction of risk within communities and their environments may be shared, although how they are to be achieved may prove both unacceptable and unworkable in practice.

An ecological model of resilience advocates the joint assessment of both the individual's ability to navigate access to resources and the community's responsibility to provide them in culturally meaningful ways. It is unclear to what extent both parties can be understood to have fulfilled these responsibilities in order to optimise resilient outcomes for all in this study.

The overall strategies adopted by this study's participants and community have been to adapt and re-create their Somali practices and cultural beliefs within their own community and to resist the pressures of the wider Western environment. Arguably, these strategies can be viewed as culturally resilient with both factors of protection and risk held in some form of dynamic equilibrium.

### **Valuing culture**

An ecological perspective offers insights into the complex ways in which participants understand and respond to their environments, and how resources within them can be seen to both promote and undermine resilience. It also highlights the

significance of culture and the ways in which this operates in this study. The cultural approach to understanding resilience prioritises this dimension by advocating the need to understand concepts of resilience, vulnerability, strength and protection as culturally defined and influenced. For participants, the notion of 'just getting on with life', emotional containment and suppression and the acceptance of God's will, can be understood as cultural responses that enabled these women to make sense of, manage and move on from their difficult experiences. These echo findings within the wider, though limited available literature (Goodman, 2004; Whittaker et al, 2005). At the same time, the study highlights the need for caution in making assumptions about how individuals /communities respond culturally to adversity and life in exile. Culture can be seen to be dynamic, influenced for these participants by Western practices, as well as powerful symbolic images of 'imagined' Somali culture and distant homeland. This implies a need to remain open to identifying new and different ways in which culture may operate to create resilience, risk and protection, as well as to understanding what may lie behind the expressions and forms it may take. Highlighted here is the need to focus not only on a cultural approach, but also the specific environments and contexts in which cultural practices occur. A potential danger of failing to recognise the dynamic nature of cultural practices and the evolving environments and daily contexts in which they occur, is that this cultural approach will merely serve to further embed taken for granted myths about people's lives in exile.

The significance attached to the cultural value and symbolism of Somali women's strength found within this study lends support to the position that resilience is a culturally based phenomenon rather than an individual trait (Goodman, 2004). In a similar vein, Islamic belief and practice, appearing intrinsic to their identity as Somali Muslim women, both personally and collectively, can be argued to further support such a position. As such, this brings into question the appropriateness of a concept that is predominantly understood and used in relation to individuals. Adopting this cultural stance also creates the potential danger of undermining or failing to recognise the agency and determination of the individuals themselves in implementing the cultural values that they hold. Mya, a single mother for example, can be seen by sheer will-power, to get on with the challenges that she faces in her life. "I see it as a challenge. I set myself the goal...you just have to get on." That being said, emphasising the role of individual autonomy and effort in relation to resilient outcomes highlights the inherent blame tending nature of the resilience

concept. This appears to be something with which the women themselves are well acquainted with in their daily lives. Culturally ingrained notions of women's strength reveal similarities and tensions in relation to the notion of 'pass' or 'fail', with the cultural standard of 'strength' being seen to 'set the bar' of achievement for what is expected and required of themselves and by others. The fear and shame of failure possibly may explain in part the ways in which participants chose to present their accounts of their daily life.

In chapter seven the competing frameworks of thought that operate in relation to the promotion and facilitation of emotional recovery were highlighted, with distinction made between the talking therapies of the West and the culturally accepted practice of emotional containment. Here the significance of these frameworks in relation to resilience, risk and protection can be drawn out. 'Silence' in relation to trauma and adversity is suggested to be a means by which healing is achieved in peoples lives, though this sits at odds with the stance that emotional expressiveness plays a vital role in resilience. The findings from this study suggest that a cultural approach has the capacity to go beyond merely identifying the role of culture in promoting notions of resilience and responding to culturally perceived risk, to unearthing what lies behind or reinforces particular competencies and responses to adversity. For example, emotional containment may well give rise to emotional healing from trauma, but contributing influences underpinning such a cultural 'competence' for these women can be seen to lie in their need to maintain the symbolic image of Somali women's strength and to avoid public and shameful exposure of vulnerability. Also, their busyness may well contribute to their having limited space for emotional expression. Whilst competencies in life may be understood as culturally defined (Papadopoulos, 2002; Gilgun, 1999), some aspects of the findings remain unclear, suggesting that ambiguity and uncertainty are inherent factors within the cultural approach.

Further illustration to support this stance is provided by the findings in relation to the ways these women understood what it means to be strong and independent within a Western society. The strong woman, considered competent in managing family life in exile, is one who can raise a family independently of a husband and sustain a powerful role within the home, yet unable to function independently in the 'outside world'. This view highlights the pluralistic and contested ways in which community members chose to understand and define cultural competencies within

their own community. For this community, there is also the suggestion of being able to acknowledge and accept the co existence of differing positions of thought and practice, even though these may be contradictory and incompatible, not least in terms of developing and implementing a practice/policy response.

This study's findings revealed a notable absence to any reference to mental health issues, despite evidence within the wider literature suggesting an increased incidence of mental illness among forced migrants (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Frazel and Stein, 2003, Hodes, 2000). It may be that disclosure to an outsider of such concern was considered by participants to be shameful both to themselves and for the community. Alternatively it could be concluded that factors such as participants immersing themselves in the busyness of their roles and responsibilities, living for their children and the future, enjoying new experiences of independence and participating in strong supportive social networks, significantly contributed to recovery for these individuals and their community. Some studies where communities own natural resources are evidenced to contribute towards recovery (Burnett and Peel, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2001, and Summerfield, 1999) would support this view.

A small number of studies focussing on the cultural meanings of resilience, risk and protection have raised the question of whether these concepts need to be understood in relation to distinct groups of people (Guerra, 1999; McCubbin et al, 1999; Ungar, 2006). This study provides some support for such a position as well as the need for further work. For example, the protective effects of corporate living evidenced in the practical and social support experienced by the women, is portrayed as integral to Somali practice and understanding of clan responsibilities and rights. The notion of Somali women's strength, and the overall ethos of 'getting on with life' is said to represent a core component of these women's identity: 'this is who we are', 'this is what we do, all Somali women'. The role and influence of Somali culture has been seen to permeate all aspects of these participants' lives. It might therefore be concluded that these women's accounts and interpretations of family life in exile are both peculiar and unique to them. That being said, the uniqueness and commonality found within this small number of participants, highlights the need for caution in making simplistic generalisations and assumptions in relation to cultural behaviour and thought within any community. Such a discussion has implications for thinking about the wider relevance of this study's findings and this will be examined and discussed in the following chapter.

Both this approach whereby cultural practices can be more explicitly revealed and the ecological approach can be seen to shed light on these migrant women's family life. While they can be treated as distinct approaches in their own right, their interrelatedness suggests that they require consideration alongside each to further our understanding of migrants' lives in exile. Both approaches can be credited with a capability of revealing complexity and diversity, and capturing changing and emerging practices in daily life. The ecological approach has facilitated a focus on the specific contexts of people's daily lives, the ways in which these may be understood and responded to, alongside highlighting the challenges of identifying and distinguishing the protective or undermining ways in which resources may operate. The cultural approach has aided the identification of cultural thought, processes and practices and the illumination of their possible significance and relevance in relation to risk, resilience and protection. Underlying factors and influences shaping such cultural practices and their attributed meanings have also been unearthed, though the challenge remains in their interpretation by outsiders.

### **Responding to oppression**

The findings have also indicated that the nature of migrant women's family life is one marred by unequal and changing power relations, and oppression. The anti-oppressive approach to resilience, though assuming individuals/families/ communities to be innately strong, recognises that the experiences and effects of oppression and structural inequalities undermine that strength. Such an approach prioritises the need to identify, understand and respond to issues of oppression within migrants' lives. The suggestion of oppression in the form of racism and Islamophobia, social exclusion and the denial of human rights can be identified within participants' accounts and reflect wider patterns of oppression directed at asylum seekers and forced migrants within the UK (Coker, 2001; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Malloch and Stanley, 2005). While these accounts reveal the day-to-day nature and operation of such oppression, interpreting participants' responses is open to speculation, leaving a sense of ambiguity and unresolved questioning. At the same time, criticism has been directed at researchers and professionals alike in their failure to prioritise and challenge oppression in the lives of asylum seekers and forced migrants (Cremlyn and Briskman, 2003).

Examining participants' tendency to downplay racist/Islamophobic incidents highlights the different interpretations that can be given to such strategies. One such

interpretation is that it may be framed as a response of active resistance by the individual and the community to accepting the label of 'victim'. Participants appear to have accepted racism as a part of life and adopted an attitude of 'getting on with it'. Such a response to resisting, managing and to some extent, overcoming such oppression is also evidenced within the wider literature. The need for support in these circumstances is seen as crucial (Anderson, 2001 cited Cowger et al, 2006). For the participants, sources of support are seen to come from the community itself, from family and friends. At the same time, this raises a question concerning the community's reluctance or inability to work with formal services in attempting to address such issues. Given that some participants had been known to experience (or to suspect) institutional racism to operate in relation to the services they had received, a wariness of formal services is not surprising. Some aspects of the findings lend support to the suggestion that this may be one more way in which this community separates and isolates itself from the wider community. The different understandings of these avoidance strategies reflect differing interpretations about the community's resilience and its potential vulnerability and weakness.

An alternative interpretation to this 'get on with it' approach strategy is to see participants' responses in relation to their position of powerlessness. They adopt a survival strategy that is least likely to provoke retaliation, by ignoring incidents, avoiding formal complaints procedures and by actively seeking to promote an image of peace-loving, forgiving Muslim women. Resilience can be argued to be evidenced in their adaptability and ability to cope with the constraints that are forced upon them.

Another dimension in considering participants' responses to racism and oppression is the historical context in which they sit. Twenty years of government discrimination, clan fractions and civil war in Somalia, as well as festering clan fractions here in this city, make these participants no stranger to the potential all-consuming nature of discrimination and hatred. In this sense, participants can be seen to carry a sense of weariness towards creating new enemies or taking on further battles where power inequalities are recognised. Many have experienced- or known female family members or friends subjected to- sexual violence, rape and domestic violence as a result of a targeted war strategy of violence against women both in Somalia and neighbouring countries of refuge. This has led to an understandings of human rights and of oppressive practices which may take on very different

significance and interpretation to that perhaps of Westerners, who are unlikely to have encountered such a scale of abuse (Musse, 2004; Farah, 2000).

Participants' accounts did not reveal a sense of recognised oppression and domination by either a patriarchal community or religious imposition. However, oppression may not have been recognised or interpreted in this way. Many participants presented a sense of independence, new-found freedoms and choices, illustrated by their increasing emphasis on their rights as wives, on their ability to leave an unsatisfactory relationship and in their freedom to be full-time mothers and homemakers. That being said, some women were known to be unable to function and participate outside the home alone, community monitoring of religious behaviour and dress in particular was common practice, and cultural and religious expectations and values were strongly ingrained and enforced to varying extent through socialisation practices from an early age. Ongoing tension and conflict in relation to gender roles and responsibilities and women's excessive workloads clearly constrained their ability to participate in outside social activities and to establish and maintain social networks.

Two very different and contradictory conclusions can therefore be reached. These are also mirrored within the literatures, with some scholars evidencing women's constraints (Burnett and Peel, 2001; Harris, 2004) and others emphasising their newfound freedoms (Cox, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2004). While an anti-oppressive approach cannot necessarily provide a clear position, or indicate an appropriate response, the study's findings can be seen to bring additional depth and detail to both arguments, thereby suggesting that both interpretations can contribute to an understanding of the nature of oppression in these women's lives. Though the notion of challenge and subsequent change can be understood as fundamental to this anti-oppressive approach, this study suggests that what requires challenging and changing may be complex, unclear and based on contested and contradictory evidence. There is, therefore, a need to suspend Western cultural beliefs and influential discourses on rights and oppression so as to 'make space' to hear alternative positions on such issues. Ungar (2003) emphasises that forced migrants should voice their own localised definitions of resilience, risk and protection. Adopting such a stance within an anti-oppressive framework may prove for some to be unacceptable, too contentious, or morally unacceptable.

In sharp contrast to the suggested resilience of participants and their community in dealing with racist and Islamophobic behaviour, participants showed a

surprisingly passive and defeatist attitude to perceived institutional racism and discrimination that they encountered. Their recognised powerlessness in challenging discrimination embedded within the structures and practices of society and their resigned acceptance of these experiences might be considered a pragmatic and sensible response in the face of defeat (Fraser et al, 1999; Gilgun, 1999; Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). While Watters (2001) encourages the recognition of resistance by forced migrants to 'external forces bearing down upon them,' Seccombe (2002) questions how resilience can be expected without significant structural change within society. Such change though is based upon political will and social pressure and in their absence; this challenging approach may have very little meaning and impact on migrants' day-to-day lives. The findings here demonstrate these women's ability to seize opportunities to gain social standing within the wider context of constraint, by adopting their predominantly private role as homemaker. This suggests the need to remain 'tuned in' and open to identifying and understanding such outcomes within the wider framework of anti-oppressive practice.

In summarising, a number of issues are pertinent. An anti-oppressive approach can be seen to allow close scrutiny of different forms of oppression and their operation, including more subtle or culturally unfamiliar forms that may be significant in the undermining of migrants' resilience and protection. Though the approach emphasises the need for challenge and an active response to identified oppression, evidence suggests that achieving such an aim may be both complex and problematic. Though many may subscribe to the ideological principle of migrants determining their own culturally acceptable notions of resilience, risk and protection, this discussion highlights the potential challenges to such a stance. The need for ongoing dialogue and reflection appears crucial if such complexity, contradictions and tensions are to be successfully managed and new understandings and interpretations of oppression and its operation negotiated. Such a process may be far from comfortable for any party, as well as potentially limited in progressing practice responses. Though forms of oppression can be clearly identified that infringe and undermine participants' lives and that of their families, there is the suggestion that new opportunities have emerged for finding protection and showing resilience. Challenge and change lie at the heart of this approach, but space must also be given to allow these glimmers of resistance to be identified. Seeking to capture this complexity of constraint and opportunity, risk and protection within an overall anti-oppressive approach has been underlined by this

study's findings. This requires encompassing both an ecological and cultural stance to such a process.

### **Evidencing resilience**

The different approaches to understanding the nature of resilience can be seen to bring different facets of participants' daily lives and that of their families under the microscope. Though each approach can and should be recognised for its own particular contribution, the relational dynamics between the approaches highlighted is demonstrated in this study's findings. Together, they facilitate a fuller exploration and assessment of resilience, risk and protection in the lives of these women. However, interpreting the findings has been shown to be both complex and problematic.

The ecological and cultural approaches can be seen to emphasise the notion of resilience for all, while the anti-oppressive and strengths framework are based on individual/ communities' assumed innate strength. At the same time, the findings have demonstrated the interrelatedness and interdependence of the approaches in illuminating the role and nature of resilience and vulnerability in migrants' lives. Though an Ecological model of resilience was adopted for the study so as to avoid the pitfalls of victimisation and blame associated with the concept, recognition has been given to the value of each approach in this discussion of the findings. Before going on to argue the need for a theoretical pluralistic approach to the concept's operation, this section reviews this study's findings on the nature and role of resilience in these migrant women's day-to-day lives.

The diverse and complex positions adopted in relation to the concept and the ambiguity and uncertainty highlighted within this study as to how strength or vulnerability might be interpreted or perceived to operate within participants' lives, all contribute to the complexity of reaching a conclusion about the role and extent of resilience in participants' lives. A general overview of the study's findings would suggest that there is overwhelming evidence of resilience operating not only as resilience but also as strength, independence, resistance, adaptability, determination and coping. These are just some of the many adjectives that are associated with the way participants 'get on with' and manage family life. That being said, the concept's contested nature means that there can be no straightforward or simple answer to such an assessment. What is required

here is the need to manage and make sense of the many strands of competing and sometimes contradictory evidence that have emerged.

The themes of movement and change have been highlighted as central features of participants' lives in exile. It is not surprising, therefore, that resilience identified by the extent to which a person is able to adapt and change can be seen so strongly within the study's findings. Participants can be perceived to be adaptive in their ability to adjust their lives to the demands of a Western environment, despite constraint and hostility, as well in their flexibility to move from one EU country of settlement to another. The re-creation within a Western context of a 'cultural home' that encompasses Somali values and culture suggests adaptability and flexibility that has been identified in relation to the 'Somali home' that is 'carried over time and space' (McMichael, 2002, p.172). For Lana in particular, evidence of resilience and adaptability is characterised by her ability to identify new forms of social support and establish relationships which recognise and respond to the need for learning and acceptance of cultural and religious difference, while maintaining relations with other Somali women and drawing upon resources within that community. Arguably, such evidence provides grounds for assuming the resilience of these participants. However, many aspects of change within these women's daily lives suggest not only the possibility of strength and adaptation, but also as potential weakness and vulnerability. The extent to which participants' and their family members' adaptation and change can be assumed or predicted as either successful or maladaptive, both currently and in relation to long-term well-being and adjustment, remains inconclusive. As such, the findings support the position that resilience needs to be understood as a dynamic force that ebbs and flows in the course of navigating and negotiating adversity and change in everyday life, rather than a determined point of assumed static success or 'failure' (Daly, 1999). This underlines an understanding of resilience that encompasses a fluidity of vulnerability and strength, risk and protection operating within individuals' daily lives.

Participants' ability to adjust to the new roles and responsibilities placed on them as homemakers suggests women's greater adaptability and ability to manage transitions in life (Papadopoulos', 2004). At the same time, Lana's suggestion that women's independence is at the cost of undermining men's role and competency within the family possibly demonstrates how one member's protection and resilience may be at the expense of another's. Determining resilience therefore requires

understanding and assessment of the individual within the context of relational ‘others’ in order to identify the ways in which the distribution of risks and protection may operate and fall. Central to understanding such a process is the need to identify the power dynamics operating within these relational contexts and the losses and gains experienced.

The study has provided some evidence to suggest that resilience, risk and protection are culturally constructed concepts (Whittaker et al, 2005). Participants’ own assessment of their competency, determination and capacity to get on with life suggests a strongly held belief in their own strength and capacity to manage life amidst daily challenges, alongside their ability to resist powerful forces and influences within their lives. The extent to which this self-belief is based upon cultural symbolism, cultural loyalty and/or the cultural unacceptability of voicing vulnerability, rather than the experienced reality of everyday life in settlement, has been questioned.

Though resilience is evident within participants’ lives, there is also sadness, a sense of loss, worry and at times despair. This finding lends support to the position that resilience co-exists alongside psychological vulnerability and pain. Recognising that participants’ resilience, their strength and determination to get on with life, highlights not only the essential presence of adversity and risk to the resilience concept, but also the need to identify and further understand aspects of both strength and vulnerability within individuals’ and the community’s lives. It also raises the question as to whether resilience is really a ‘successful’ outcome or if there are possible long-term costs for these participants and their family members as a result of their resilience? Speculation as to the long- term emotional/mental health outcomes of participants and family members is inconclusive. This suggests the need to place both understanding and assessment of resilience within a longitudinal, developmental life-cycle framework rather than make static or fixed judgements at any particular point in an individual’s or community’s life.

### **Re-thinking resilience for theory and practice**

Having shown how the identification of resilience can be both complex and at times ambiguous, this section returns to the need for a new approach to understanding resilience and its assessment in the everyday lives of women in exile. Both Forced Migration and Resilience research are influenced to varying extents, by an ideology

that advocates the role of research as one that serves to improve the lives of the research participants (Garmezy, 1971, cited Garmezy, 1987; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). This discussion now examines the ways in which research and this study in particular might be seen to fulfil this imperative for both understanding and change.

Hebb (1958) suggests that a theory's value is determined by its ability to help us think about the issues involved. Drawing on the diverse theoretical approaches to the resilience concept has allowed exploration of issues related to resilience, vulnerability, risk and protection within the lives of the study's participants and their families. Drawing on differing positions within the literature, a more holistic and complex approach to understanding resilience has captured the breadth of lived experience of participants' lives and contributed to a fuller understanding of their daily family life. That being said, we are left with messy and often ambiguous results. This leaves the concept's ability to provide clear messages that have practical significance and worth for making a difference to migrant family's lives open to further scrutiny.

First and foremost, the resilience concept can be seen to offer practitioners and policy makers a potential alternative framework for working with and responding to the needs of migrants; a framework premised on the need to recognise migrants as active agents, competent in contributing to the affairs of their own lives (Anderson and Doyal, 2004). However, the framework's value and effectiveness can be understood to be dependent upon critical, competent practitioners and policy makers, capable of recognising and managing the inherent complexity of the resilience concept and its use in any assessment process. The adoption of a resilience framework cannot be undertaken lightly as a response to wanting a 'feel good factor' rather than a sense of being overwhelmed by a focus on 'problems'. Commitment of time, as well as working with potential ambiguity, unease and managing conflict is required. A willingness to engage in dialogue, reflection and negotiation in interpreting findings is also needed.

This study arose in response to a desire to examine and challenge the dominant societal discourses that represented forced migrants' lives. Recognition of and critical reflection on the competing discourses and their impact upon the lives of forced migrants had to be a starting point in seeking to understand who forced migrants are, the reasons behind their settlement, the nature of their needs and how these might be best met. In particular, questioning the interests that

social discourses serve, and seeking to identify these whose voices are silenced or muted within society is seen as a means of identifying possible sources and processes of oppression. While professionals have been challenged regarding their need to respond to oppression taking place in forced migrants' lives, the study's findings have illustrated the contentious and challenging nature of such a task. The value and significance of identifying, and giving 'space' for silenced voices to represent and present their own interpretations and understandings on matters relating to everyday family life in exile has been demonstrated by the study's focus on eliciting women's accounts. Furthermore, the importance that dialogue and negotiation play in navigating new and alternative understanding of forms of oppression and their operation has been discussed. As such, these factors may be considered a guiding principle within the process of assessing resilience.

The centrality of religion within participants' accounts of daily life recognises the salience attached to cultural/religious sources of protection, yet these are an area under-researched and poorly understood by professionals (McMichael, 2002; Thornton, 1998). While acknowledging the sensitive and somewhat contentious nature of such sources within our largely secular and arguably, Islamophobic society, the findings support the need for professionals to engage more fully with this area of participants' lives. Initiating respectful dialogue on aspects of belief and religious practice, both in relation to the individual and the wider community, can further understanding, identify misinformation and allow for reflection and response to personal discriminatory attitudes. That being said, it is clearly a potentially challenging and possibly unsettling process when societal, organisational and personal values are out of line or considered incompatible with those being heard. While this may pose for some a potentially ethical dilemma, or result in perceptions of feeling deskilled and disempowered in the ability to make judgements or decide a course of action, such factors can be understood as integral features of working together and of negotiating the challenging realities of working with 'difference'. There is, though, the suggestion from this study that in some aspects, compromise and agreement may not be reached, given the limited common ground available to plan and activate an acceptable response.

While dispute is evident as to whether efforts to promote resilience should be targeted at specific vulnerable groups or be adopted as a universal approach (Pollard et al, 1999; Fraser et al, 1999), evidence from this study would support the need for specifically targeting areas of high risk within vulnerable communities. This would recognise the overwhelming impact of racism, (both personal and institutional) and Islamophobia on the individual and community, as well as the undermining nature of chronic, insidious risk associated with the refugee experience. Given this study's evidence of structural oppression and participants' perceived lack of resistance and challenge to it, efforts might be better aimed at changing the odds, rather than assuming that resilient and resourceful individuals and communities are able to beat the odds stacked against them (Seccombe, 2002). Findings lend support to the position that resilience and its sources of protection are to be found within communities themselves. This reinforces the need and appropriateness of a strengths approach in the assessment of a community's resources. This should include sources and potential sources in operation as well as the identification of any barriers that might reduce their access or successful uptake. Potential fears and tensions as to the resilience label's ability to undermine individual and communities' rights and their acquisition of essential resource allocation, cannot be ignored. Publicly recognised self-sufficiency and competency can be argued to carry this inherent danger, particularly in times of recession and severe financial constraints. At the same time, the label of resilience has the potential to serve to ensure that increasingly scarce public resources are targeted and used most effectively, in strengthening protective strategies already in place within a community

The potential complexity of the assessment process using a resilience framework has been highlighted, suggesting an inherent danger of it being conducted superficially, or not at all due to practitioners' 'paralysis' in undertaking and managing such a complex and somewhat ambiguous task. Though the complex and distinct nature of risk and protection alongside resilience within different contexts is evidenced by the study, meaning-making, context, history and culture can all be seen as pertinent to understanding how risks are perceived and responded to, as well as how protective resources and strategies are identified and utilized.

Theoretical approaches to resilience outlined in the study are represented in their own right within the literature. However, as argued earlier in this chapter,

this study's findings have shown the inter-relatedness of these approaches and the value of adopting a more explicit pluralistic theoretical approach to understanding resilience. At the same time, adopting a more complex understanding of resilience in practice presents many challenges as outlined above. Nevertheless, this study supports and argues the value and need for a holistic assessment underpinned by a theoretical framework that acknowledges the interdependence of the different approaches to understanding resilience. Based on the findings from this study, a model for the assessment of resilience, vulnerability, risk and protection is presented here. It is premised on the four theoretical approaches being understood as both independent and interdependent (See figure 7.1). At the centre of the model is the individual, family or community, depending upon the level of assessment and proposed intervention. The practitioner is reminded of the centrality of such voices within the assessment process. Next, the four theoretical approaches provide the different lenses through which the practitioner may look. The subsequent circle provides the focus for each of the lenses so that gender, age, ethnicity, past history, location and meaning-making are considered. Meaning-making refers to the individual person's sense of understanding of their life, their experiences and circumstances, how they make sense of them and attribute meaning. The final circle directs the focus to be placed in the context of resilience, risk, protection, and vulnerability, highlighting the fluidity of these concepts and the need to consider them as dynamic and open to change over time, rather than as static or discrete positions. Though not in any way capturing the full complexity of the concepts, the model is intended to act as a prompt in taking forward a complex, holistic assessment of every day life for an individual, family or community. Implementing such a model at the different levels of intervention, it must be reiterated, requires commitment on the part of the practitioner and a range of skills, not least the ability to retain a reflective stance in undertaking this challenging task. Accurate and thorough assessment can be seen as central to efficient, effective and acceptable responses, with presumed assumptions and incorrect knowledge of forced migrant communities, serving only to perpetuate a false rhetoric of partnership working and empowerment.

# Model of Resilience for use with Individual, Family or Community

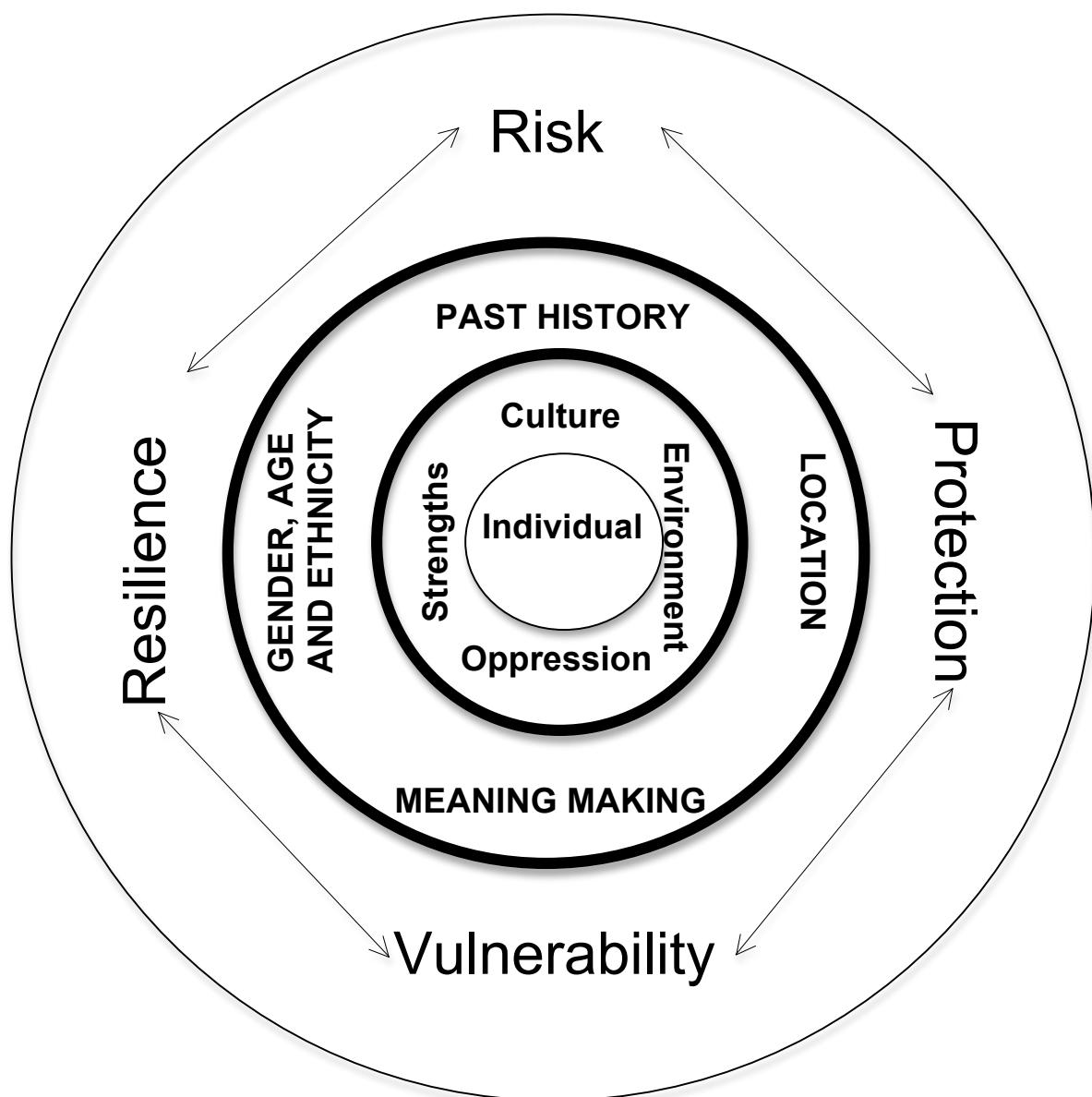


Figure 8.1

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued the value of all four approaches to understanding the resilience concept. Sharing an emphasis and value placed on a notion of strength, each approach has been seen to prioritise and offer insights into different aspects of forced migrant women's family life. Bringing these different theoretical positions together has captured both the complexity and contradiction of the resilience concept and in doing so has facilitated a more informed understanding of the complexity and richness of forced migrants' lives. The potential contribution of this more complex understanding of resilience to practice and policy fields, along with some of the challenges, has been outlined. A model developed on the basis of this study's findings has been presented with a view to assisting practitioners in making more effective interventions with migrant communities.

## CONCLUSION

### Introduction

This final chapter begins with a brief summary of the key findings from the study. These are reviewed using two identified themes that emerge from the discussion of findings in chapters seven and eight (see below). The second part of the chapter presents further methodological reflections on the study and concludes with some consideration of the contribution that this study makes to understanding the nature and role of resilience in the day-to-day lives of women in exile.

There are two distinct areas of evidence contained within this study. These relate to the concept of migration and the (forced) woman migrant, and the concept of resilience and the notion of the strong migrant woman. Static frameworks and labels used in determining and categorising migratory journeys and migrants' experiences have been challenged, with participants' accounts evidencing movement and fluidity. The notions of 'migrant women's strength' and resilience have been shown to be complex in the extent and depth of meanings and significance given to these notions in migrant women's lives. 'Movement and fluidity' and 'complexity and contradiction' can be identified as the overarching themes of this study and together capture and represent the essence of migrant women's family life in the UK. The theme of movement and fluidity, in particular, is evidenced as a central feature of migrant women's migratory journeys and their settlement and (re)settlement within exile. Complexity and contradiction permeate these women's accounts of how they understand the nature of strength and its operation within the busyness and demands of managing and getting on with their family life in exile. Both themes, though, are also identifiable and prominent across the findings as a whole.

### Movement and fluidity

Participants' migratory trajectories have highlighted the fluid nature of movement and the arbitrary 'push' and 'pull' factors operating behind their border crossings. Their cultural framing of movement, representing and affirming the women's cultural identity and nomadic heritage, further accentuates this notion of fluidity. Alongside this, refugee characteristics and features exhibited within the context of settlement, and (re)settlement of daily family life, suggest the continuing relevance and pertinence of the refugee identity for participants regardless of their

formal legal status. Such factors have evidenced and underlined the limitations of static categorisations and labelling of migrants' and their border crossings.

Transnational networks, underpinned by the Somali cultural values of rights and responsibilities, operate within a globalised world and have been shown to facilitate the flow of resources in strategic and coordinated ways, contributing to successful border crossings. The fluidity of the Somali 'home' built upon familial cultural/religious values and practices have enabled its reconstruction whilst maintaining essential links and continuity with the past and homeland.

Transformations within the home reflected participants' response to the perceived threat of Western influences thought to undermine Somali family life and the demands of living in a Western society. Notions of home and homeland portray shifting and diverse understandings among participants and family members, further reinforcing this image of fluidity and movement in relation to home, home life, and the hope of return.

A sense of movement runs as a thread within participants' accounts as they are 'pushed' and 'pulled' to get on with their lives and to be 'good Muslim woman'. Fear and resistance, compromise and change have been seen to occur in diverse and sometimes contested ways, underlining the emergent and transformative nature of migrant communities unable to 'stand still' within the context of settlement. Pre-migratory strengths have contributed to directing and governing women's responses to the perceived challenges and opportunities presented in exile. However, factors that contribute to and underpin these strengths appeared to have undergone subtle changes in their interpretation and use. The notion of the 'good Somali Muslim woman' and the role of religion have been identified as particular aspects of women's lives both individually and corporately and these continue to undergo negotiate and transformation.

Corporate living, its bearing on women's corporate identity and the underlying values and responsibilities that this represents and carries, is another facet of daily life that demonstrates movement and change. This movement has resulted in the strengthening and increased dependence upon this corporate way of life for many. At the same time it has facilitated a few to venture away from the relative security and support of community living to experience new opportunity and somewhat greater engagement with the wider, 'outside' community. Some women's tentative embracing and adoption of new ways of coping with everyday stresses and adversities through

greater emotional engagement and expression also evidence ripples of change. This has served to highlight both the subtleties of 'movement' occurring and the possibilities of change that may stem from such tentative beginnings. These factors capturing movement and fluidity within migrant women's family life underline and illuminate the evolving and transitional nature of this community and the 'push' and 'pull' elements occurring within it, both from inside and out. Such an image projects a strong overall sense of tension existing within migrant women's lives. The need to hold onto the past, with its attributed meanings and the representations of the Somali identity and heritage, appears set against the demand and need for change and adaptation within the context of settlement.

The suggested dichotomy between recreating the past and adopting new practices and ways of thinking about and responding to family life in exile has been challenged by this study's findings. Rather than seeing these positions as polarised, distinctive and competing, their co-existence in every day family life is emphasised. Transformations of family structure, gender relations, notions of corporate living and interdependence, as well as Islamic practice and understanding all evidence, to varying extent, features of both continuity and change. Absorbing their time and energies, migrant women's lives have been seen to be focused on negotiating and managing these transformations in acceptable ways that encompass 'staying the same' within the context of a Western society that demands change.

The theme of 'movement and fluidity', encompassing also the notion of continuity and change, has been used as a means by which to convey and represent the centrality that these features and characteristics play in migrant women's family lives. It has also helped to illustrate and underline the insights that this study offers as to the richness and diversity found within the everyday lives of migrant women and their families within the UK.

### **Complexity and contradiction**

The theme of 'complexity and contradiction' is seen to mark the ways in which migrant women's strength is understood and operates within their day-to-day family life. This theme has also been seen as an inherent feature of the resilience concept and its integral concepts of risk and protection within this study. As such, insights provided by this study in relation to migrant women's activities and the

meanings that lie behind their accounts of family life, emphasise and illustrate the complexity of their resilience.

Evidence of migrant women's strengths, illustrated in the undertaking of their roles and responsibilities as mothers and homemakers, their ability to manage and move on from adversity and sadness in their lives, and their committed and determined pursuit to being 'good Somali Muslim women' has contributed to the reframing of migrant women as strong, resourceful and capable of managing the challenges of family life in exile. Though evidencing an alternative framework from that of the widely accepted 'deficit' approach, this study's findings have added further understanding of the way in which migrants' strength coexists with vulnerability within their lives. Insights into the complex, dynamic relationship that exists and operates between strength and vulnerability, and risk and protection within family members' daily life have been presented. Such evidence has underlined the limitations of using solely a strengths approach in understanding and promoting the wellbeing and resilience of migrant communities.

The nature and role of risk and protective factors in both the promotion and undermining of resilience have been shown to be complex and contradictory. The ecological model of resilience has highlighted the diverse and evolving nature of migrant women's environments, the ways that these are perceived and how resources are identified and utilised. The cultural model of resilience has furthered our understanding of the complex cultural dimension operating within resource use. This has been illustrated by participants' preoccupation with the need to protect and insulate themselves from Western influences and 'corrupting' forces. Diverse, contested and subtle differences have been highlighted among the women as to their understandings and responses to risk and protection and the opportunity and constraint this brings within their Western environments.

Protective resources, evidenced by such factors as the women's religious belief and practices, their corporate community living, and their fulfilling roles as mothers and homemakers, have also been shown to create and expose women and family members to (potential) risk and thus to undermining their resilience. The study therefore has given support to the position that risk and protective factors are a false dichotomy, with both able to promote or undermine resilience depending upon the individual and context. Such complexity and contradiction has most prominently been

a feature of the evidence stemming from the cultural and anti oppressive approaches to resilience.

Within the complexities of identifying issues of risk and protection, alongside strengths and vulnerability within migrant women's lives there is the suggestion of both 'loss and gain'. Participants' perceptions and understandings of loss and gain have been shown to operate in complex and perplexing ways, often challenging commonly held assumptions in relation to migrants. The widely assumed gains and protection offered by exile have taken a more muted and backstage position within these accounts. Salience has been given to issues of loss, reduced quality of life, changes in family status and supportive extended family networks, and women's increased workload in exile. Uprooting and (re)settlement within the UK has been understood to offer greater religious freedom and choice and a relatively increased sense of cultural/religious protection. That being said, it has also led to significant lingering feelings of loss and nostalgia for aspects of life valued within participants' initial counties of refuge.

Loss and gain is also evident in the continuing emphasis in migrant women's lives of duty, obligation, and the meeting of personal and public cultural expectations. The supportive structure of the women's community networks has been seen to provide, to varying degree, both practical, social and to some extent, psychological support in enabling the women to just get on with their family lives. It has also been understood to play a part in the undermining of individual agency and the restriction of potential opportunities and experiences that the host community has to offer participants and family members living in the West. Loss and gain therefore characterise the experience of exile, but distinguishing and determining their salience for family members and their effects upon risk and protection can be seen as complex and challenging given these apparent contradictions. Unearthing the cultural layers and subtle power dynamics operating within migrants' women's lives and relationships has also reinforced the complexities of interpreting and managing the rich but challenging nature of this study's findings.

Much of the literature suggests that the resilience concept's contested nature is a feature of its weakness. Adopting a pluralistic theoretical approach to understanding this concept, this study's findings have evidenced an alternative view. Resilience characterised by complexity and contradiction plays a valuable role in understanding the richness and diversity of strength and vulnerability in these women's day-to-day

lives. At the same time, the skills required for the successful operation of this reframing of resilience in practice have been acknowledged as demanding and at times unsettling for the professional. In particular, dialogue and negotiation, management of conflict and uncertainty, acceptance of unresolved issues, and the need for an open and reflexive stance have been seen as central to working with ‘difference’. In chapter 8, a model developed on the basis of this study’s findings and a pluralistic theoretical approach to understanding resilience was presented as a potential tool for professionals undertaking the demands and complexities of the resilience assessment process. This study has evidenced and argued the need to place and understand resilience and its assessment of both strengths and vulnerabilities within a dynamic and developmental life cycle framework as opposed to static labelling at a specific point of time in these women’s lives.

The theme of ‘complexity and contradiction’ has been drawn from an increased understanding of resilience in these migrant women’s family lives. Within this theme, notions of risk and protection and loss and gain have also been identified as threads running through these women’s accounts. This theme of complexity and the theme of movement and fluidity discussed earlier have also been evident within the research process itself. Further methodological reflections are offered in the following section.

### **Further methodological reflections**

The fieldwork process, the ways in which constraints and opportunities arose, my response to them, and my own journey of learning reflect both complexity and movement evident in the study’s findings. Methodological principles have served to guide the research and help navigate some of the challenges encountered. It is apparent that principles such as listening to participants’ own accounts, seeking to adopt more balanced power relations with participants through which knowledge can be co-created, attempting to encourage participation of those often not included in research, being open to learning, reflection and challenge from those who are expert on their own lives can all be seen to have helped me navigate a path through the complexity and innumerable choices presented during this study. At the same time, while the principles have provided clarity and focus, the complexities and subtleties inherent in terms of implementing these principles and in determining one’s success have only been

revealed and understood as a result of actually negotiating such a course. A new appreciation of the challenges of conducting cross-cultural research with a hidden, vulnerable population has thus been gained.

Having a sense of distance from the fieldwork and the participants, it is timely to reflect further upon some of the issues arising from the research. As someone who has worked in the study's location as a health visitor and as a student researcher, it has proved interesting to reflect on how these different roles have contributed to the study's successful management and/or created or highlighted tensions and challenges. The experiences and skills acquired over many years of working on 'hard to reach' estates, can be seen to have prepared and equipped me with the ability to persist in 'finding my way in', initiating and developing tentative relationships in a community that had very little, if any experiences of research and few strong relationships with white non-Muslim women. I entered the research field conscious though that I would need to play down my 'expert' role with families and resist taking on the role of advisor, problem-solver and facilitator, which I had been accustomed to in the past. In one sense, this was easily achieved as entering a cultural community so alien to my own, positioned me as novice and learner and participants as experts. Having said that, there were occasions when I attempted to solve participants' problems or facilitate their efforts in achieving something. I framed my understanding of this in terms of reciprocity.

In many ways I have been confident about the professional boundaries that I adhered to as a health visitor. I have many years of professional experience, the explicit code of conduct that I work to and daily contact with team members to work alongside. In contrast, relational boundary setting within the research field seemed less clear and contested. I was aware of being 'at sea' in terms of what I considered appropriate conduct and practice. My relatively independent role, the ethnographic nature of my approach and the challenges of recognising the inherent dangers of 'going native' can all be understood as contributing to the blurring and complexity that I experienced in managing my relationship with participants. I found myself reflecting on the question as to what reciprocity means within the research relationship. I was strongly challenged by Oakley's study 'The Traveller Gypsies' which resonated somewhat with my own experiences of fieldwork and by the commitment to her research participants to 'reciprocate for the hospitality, friendship, protection and wisdom' that was given (Oakley, 1983, p.42). Discussion took place

within my supervision sessions as to what might be considered appropriate boundaries in the researcher/participant relationship and the need to protect both myself and the participants from possible exploitation or harm.

While discussion on this contentious area of research practice continues, it is now easier to reflect on some of the issues that arose. One such issue was my offer to one of the community leaders to hold a Somali homework group for the children. While this can be viewed purely as a way of reciprocating for these women's contributions and hospitality, it was in fact more significantly seen by me as a means to further engage a reluctant/hesitant community with my research. Having drawn the conclusion with my supervisors that this was not an appropriate offer while still in the field, the offer was modified to that of reviewing the possibility once I had finished the research. Tellingly, the drive to fulfil this offer is considerably less now that there is no personal gain to be had for the study. The importance of critical reflection, along with supervision by someone outside of the research, is evident, as all motivators for behaviour within the researcher/participant relationship need to be made transparent and considered thoughtfully. Highlighted for me was a new sense of appreciation for the guidelines and lines of accountability provided by my profession, contrasting sharply with my understanding and experiences of the 'messiness' and uncertainty of the research relationship. That is not to propose that researchers should adopt practices that are the most straightforward and least demanding on them. Rather it is suggested that we need to engage with the complexity and uncertainty of what it means to form and maintain ethical research relationships so as to further contribute to identifying and developing ethical research practices.

While this writing concludes the study, in many ways it provokes for me the beginnings of many possible avenues for future reading and research. Areas for possible exploration include examining the concept of identity, a concept that has frequently appeared in different guises within participants' accounts. Examining the adaptation of Somali men to family life in the UK, as well as exploring more generally how forced migrants' different religious beliefs shape their adaptation and management of life in the West are other areas that hold interest. At the same time, I see the focus and subject of this study as representing a 'vehicle' in which my wider interest and concern for marginalised individuals and communities have been able to be pursued. Having gained experience of researching with a 'vulnerable population', I have acquired a set of basic research skills that I can build on and take forward in

researching with other such groups. I am conscious as I reflect upon some of my past health visiting experiences that they offer a wealth of possible topics for future exploration, confirming the valuable symbiotic relationship between professional practice and research.

### **Contribution of this empirical study**

This study has revealed similarities to previous studies of Somali women in exile (Cox, 2003; McMichael, 2002; Whittaker *et al*, 2005). At the same time this study's findings have indicated a diversity of experience in the day-to-day lives of these women. Drawing on a more holistic approach to understanding resilience a more complex picture of women's strengths and vulnerabilities has been presented. This reinforces Harris' (2004) position, that 'generalisations about Somali women must be read with the proviso that they do not form a homogenous group' (Harris, 2004, p.60). Identified differences relate to participants' time of migration, their migratory journeys and stories of settlement and resettlement. While their role of homemaker, their busyness and their cultural and religious practices had much in common with other studies of women in exile, contradictions were also evident in their different approaches to and experiences of community life.

A significant number of participants drew distinctions between the experiences and practices of their community and those of other Somalis living in both the UK and Europe. This poses questions as to how relevant these findings might be to both other Somali communities and other migrant populations. This Somali community was viewed by participants as largely segregated from the wider host community. It was presented as traditional in thought and religious practice, less exposed to crime and anti-social practices and having fewer people in employment and adult education. Exploring further participants' perceptions of their 'differences' there are some factors that can be identified from the literature that contributes to their sense of distinctiveness. The majority of studies have been undertaken in large cities with significant Somali populations. For example, London features in many of the studies and has 78% of the estimated 43,515 Somali population living in the UK (Harris, 2004). In contrast, a local research organisation estimated that the Somali population for the city in which this study was carried out was considerably less (ICAR, 2010). While many of the communities live within distinct areas of a city according to clan affiliation, this study's small community had various clans live

alongside each other. Very few older members of the community were identified as contributing to and supporting family life. In contrast, larger cities within the UK have both established and new Somali communities reflecting migratory movements that have occurred over the years and the presence of members of an older generation. In many ways therefore this community can be considered as different from other Somali communities in the UK, reinforcing the need for caution in making generalisations from the study's findings. At the same time, the issues that dominate Somali women's daily life in this study can be seen to consistently recur in many of the studies of Somali communities and other women in exile.

The adoption though of a strengths orientation for this study using an understanding of resilience as complex and contradictory makes for this 'familiarity of focus' to become 'unfamiliar'. Though maintaining a position of caution, it can be suggested that this study contributes towards a richer 'picture' and a broader understanding of the issues and practices relating to Somali women and family life in the UK, as well as more widely contributing further understanding to the lives of women in exile.

The two identified themes of movement and fluidity and the complexity and contradictions of resilience within participants' lives are interrelated. Interwoven across these two themes are participants' accounts of their need for continuity amidst change, a continuous negotiation of risks and protective factors and an acknowledgement of both losses and gains. The inherent complexity and ambiguity in interpreting women's family life in exile can be viewed as a significant component in understanding and responding to the needs of migrant women. It also underlines the need for caution in adopting static positions, categories and labels and reinforces the demands for an ability to accept and manage the 'messiness' and level of complexity that resilience entails. Principles of practice have emerged from these findings and the development of a more pluralistic theoretical framework in the form of a model or tool for a holistic assessment of resilience. The potential of this tool goes beyond its use with migrant communities given the need for practitioners to identify and assess resilience in individuals, families and communities more widely. Nevertheless, caution is urged in its use and interpretation.

This study has examined the everyday lives of Somali women and their families living in exile within the UK from a strengths orientation using the concept of resilience. Amidst the activities, busyness and sense of movement within these

women's family life, insights into the complex ways in which risk and protection, strengths and vulnerability operate within their day-to-day lives have been revealed. The resilience concept perceived as complex and contradictory has demonstrated its value in identifying and unearthing the richness, subtle diversity, ambiguity and paradox lying beneath an appearance of 'ordinary' homogeneous lives.

Finally, Saleebey (2006) warns of the dangers of labels being attached to people, and suggests that:

*'They be used judiciously, if at all, and with a profound respect for their distortions and limitations, and also with an equally profound respect for their potential to 'mortify' individuals (Goffman, 1961).'*

*(Saleebey, 2006, p. 285.)*

It is therefore with 'profound respect' for the limitations of such labels, and of the model of assessment of resilience presented here that these women should be credited with a resilience that embodies both strength and vulnerability.

## **Appendix 1**

**Research ethics application number: SOC200078-20**  
**Jane March-McDonald**

### **‘Refugee and asylum seekers: exploring the nature and role of resilience’**

Dear Professor Heath,

I am writing to you in relation to the above ethical application SOC20008-20 that was granted ethical approval by the School Ethics Committee in April 2008. I am seeking permission to make some minor changes to the agreed proposal as a result of my fieldwork experiences so far.

The committee agreed for me to undertake both focus group interviews and individual interviews with Somali women. Issues of mistrust and lack of familiarity with formal research by forced migrants was highlighted as a potential challenge to carrying out these methods in my initial proposal. Despite opportunities developing for me to spend time with the Somali women to build up trust and relationships, such as by attending a Somali sewing group, and being invited to group sessions and gatherings which the women hold, I have to date only achieved seven formal interviews, one small group interview and two ‘informal’ group interviews. I have though been presented with opportunities to spend time with the women in their homes, along with their visiting friends, and here they have been happy to talk with me informally about a variety of issues related to my study. In the light of the limitations of the planned implementation of my data methods, and the opportunities that are apparent for more informal interviews to occur, I wish to make the following changes.

#### **Proposed amendments**

To take an ethnographic approach which includes the use of informal interviews and semi participant observation making use of the natural settings, networks and formats in which the women socialise and meet together.

#### **Rationale for amendments**

This recognises that in order to give voice to these women, I need to find a way that they are comfortable with and which can facilitate this in a non-threatening way. My proposal takes account of what I have learnt about the social networks of the women, and attempts to make use of these rather than trying to impose more formalised focus groups and interviews upon them.

#### **Addressing issues of consent**

Many of the women have been introduced to me and have been informed by gatekeepers that I am ‘writing a book’. I would though ensure that anyone introduced who was new to me, or who I had not had direct contact with before would receive an explanation from me as to my student role, and my intention of writing a book/conducting research about Somali families and their lives in the UK.

During an informal meeting/ conversation I would ask at an appropriate moment during the discussion if they were happy for me to write about the issues that we had just talked about. I would assure them that no one would be named, and that the intention would be that no individual would be identifiable. If anyone objected to

anything I would clarify if this were in relation to a particular aspect of the conversation or a general objection. Providing the other participants of the conversation were happy, I would omit any contributions made by the objector. Sensitive material would be negotiated with the participants to try to minimise any risk of identification of the participants. At the end of our conversation I would again clarify with the participants if they were happy for me to use our conversation for the purpose of my study.

It is hoped that my time spent informally with the women in their natural social settings would encourage a greater ease and willingness to contribute to the study, as well as ensuring that I am able to make use of valuable 'data' I am given in these informal ways. I look forward to your response. My fieldwork is to be completed by the end of December this year, so I am on a tight deadline. I would very much appreciate a speedy response. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have regarding these amendments.

Sincerely  
Jane March-McDonald  
3<sup>rd</sup> Year PhD student.  
Division of Social Work

## Appendix 2

### Topic Schedule

Welcome; introductions; ground rules; fun icebreaker.

#### Discussion Introduction

I am interested in finding out how you and your families manage your every day lives living here in Southampton. As you are aware, I have chosen several topics that will help us talk about different aspects of your family lives. You each have a copy of the set topics. I have given some examples and asked some questions to help you think about the sorts of things you could choose to talk about. You might have other things as well to contribute about the topic, and that is fine. You may have more to say about some topics than others, and again, this is ok.

Quick verbal recap of the topics.

The topics are in no set order. Are there any preferences with what we should start with? We will try and cover all the topics eventually.

#### **Being healthy and well. Feeling a sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. Coping with illness or disability**

You might think of:

You're own and your families experiences of health and illness here in the UK.

What things contribute to your family members being well, or help them manage illness. For example – you're beliefs, the things you do, family and friends, the Somali community, professionals and services in Southampton. Who or what helps you when you are struggling to cope, or feeling sad or unhappy?

*Questions for the researcher will be on a separate piece of paper, which only she and the assistant will have. Although the topics are defined as separate, there will probably be overlap/ some fluidity of discussion. Where little discussion occurs around a topic area, the researcher will probe/ clarify possible reasons for this.*

(Possible questions or areas for discussion)

- *We all want our families to be well and healthy, and not be ill. Can you tell me a little about how your families try to stay well? What are the most important things that contribute to you keeping well and healthy?*
- *We all get ill at times. Some people suffer a lot of illness. Can you talk about any of your experiences here in the UK and what has helped you to cope most with these difficulties?*
- *Sometimes our families may be physically well in their bodies, but they are unhappy or sad and don't enjoy life. I wonder how you have coped if you have felt like this or if a member of your family feels like this? Are there people, things or places that have helped? Can you tell me a little about your experiences?*

#### **Opportunities and experiences of educating our children and young people**

You might think about the experiences your children have of education in the UK. What are some of the positive experiences they have or have had at school or college? What has helped them cope well in school, both in terms of learning and being happy at school? Have there been any negative experiences for them? This might be due to difficulties with learning, or perhaps with relationships/ friendships with other children or staff, or with school/ college rules.

(Possible questions, area for discussion)

- *What are your children's experiences of school and college?*
- *What has contributed to them doing so well? / Or and*
- *How have they coped with difficulties at school, or overcome these issues?*
- *Are the issues the same for girls and boys or are there differences?*
- *What role do you think you play in educating your children for their future adult lives? Can you tell me about that?*
- *Are there things you can pass onto them that have helped you and you think will help them when they are adults?*

### **Who supports you as a family?**

Family life is often very demanding and challenging. It can be difficult trying to meet every member's needs. Can you think about the friends/organisations or professionals who have helped you most as a family or whom you would turn to for support?

(Possible questions/question areas)

- *Do you have difficulty, or have you or your family experienced difficulties obtaining support from people/ organisations when you have needed it?*
- *How do you support one another and the other families in your community? Tell me about your experiences.*
- *Can you identify sources of support, which are lacking, but which you think should be provided?*
- *Do you think that your voices and opinions can influence the local services that are provided? Have you any experiences of this you can tell me about?*

### **Families: What does it mean to me?**

There are many different sorts of families and we all have different experiences of being in a family. Perhaps you could think about your family. How would you describe it to me? Are you all living together in Southampton or are your family members spread over the UK, or the world? We often see our families as very important and significant to us. How do you feel about your family and the way they each contribute to your pattern of family life?

- *Can you tell me a bit about your family?*
- *How important is the family in helping us cope with our lives? Can you give me some examples?*
- *What helps you cope with difficult situations such as if your family has been separated, a partner leaves the family home or a family member has died?*
- *Families can also cause us lots of worries and problems. How have you managed these and what has helped you do so?*

- *There can often be challenges for parents bringing up teenagers. Do you have any experiences of this? How do you manage it/ intend to manage it when your children become teenagers?*

### **Providing our families with what they need**

Children are expensive to keep. They always seem to need things or want new things. It is difficult for some trying to provide their families with all the things they need. Often we have to go without or be very good at prioritising and managing our money and resources. Perhaps think about how you as a family manage the money you have.

- *Are there things that you do that help your money 'go further'?*
- *How do you manage or cope with money worries?*
- *What opportunities are there for you to be able to make more money? What are the barriers that stop you taking these up?*
- *Are rich people always happy people? Are there things that make you happy or content even though you might not have much money?*

### **Somali customs and values**

I am really interested in learning about Somali customs and values, such as traditions, rituals or religious practices that you as a family practice and which you think helps you and your family manage your daily lives here in the UK.

- *Can you tell me about them?*
- *How difficult is it for families to maintain these practices in a western culture?*
- *How do you manage any tensions or challenges that Somali young people might make to these traditions?*
- *How do you manage tensions and challenges that might arise in relation to what you do either by other Somali individuals or non-Somali individuals/ groups living in Southampton?*

### **(Last question)**

#### **Hopes for the future**

We all have dreams and hopes for our children and families. What are yours?

- *What hopes and dreams do you have for yourself and your children?*
- *What things do you think might get in the way of these dreams coming true?*

Examples of possible questions/ comments the researcher may use to clarify meaning, determine sensitivity of an issue/ account and establish the needs for maximising anonymity.

So are you meaning....?  
Have I got this right or not?

I will just summarise what I think you as a group are trying to say.

That seems a very difficult issue that you have just talked about. Are you happy still for it to be included in the research? What do you think we would need to change so that other people cannot tell whom it is about?

You don't seem to have very much to say on that topic, am I right or have you not understood what I am asking?

That seems a difficult issue for you discuss, am I right?  
I'm wondering why everyone has gone quiet?

That was a very strong clear opinion that you have just made. Thank you. Does everyone else feel the same?

Are there any other experiences that perhaps are different to what we have already heard?

Conclusion

Thank you for all your contributions. It has been really interesting. Do you feel that we have covered it all, or are there still things you would like to talk about in relation to the topics?

We still have some topics we have not covered, but unfortunately we have run out of time, which is a shame as I have found this really interesting? Would you be willing to meet again so we could cover the remaining topics?

## Appendix 3



**University  
of Southampton**

**School of Social Sciences**

**July 2006**

### **ETHICS COMMITTEE APPLICATION FORM**

#### **Please note:**

- You must not begin your study until ethical approval has been obtained.**
- You must complete a risk assessment form prior to commencing your study.**

- 1. Name(s):** Jane March-McDonald
- 2. Current Position** 2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD student
- 3. Contact Details:**  
Division/School Social Work Studies

**Email** jmm402@soton.ac.uk

**Phone** 02380558608

- 4. Is the proposed study being conducted as part of an education qualification (e.g., PhD)**

**Yes**

- 5. If Yes, state name of supervisor (the supervisor should complete the declaration at the end of this form)**

Professor Jackie Powell; Dr. Derek McGhee; Dr. Gillian Ruch

- 6. Title of Project:**

Refugee and asylum seekers: exploring the nature and role of resilience.

- 7. What are the proposed start and end dates of the study?**

I plan to start the fieldwork spring 2008 and complete the project 2009

- 8. Briefly describe the rationale, study aims and the relevant research questions**

Tomlinson and Egan (2002) suggest that two main discourses can be found in the literature regarding the identity and nature of refugees and asylum seekers. The dominant one is mostly informed by a problem- based, deficit model and is associated with the victim status of the refugee. While there is extensive evidence of the hardships that refugees have experienced in their country of origin and continue to encounter in the host country, the portrayal of the forced migrant identity as one of scrounger, passive victim and societal burden arguably fails to identify and acknowledge the forced migrant's autonomy and resilience in managing their daily life. (Papadopoulos et al 2004; McCrone et al, 2005). Anderson and Doyal (2002) suggest that an alternative strengths based discourse needs to take precedence when researching the lives of forced migrants, with emphasis given to understanding the nature of forced migrant's strengths, their skills and orientation to life (Al et Park, 2005; Watters, 2001; Butler, 2005). The resilience concept, which can be defined as 'the ability to overcome the odds, to sustain competence under pressure, and to recover from trauma', can provide a framework in which to explore how forced migrant families manage their daily lives amidst facing daily adversity (Fraser et al, 1999, p. 136) This study therefore does not seek to eliminate the paradigm of vulnerability which is so central to the forced migrant identity, but rather, to attempt to rebalance it, identifying, highlighting and developing an understanding of their strengths and the nature and role of resilience in their lives.

#### **Aims and objectives**

- To provide a platform for refugees and asylum seekers to voice their experiences of life in the UK.
- To explore there understanding of how they manage their every day lives.
- To contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the extent to which refugees and asylum seekers perceive themselves as victim or agent.
- To explore the notion of resilience in refugee lives.

#### **Research hypothesis and questions:**

- I hypothesise that the refugee is resilient and has resources to enable them to cope with daily life. Current approaches to refugees by policies, services and society generally, are premised on a problem-based model of the refugee as represented in the literature. At worst, these approaches undermine and diminish refugee's own coping strategies. At best they are largely irrelevant and fail to draw on or enhance refugee's own coping mechanisms.

To achieve the study's aims and objectives, stories and accounts will be invited based on different aspects of the participant's daily family life with the intention of shedding light and understanding on the following questions: how do refugee families manage their daily lives; what evidence is there of refugee's inner resources and strengths and how do they contribute to managing and negotiating risks; how are resources, both informal and formal accessed; which resources are most important to them; how could these resources be enhanced and supported; in what ways do refugee families perceive their coping resources to be undermined; do they still maintain some sense of agency over the risks they encounter, or are they overwhelmed by the accumulation of experiences?

Unexpected themes or discussion that might emerge from the interviews/focus groups will also be pursued for further insight into what is considered important to the participants to tell about their lives and family.

#### **9. Briefly describe the design of the study**

Traditionally resilience has been studied using quantitative methods, however the methodological limitations of this approach in failing to identify the meanings of risk for individuals and the processes involved in protection have been increasingly highlighted within the resilience literature. These limitations are further supported in relation to this cross cultural study in that methods are required which are able to provide thick description, context and meaning in order to aid full understanding by the researcher, a white western female, for whom the value systems and experiences expressed by participants may be alien. Framing forced migrants as active agents also will need to be reflected in the research process, with methodology emphasising listening to the voice and experiences of the participant, partnership working, and shared knowledge and meaning making.

A social constructionist approach will therefore be taken using predominantly qualitative methods, emphasising the centrality of people's accounts and meanings attributed to their lived experiences. Giving voice and recognising the frequently unrecognised voice of Somali women and their families will be a key focus. Research theories will be drawn on that highlight and address the issues of power relations with a view to challenging and changing these relations. The Somali community living in Southampton is the context for the study, with the focus being individual Somali women.

Research with forced migrants poses particular problems for the researcher. The challenge of overcoming mistrust and secrecy held by forced migrants in relation to research, formal processes and strangers is well recognised (Mestheneos, E., 2006; Mackenzie et al, 2007; Tait, 2006). Past experiences in their country of origin, the asylum process, issues around their legal status, concerns for family and friends and a lack of understanding of the nature and role of research, have all been highlighted as contributory factors for this. An incremental approach using ethnographic methods has therefore been selected to help overcome these problems; namely, using focus group techniques within existing constituted women's groups and in depth interviews using a narrative approach.

### **Established women's groups using focus group techniques**

Established Somali women's groups within the city would be approached to see if their members would be potentially interested in participating in the study. Taking advantage of these natural gatherings of women is a way of navigating the Somali cultural clan system, of which there are understood to be five or more clans based within the city. These are known to have strong membership affiliation and existing tensions between them. This system is fairly invisible to the western outsider, further reinforced by an absence of discussion outside of the Somali community in relation to them (Luling, 2006; New Communities Team, Southampton City Council, 2007). It would be hoped that at least three different groups might participate in the study, with a maximum being six. A female research assistant (PhD student from School Of Social Work) will assist the researcher in the running of the groups.

### **Interviews**

Following participation in the groups, participants would be asked if any would be interested in also participating in individual interviews at a later date. Having had an opportunity to establish some trust and rapport with the women, it is hoped that some might feel confident to do this. It would be made clear that not everyone who indicates an interest in this would necessarily be asked for an interview, but rather the researcher would seek to ensure some members from each of the groups participating were included. Other criteria for selection for interview would be language competence (given the demands of interviews using a narrative approach), and a diversity of experiences and views.

Participants expressing a potential interest would be asked to provide a contact name and telephone number. Those later selected by the researcher would be contacted by phone and an appointment made to meet at a venue of their choice, to discuss the information contained within the information sheet, answer any questions and negotiate where and when the interview should be conducted. The researcher would contact potential participants forty-eight hours after this meeting to hear their decision regarding participation, and confirm an appointment for the interview. If there is limited or no interest in participating in individual interviews, the researcher may also approach key Somali women informants who have not taken part in the group sessions.

Individual case studies provide an opportunity to gain a greater depth of understanding of forced migrant lives, particularly in relation to trying to understand how risk and protective processes impact on family life, as well as recognising and allowing the researcher to hear and understand the unique stories that women have to tell. It also recognises that it may not be appropriate, or participants may not feel comfortable, sharing some aspects of their lives in a group setting (Mackenzie et al, 2007).

Permission would be sought from participants for the researcher to record the groups/individual interviews. If there is not agreement with this, then detailed notes will be taken by the researcher/ research assistant.

## **10. Who are the participants?**

The participants will be Somali adult women (aged eighteen and above), regardless of legal status, living within a family in Southampton, and either pregnant, and /or having

children under the age of eighteen in their care. The study's focus will be family life seen through the lens of Somali women.

The Somali community is the largest refugee community in Southampton, with an estimated population of 1500-2000 individuals (Southampton City Council, 2007). Within the UK the Somali community has been perceived as problematic; making demands on public policy, regarded by professionals as difficult to work with, and accused of failing to make any attempts to integrate into the host community. (Harris, 2004; March-McDonald, 2007). The size of the community, they're perceived problematisation within the literature and my own experiences of working with Somali families as a health visitor, has influenced the study focus.

The forced migration literature predominantly focuses on male refugees or ungendered refugees, though increasingly it is recognised that gender impacts on refugee / asylum seeker experiences. A focus on families has frequently been limited to the Therapeutic / Mental Health literature, or in relation to children and young people. The Psychological literature related to forced migrant families often takes a systemic approach to the family unit, as oppose focusing on the individual experiences of the family members, or one person's account of their family members experiences. The researcher recognises that there may be differences of interpretation in relation to the concept of family and this will need to be explored with participants. The gendered nature of the study hopes to address some of the cultural issues/difficulties for women participating in research, and reflect the need to give voice to those who are often silent in public life.

**11. How will they be identified, approached and recruited to the study?**  
*(Please attach a copy of the information sheet if you are using one)*

Please see appendix A, information sheet.

Having worked as a health visitor in the inner city for four years I am familiar with some of the key organisations and venues which Somali families/ women meet at or use. I also have an established network of professionals who I have worked with professionally, or who have been involved with my previous research, conducted four years ago for an MSc in relation to forced migrants. I have informally approached some of these professionals to discuss their views on the research, its acceptability and implementation. They have also been able to direct me to other key gatekeepers, who either run some of the groups for women, or who play a key role in the Somali community. The feedback and support for the study has been surprisingly good, with promises made to support the operation of the study once ethical permission has been obtained. It would be anticipated that the gatekeepers would act as a go between in seeking out their group's interest in participation, providing information about what is involved to the participants, and inviting me into the groups to discuss more fully the research and to obtain their views and feelings about how they would like the sessions conducted.

The Somali community traditionally have an oral culture. The use of leaflets and posters, even when translated into Somali, are considered to have limited success in communicating information to the community. Some members are illiterate both in Somali and English, though they may speak two or three languages. Word and mouth is therefore regarded as the most effective form of communication (Olden, 1999). This requires the identified, agreed gatekeeper, telling their members/ contacts, about the study and introducing me to them at their settings so that I can talk through the information sheet and answer their questions directly. Issues such as time commitment, confidentiality, tape-recording, venue and childcare would also be discussed. An information sheet would be given to gatekeepers and potential participants, with Somali and English versions available. Questions would be answered as fully as possible by the researcher with the group members, with those preferring a more private conversation, or having questions arise at a later date, being encouraged to contact the researcher by phone or email.

The venue in which the group sessions take place ideally would be the venue of their meeting so as to provide a familiar setting and time, making attendance by agreed participants more likely. An alternative venue has been offered by the local Central Sure Start organisation,

along with the offer of its staffed crèche facility. This facility is already used by some of the women when attending their groups, so would again provide a familiar setting.

**12. How will you obtain the consent of participants?**  
*(Please attach a copy of the consent form if you are using one)*

Within research the principles of respect for persons and beneficence are enshrined and governed by ethical, legal and professional frameworks which emphasise the importance of informed consent (Mackenzie et al, 2007, p. 30; Wiles et al, 2005) Balancing the competing interests of all parties represented within the research process is very challenging. Research involving refugees raises specific concerns in relation to this issue. Mackenzie et al (2007) suggest that informed consent is 'premised on the assumption that participants are autonomous, understand the implications of giving consent and are in relatively equal positions of power with researchers' (Mackenzie et al, 2007, p302). Refugee's vulnerability due to past trauma, status, relationship to the host country and their lack of experience and understanding of formal research processes may impinge on their ability to make an autonomous informed decision about participation. Omidian (2000) states that individuals who have strong cultural notions of trust as well as fear in relation to official processes may feel that the request to sign a consent form undermines and insults their verbal consent to participate

**Information sheet (See appendix A)**

In attempting to address some of these issues, attention is first given to the information necessary to facilitate informed choice. Homan (1991) suggests that informed consent may actually not be possible due to practical issues such as being unable to fully explain the nature of the study and the researcher not knowing all the consequences of participation (Homan, 1991, cited Wiles et al, 2005). Reviewing the literature in relation to this issue Wiles et al (2005) suggest that the crucial message about providing information is:  
'That researchers understand the information needs of the group that they want to research and that they use this knowledge to provide information in a way that will enable potential study participants to understand what participation may involve'

(Wiles et al, 2005, p.13).

In designing the information sheet for this study attention has been given to ensuring the design and lay out are clear and concise so as to not overwhelm those struggling to read it (Alderson, 2004, cited Wiles et al, 2005). The style of writing is friendly and informal, though conveys the formal research process in a way that is hopefully accessible to the reader who may have limited understanding of research, and also non threatening to those reluctant to be involved with formal processes. University headed notepaper is used emphasising the researcher's student position and educational affiliation, hopefully assuring potential participants of its independence from government/ Immigration bodies. The researcher will also be seeking the advice and opinions of key Somali workers on the information sheet, consent form and process, recognising their input to be crucial to the likelihood of achieving informed consent (Ensign, 2002, p. 47). Alterations occurring in procedures or consent documentation will be resubmitted for ethical approval.

Information sheets will be available in both English and Somali and will provide information regarding the broad aims of the research; what it hopes to achieve, what would be expected from their involvement, contact numbers and email for the researcher and her supervisor so that potential participants/participants may contact to ask questions or discuss concerns, along with assurances that participation or non participation in the study does not effect their rights to services, their status, or be likely to have any other adverse effects on themselves or their families.

**Procedure for presentation of information**

Given the potential communication problems outlined earlier, the information provided will take both written and verbal forms. An informal presentation will be arranged with each group outlining the information sheet and the consent form and providing additional detail. The researcher will check throughout the procedure that information has been understood, by reemphasising/rewording phases, giving space for and encouraging questions, answering

questions as fully as possible, identifying possible underlying missed meaning from questions and clarifying any confusion. Other important issues to be discussed will include issues of informed consent and confidentiality. Practical issues for the running of the session will also be discussed. It would be hoped that by demystifying the research process and the researchers' role, it would contribute towards allaying fears, promoting understanding of the procedures and allow opportunity for negotiation of preferences and requests to occur and be responded to. Initial interest for participation will be assessed, though individuals will require further time to make up their minds regarding their participation or not.

Following this information session, the researcher will contact the group leader within a week to identify participant numbers and arrange a date for the session.

#### **Consent forms (see appendix B and C)**

Consent forms will be verbally read and discussed by the researcher and signed by willing participants on the day, prior to commencement of the research session. Prior to signing, the researcher will ensure that opportunity is given for questions to be answered and that individuals have understood information. Consent forms will state individual agreement to participation in the study and their awareness that they can withdraw at any time from the research process at any stage. A research assistant will be available to help ensure the smooth running of this process.

#### **Remuneration**

The remuneration of refugee participants for their time and inconvenience as a result of research participation is known to have had mixed responses (Mestheneos, 2006). There is no general consensus on the appropriateness of remuneration for research participants. Refugees are thought to suffer hardship. Incentives therefore may undermine for them the concept of informed consent. (Wiles et al, 2005; Ensign, 2003).

Those participating in group sessions will be provided with light refreshments by the researcher, though no other remuneration on the grounds that they would have travelled to and spent their time at the group session anyhow. Even if given something at the end of the session, in a small community, others would hear of it and this might influence their decision to participate in other groups. Truman, (2003) highlights that some might consider the provision of refreshments a form of inducement. (Truman, 2003, cited Wiles et al, 2005, p. 15). For those providing individual interviews, between ten and fifteen pounds would be given at the end of the planned sessions, along with reimbursement of travel expenses upon receipt. Traditionally, non-monetary gifts might be considered the preferred option, however asylum seekers experiences of voucher systems make this less appropriate (McGhee 2005: 69).

While attention has been paid to the initial process of providing information and gaining informed consent, many researchers argue that consent and related ethical issues are an ongoing, central part of the research process which the researcher should be mindful of and responsive to as they seek to build trusting and ethical research relationships. This reinforces the need and value of regular diary keeping of the research process and its critical reflection by the researcher (Mackenzie et al, 2007; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Shaw, 2003).

#### **13. Is there any reason to believe participants may not be able to give full informed consent? If yes, what steps do you propose to take to safeguard their interests?**

Language barriers are a potential problem inhibiting informed consent. Emphasis has been placed upon both written and oral presentation of the information and consent procedure. Written information will be available in both Somali and English which individuals will be able to take home with them to read/ have read by someone on their behalf. The researcher's previous experience of working with the Somali community, and communities whose first language is not English, is that informal interpretation takes place within the group for those with more limited English language.

The aims of the research and the possible benefits to the participants and their community will be discussed in the informal presentation to the groups, or in the advance meeting with individual potential interviewees. This will ensure that potential participants are not consenting to participation based on misconceived expectations. Potential participants will be

encouraged to contact the researcher to answer any questions, or clarify any remaining issues they may have.

**14. If participants are under the responsibility or care of others (such as parents/carers, teachers or medical staff) what plans do you have to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?**

Informal consultation has taken place by the researcher with some key gatekeepers regarding their interest in the research and the likely interest of their group members. The positive response of gatekeepers has been attributed to the researcher's previous employment in the area as a health visitor, and that she has known many of them. Accessing refugees in research is known to be problematic, but drawing upon prior contacts, known credibility and reputation can contribute to overcoming this issue (Tait, 2006). To date the researcher has identified three settings in which Somali women regularly meet and informants have indicated a possible further three. The researcher plans to contact key gatekeepers once ethical permission is granted for the study to negotiate entry into the groups to discuss the research with its members. The use of several gatekeepers provides opportunity for the researcher to inform and represent a variety of Somali networks in the study.

The issues of using gatekeepers in relation to refugee research is well documented, particularly in relation to their vital role in identifying individuals and groups, given the 'hidden' nature of the community, along with issues of representation and voice (Tait, 2006). Refugees are recognised as a vulnerable group and in need of protection from those that might seek to exploit them. Gatekeepers in carrying out this role may be over protective of their clients, or speak on their behalf without consulting them over their wishes. The researcher's responses from gatekeepers have been open and welcoming. The researcher is aware of the dangers of gatekeepers making assumptions about individual's decisions to participate, and emphasis on individual informed consent will be made (Stalker, 1998). If granted permission to approach the groups, members will have the opportunity to hear about the study first hand and make an informed choice about their individual voluntary participation. As adult women over the age of eighteen, organisations/ or gatekeepers have no legal rights over member's decision to participate or not. Those deciding not to participate in the group discussions will be assured that this will not effect their group membership or participation in group activities in the future in any way. Somali women group leaders will be entitled to take part in the discussion group session if they should wish, but the researcher will be observant for any behaviour that would suggest that they were attempting to dominate or dictate the discussion or to silence any other member. This would be dealt with sensitively by the researcher and discussed and documented by the research assistant with the researcher either at the break or at the end of session. Gatekeepers will not be given information about what is said in the discussion groups, but will be invited to the verbal feedback session and given a written report of the overall findings of the study.

**15. Briefly describe what participation in the study will involve for study participants. Please attach copies of any questionnaires and/or interview schedules to be used**

See appendix D

Participants participating in the discussion groups will be required to attend the group on the day and time agreed by the members. They will be invited to discuss issues and experiences in relation to six areas of Somali family life in the UK, as highlighted by the literature. They will have been informed of the key areas for discussion in the introductory initial contact session. Sessions may be taped if all are in full agreement. Notes will be taken by the research assistant if this has not been obtained. The discussion will last between one hour and one and a half hours with a ten-minute comfort break in the middle and refreshments on arrival. Participants can contribute or remain silent, as they feel comfortable during the session. At the end of the session, participants will be asked if they feel they have covered everything. Another session will be offered as a follow up if there is a general consensus they would like to meet one more time and that they have more to contribute on the topics.

For those agreeing to individual interview, participants would be asked to meet with the researcher (and interpreter if required) on a day and time mutually agreed. A venue would be chosen that provides suitable conditions for interviewing, but which the participant is

comfortable with. I.e. client's home, Sure Start organisation, CLEAR voluntary organisation. Participants would be asked to talk about their experiences in relation to the preset broad categories. The interview would last between one to two hours with short breaks if needed. Up to two further sessions would be arranged if participants felt that they had more to say in relation to the subject. The researcher is keen to allow participants time to say what is important in relation to the topics, but also mindful of the need for a strategy that is manageable. Between six and ten participants would be required by the researcher.

**16. How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time without penalty?**

The right of participants to withdraw their consent to participate in the study without it effecting their rights and entitlements or that of any of their families will be stated verbally at the group introductory session/ prior to the pre interview session and also prior to signing consent. This information is also contained within the information sheet and the consent form, which is available in both Somali and English. Questions on issues of consent and withdrawal will be answered as fully as possible by the researcher. Prior to seeking agreement of, or commencement of any additional sessions either in relation to discussion groups or interviews, participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research. It is recognised that the inherent power differential between the researcher and participant may make it difficult for individuals to voice their desire to withdraw consent. The researcher will be mindful of this throughout the research process. Careful attention will be paid to possible negative body language, apparent disinterest or lack of responsiveness and disruption, and responded to by checking with the individual at an appropriate opportunity if they are happy to continue (Wiles et al, 2005). Individuals may feel pressured by the group to participate/ continue to participate or feel a duty to the organisation or researcher. Encouraging individuals to contact the researcher about any concerns by phone or email may help by providing some sense of detachment from the group or research setting.

**17. Detail any possible distress, discomfort, inconvenience or other adverse effects the participants may experience, including after the study, and how this will be dealt with.**

It is not possible to categorically state the discomfort, distress or inconvenience that participants may potentially experience, however the researcher has tried to identify and anticipate ways to minimise the likelihood of this occurring, informed by her knowledge of the literature. Participants will have been informed of the possibility that the research may raise concerns or issues which they may require support with, and have given their informed consent to participate in the light of this knowledge.

**Minimising potential distress, discomfort and inconvenience in relation to group participation**

Using ready constituted groups ensures that participants are familiar to each other, are comfortable in that group setting and are prepared to spend their time with each other. The broad discussion categories allow participants to select those things they feel comfortable talking about. It is recognised that this focus may still cause possible upset as discussion may make reference to, or bring to mind aspects from the past or current distressing situations. The researcher will draw upon her acquired skills from midwifery, health visiting and counselling in recognising signs of distress and responding sensitively to needs should they arise. In the event of an individual becoming distressed during a session, the researcher will discuss with them what would be most helpful and take the appropriate action. This may involve listening, providing time out, discussing sources of local support and their contact numbers. It would be made clear that the researcher would not have the capacity to provide ongoing support, or possibly have the skills to do so. A discussion would be held at an early appropriate time to see if the participant felt it was still in her best interest to continue participating in the research.

The participant may find that the distress experienced in a supportive empathetic group has beneficial effects, in highlighting the need for support from services/and or the other women. At the end of a session all participants will be reminded that the researcher is able to advise them of local organisations and professionals who will be able to provide support, depending upon the nature of the problem, if they should require this.

### **Minimising potential harm, distress or inconvenience caused by language barriers**

A significant number of the Somali women are known to speak good/ reasonable English. The interested group participants would be asked their preferences for interpretation. It may be they do not wish to introduce a Somali outsider into the group, preferring to translate themselves for those with limited English. Alternatively they could be offered a formal translation service, either using a local agency or one from another city. This though would be dependent on availability. All women participating in the interviews would also be asked for their individual preferences.

Temple and Edwards (2006) highlight a lack of methodological discussion to be found within the literature regarding the role of interpreters and translators in the research process for those for whom English is not a first language. This absence is particularly noted in relation to interviewing and focus group methods. Adopting their stance that the interpreter makes a significant contribution in the co construction of knowledge, an informal interview would be held by the researcher prior to an individual undertaking any formal interpreting duties, to explain the aims of the research, discuss the importance of confidentiality and their accountability in this, and to make visible the social location of the interpreter. Careful thought and consideration would be given in conjunction with the group in deciding who would be suitable for the role. This is particularly relevant for a community divided by clans and with a past history of civil war. Jacobsen and Landau (2003) highlighting the complexities of introducing interpreters to refugee communities suggest they may 'incur the risk of transgressing political, social or economic fault-lines of which the researcher may not be aware' (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, p.9).

Individuals, if providing a substantial informal interpreting service, would be asked if they would be willing to be interviewed by the researcher. The procedure for recruiting individual interview participants would be followed.

### **Minimising potential distress, harm or inconvenience caused by individual interviews**

Refugees are known to have suffered trauma to varying extents both in relation to their past experiences in their home country, their journeys to the host country and their current daily life experiences (Papadopoulos, 2001). No questions will be asked about the nature of their experiences in the past or their reasons for entry into the UK. To address possible negative associations the participants might have with interviews, gained either in their country of origin, or as a result of the asylum process, in depth interviews will be open-ended with participants invited to tell stories and accounts about their lives in relation to the preset broad categories used in the discussion groups allowing for additional data and further clarification and the development of themes and new themes to emerge. Participants will be asked to talk about the set categories as they feel comfortable, therefore allowing the participant to lead the interview and to 'hold the floor' beyond the limits of the usual turn (Mishler, 1996, p.74). At the end of the session they would be asked if there was anything that they felt to be important that had not been covered, and invited to do so.

### **Minimising harm and distress to individuals and the Somali community**

Attention to issues of anonymity and confidentiality will be vital in reducing the likelihood of harm to the participants following the study. (See question 18) It is not possible to anticipate the potential for harm to the Somali community as a whole caused by the study, however Harris (2004) in his authoritative review of the literature in relation to the Somali community in the UK suggests that qualitative research studies which portray the voices of Somali individuals introduce 'agency, open a window on the process of social life, illuminate generalisations, and counter the essentialisation of groups and communities' (Harris, 2004, p. 17). He also highlights the emphasis placed on the self reliant, active agency of the individual within Somali culture, and its disjuncture from the problem based, victim hood Somali/ refugee research that predominates. The orientation of this study seeks to redress this problem.

## **18. How will participant anonymity and confidentiality be maintained?**

### **Anonymity**

Anonymisation, in which an individual or group is made unidentifiable to the reader, traditionally is considered to be central to gaining potential participant's confidence to participate in a study and in safeguarding them from potential harm resulting from their participation (Grinyer, 2002). For refugees, issues relating to their status, their uneasiness

with formal processes, and their activities in the host community and within their own communities, would suggest the importance of ensuring anonymity. Anonymity issues will need to be discussed and negotiated with the groups/ individuals prior to and during the data collection process. Participants name and contact number/or contact point will only be required to be known by the researcher. No other demographic details will be asked for. Discussion groups and individual interviews will be taped (if agreed), transcribed, used for the purpose of the research and made anonymous. Pseudonyms will be discussed and chosen by participants, (though avoiding duplication, or using an initial as well if necessary) given the researcher's limited knowledge of Somali names and the need for the Somali community to be able to relate to them (Grinyer, 2002). The different groups, referred to by pseudonyms, will be identified as being from a city located in the south of England. Detailed description of the groups will occur within the PhD thesis and other related material.

The small Somali community in Southampton may require the researcher to change some characteristics of individuals if the information is considered sensitive in order to preserve individual's anonymity. If this is thought to be required, the researcher would attempt to clarify with the informant at the time whether they felt it necessary to change any characteristics to aid anonymity and if they were happy for this information to still be included even if anonymity could not be guaranteed (Ensign, 2002; Grinyer, 2002). The researcher is aware that there is a balance to be obtained in changing characteristics of the data and maintaining the integrity of the data and careful consideration would be given to this. Individuals would also be encouraged to talk about their own experiences and that of their families rather than other people. Attention would be given to the anonymisation of any other individuals referred to in the study.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality would be assured, with no information being shared with gatekeepers, organisations or family members without prior consent from the participant. It would be made clear however that the researcher has a duty to disclose information if it indicated that a child or a member of the family was, or was in danger of being physically or psychologically harmed or abused. The involved participant would be informed of the researcher's concern, consent to disclose sought and information given to the appropriate agency, including if consent had been refused. The researcher would inform her supervisors of any such concerns and seek their advice prior to any none consensual disclosure being made.

The researcher generally would attempt to avoid participant's disclosing incriminating criminal evidence, such as that related to illegal status, involvement of smuggling activities, benefit fraud etc. by redirecting discussion/ conversation, reminding participants to be mindful of what they might be saying or implying or asking them to stop the account (Wiles et al, 2006) This reduces the likelihood of the researcher having to break the confidentiality agreement.

Issues of confidentiality and the use of interpreters/translators have been discussed. (See question 9).

### **19. How will data be stored securely during and after the study?**

The researcher will record the data using mini disk recorders. These will be transcribed anonymously by the researcher onto a Microsoft Word File and stored on home computer in 'my documents' section. Only the researcher uses the computer account and it is password protected, known only to the researcher. All data will also be stored on a portable external hard disk which is password protected, known only to the researcher. When not being used, the external hard disk will be stored in a locked drawer. Back ups will be made on CDs and stored in a secure place at the University in case of fire. All written notes and used discs will be stored in a secure drawer. The researcher, and possibly her supervisory team, will only have access to this. The researcher will carry out the analysis using a qualitative computer software package (still be decided). This will be stored on my home computer, documents section and will be password protected. CD backups of the analysis will be made and stored securely both at home and the university. Tapes, transcriptions, identification codes and back up discs will be retained for fifteen years in a secure place following completion of the study. The data will be used for the purpose of this PhD research and any papers and reports that follow directly from the research.

**20. Describe any plans you have for feeding back the findings of the study to participants**

Oral feedback (using an interpreter if required) will take place initially to each of the groups that have participated with an informal presentation of the main initial findings from the overall group sessions. Participants would be invited to contribute any thoughts and responses to this feedback and this would be documented. An oral presentation is thought most appropriate given the issues with written language and the expense and complexities of producing written Somali feedback. Feedback needs to be carried out as soon as possible, given that some members may have left groups or moved out of the area. The researcher would ask participants of individual interviews, how they would like to have feedback. Options would include meeting and providing verbal feedback, or a succinct written summary in English being sent or collected from an organisation. Negotiation of what would be viable and acceptable would take place in anticipation that an individual/ group member might move out of the area, or change their address/ contact point, making feedback more challenging.

**21. What are the main ethical issues raised by your research and how do you intend to manage these?**

**Language barriers**

Researching with individuals who lack fluency or understanding of English, the language the study is to be conducted in, raises significant ethical issues regarding the researcher's and the participant's ability to really understand what is said and meant by each other. Introducing a third person into the research relationship, the interpreter, raises issues concerning validity, confidentiality and questions regarding their impact upon the data. Cultural understanding of what is said also is a significant challenge for a white western female researcher. These issues cannot be entirely eliminated, but remain a challenge, and areas for critical reflection by the researcher throughout the research process. The methods chosen for the study emphasise the need to hear and understand individual meaning and context of experience and allow for full accounts to be given in the order and way that individuals feel they need to be told, thus contributing to fuller understanding by the researcher. The researcher is/ will also need to immerse herself in Somali/ African culture, through reading, talking with key workers/ asking questions and checking understanding and tradition, and by checking my understanding with participants. Critical reflection of my research diary with follow up of any questions it may highlight will also contribute to this learning process by the researcher.

**Sensitivity and contentious nature of the research**

Researching with refugees/ asylum seekers is a contentious and politically sensitive area, with strong emotions and views held by many on the subject. Hayes and Humphries (1999) define sensitive research as 'areas of social life that are contentious or highly conflict ional' (Hayes and Humphries, 1999, p.19). The researcher, as the research instrument and co constructor of knowledge, will reflect and be influenced by her political, ideological, research and professional values and this will require reflection and transparency on her part, through the process of regular diary keeping and discussion. The study's objectives, among others, are to impact positively on the lives of Somali communities in the UK, through potentially creating greater, accurate knowledge based upon the voices of Somali people, and by influencing professional practice and policy makers. However Finch (1985) draws attention to the concern that findings can actually worsen a situation for a community/ individual or reinforces negative assumptions and prejudices (Finch, 1985, cited Shaw, 2003, p. 24). The researcher cannot predict this necessarily, nor is it easy to manage. The researcher though will seek to be reflective on what she is hearing and how data is selected and represented in writing and reports. Attempts would be made to ensure emphasis is not given to more extreme examples of accounts that might catch reader's attention, or to particular viewpoints or perspectives, but rather chosen to represent the diverse experiences and views of the community. The researcher will need to be watchful she doesn't fall into the trap of trying to present evidence of resilience at the expense of representing what is a balanced representation of what is said, in order to compensate or influence public opinion. Thought must also be given throughout the research process to issues relating to future dissemination of the findings, recognising that this may include ambiguous or even hostile audiences. Attempts may be made to render the work invisible by those in more powerful positions,

seeing it as not a priority (Hayes and Humphries, 1999). This is particularly relevant for the area of this study, as Somali refugee families make up only a small number of the population.

**22. Please outline any other information you feel may be relevant to this submission**

A health and safety check will be carried out by the researcher with her supervisors prior to commencement of data collection.

I do not feel that there is any additional information that will be relevant to this submission .

**Please include your research proposal with this form**

**Supervisor/Grant-holder/Research Student Declaration**

**I have discussed this application with the applicant and support it.**

**Any further comments:**

**Supervisor/Grant-holder:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Research Student:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

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## Appendix 4

Information letter (University headed paper)

Assalamu alaikum.

Hello, my name is Jane March-McDonald and I am a student at Southampton University studying for a PhD. The research I plan to undertake is to enable me to obtain my PhD qualification from the University. It is therefore independent of any formal organisations or agencies. I am asking if you would be willing to help me with my research.

### What is my research about?

I am interested in understanding how Somali women and their families living in Southampton manage their everyday lives- for example, the sorts of things you do everyday in managing and caring for yourselves and your families, the things that help you do this well, and also some of the problems you face and overcome or struggle with as you try to manage daily life. My research hopes to listen to what women have to say through women's discussion groups and also by talking to some women on their own.

### What would I have to do if I say yes to take part in this research?

If you agree to take part in a discussion group along with other Somali women from your group, you could expect it to take between an hour and an hour and a half. If there is a lot to talk about and you feel I have not heard everything you want to say I can arrange a further session on another date. There will be variety of topics set to discuss. You would be asked to listen to what each other has to say and contribute to the discussion as you feel comfortable. You do not need to talk about anything that you prefer not to and only need to contribute when you want to talk about your own experiences and thoughts on the subject. I will provide some light snacks and drinks for us to have together before the discussion group begins. A female helper who is also a student will attend the session to help me in the running of the session.

I will also be asking if you would like to talk with me on your own or with an interpreter of your choice at a later date so as to give you a better opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences in more depth. I may not be able to include everyone who wants to do this as I need to seek as many different views as possible from the different Somali women's groups. If you were asked to participate, I would arrange to meet with you for about an hour and a half to talk about the set topics. You may find this time insufficient to cover all that you want to tell me and therefore we could agree to meet again for another one or two sessions if needed.

### Will taking part harm me in any way?

Taking part in the research is voluntary. You choose whether to take part or not. If you decide not to take part, this will not have any negative effects for you or your family and will not change your rights to services, your status or your life and that of your families in any way.

If you decide to take part, you can still change your mind at any time during your involvement and have no further involvement with the research. You will not have any negative effects from this decision.

Although the aim is for you to be comfortable with the discussion, you may feel that it highlights a problem or a concern you are trying to deal with.

I would be able to try and identify a local organisation or person that would be able to support you with this issue if you should need this.

I will ensure that what you tell me is kept safe and that you as an individual are unable to be identified by what you say.

### What can we do if we are not happy with anything that occurs during our involvement?

I have a supervisor, someone based at the university, whose role is to support and guide me as a student researcher. If you have any concerns about the way I have worked with you, or about the research itself, please contact my supervisor Professor Jackie Powell to discuss your concerns. Her telephone number is..... and email address

[J.M.Powell@soton.ac.uk](mailto:J.M.Powell@soton.ac.uk)

### What if we find it difficult to talk in English?

It is important to me to allow everyone a chance to speak about the things they want to contribute, whether or not they are able to do this in English or Somali. I will talk to you /your group and see what your preferences would be for having interpreting and translation.

### What feedback will I get?

When I have completed putting all the findings together from the different discussion groups, I will arrange to come back to your group and tell you the main things that have been spoken about.

### How do I make contact with you?

I am very happy for you to contact me on my mobile number..... or email [jmm402@soton.ac.uk](mailto:jmm402@soton.ac.uk) if you have any questions, are unsure about any aspect of what you have been told or read, or if you change your mind about participating. I am also at CLEAR on a Tuesday morning, so you could pop in to see me in person.

Thank you for your time in reading this information letter.

Jane March-McDonald

## Appendix 5

University of Southampton,  
School of Social Sciences  
Postgraduate Research Office

Assalamu alaikum.

Hello, my name is Jane March-McDonald and I am a student at Southampton University studying for a PhD. The research I plan to undertake is to enable me to obtain my PhD qualification from the University. It is therefore independent of any formal organisations or agencies. I am asking if you would be willing to help me with my research.

### What is my research about?

I am interested in understanding how Somali women and their families living in Southampton manage their everyday lives- for example, the sorts of things you do everyday in managing and caring for yourselves and your families, the things that help you do this well, and also some of the problems you face and overcome or struggle with as you try to manage daily life. My research hopes to listen to what women have to say through women's discussion groups and also by talking to some women on their own.

### What would I have to do if I say yes to take part in this research?

I am asking if you would like to talk with me on your own (or with a female friend), so as to give you an opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences on this subject. I would arrange to meet with you for about an hour and a half to talk about the set topics. You may find this time insufficient to cover all that you want to tell me and therefore we could agree to meet again for another one or two sessions if needed.

### Will taking part harm me in any way?

Taking part in the research is voluntary. You choose whether to take part or not. If you decide not to take part, this will not have any negative effects for you or your family and will not change your rights to services, your status or your life and that of your families in any way.

If you decide to take part, you can still change your mind at any time during your involvement and have no further involvement with the research. You will not have any negative effects from this decision.

Although the aim is for you to be comfortable with the discussion, you may feel that it highlights a problem or a concern you are trying to deal with. I would be able to try and identify a local organisation or person that would be able to support you with this issue if you should need this.

I will ensure that what you tell me is kept safe and that you as an individual are unable to be identified by what you say.

**What can we do if we are not happy with anything that occurs during our involvement?**

I have a supervisor, someone based at the university, whose role is to support and guide me as a student researcher. If you have any concerns about the way I have worked with you, or about the research itself, please contact my supervisor Professor Jackie Powell to discuss your concerns. Her email address [J.M.Powell@soton.ac.uk](mailto:J.M.Powell@soton.ac.uk)

**What if we find it difficult to talk in English?**

It is important to me to allow everyone a chance to speak about the things they want to contribute, whether or not they are able to do this in English or Somali. I will talk to you /your group and see what your preferences would be for having interpreting and translation. Some people may find this a good opportunity to practice their English and gain confidence and experience.

**What feedback will I get?**

When I have completed putting all the findings together from the different discussion groups/ individual interviews, I will arrange to tell you the main things that have been spoken about, either in person or written.

**How do I make contact with you?**

I am very happy for you to contact me on my mobile number 07842877850 / telephone number 02380558608 or email [jmm402@soton.ac.uk](mailto:jmm402@soton.ac.uk) if you have any questions, are unsure about any aspect of what you have been told or read, or if you change your mind about participating. I am also at CLEAR on a Tuesday morning, so you could pop in to see me in person. Thank you for your time in reading this information letter. I hope that you are able to pass it onto the female person in your household if appropriate.

Jane March-McDonald

## **Appendix 6**

### **Pen Outlines of Formal Participants**

#### **Eighteen formal participants taking part in group and/or individual interviews**

**Name:** Awo

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Ethiopia, Sweden

**Marital status:** Widowed 2008

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Good; studying level three

**Location living:** Tower block, city centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** At Sagal's meeting

**Additional information:** Two children

**Name:** Carla

**Origin:** Northern Somalia

**Migratory year:** Left Somalia aged 19 years. Travelled and worked in Italy, Yemen, returned to Somalia, Denmark and finally the UK in 2000.

**Marital status:** Single parent

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Good

**Location living:** City centre, housing association flat.

**Role in community:** Syrod's aunt

**Where met:** While visiting Syrod

**Additional information:** Two sons in their late teens. Came to UK when unable to get recognition of her nursing qualification in Denmark. Suffers from chronic health problems. Aged over fifty but has no known birth year.

**Name:** Faham

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Finland with her husband

**Marital status:** Single parent

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Studying level two

**Location:** Centre of town, housing estate

**Role in community:** Community group leader

**Where met:** Identified as key gate keeper

**Additional information:** Two children

**Name:** Farhah

**Origin:** Northern Somalia

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Sweden. In UK past four years.

**Marital status:**? Separated. Husband lives in Sweden

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Studying level two. Unconfident.

**Location living:** City centre

**Role in community:** Best friends with Sagal and Habon.

**Where met:** Sewing group

**Additional information:** Five children. Chronic health problems

**Name:** Fathai

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Denmark

**Marital status:**?Separated

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Good

**Location living:** Locally

**Role in community:** Related to Sarah

**Where met:** Visiting Sarah

**Additional information:** Four children

**Name:** Fatima

**Origin:** Northern Somalia

**Migratory year:** Unknown. Via Sweden

**Marital status:** Single mother

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Very poor

**Location living:** Centre of town

**Role in community:** Member of Yusra's group

**Where met:** Brought to small group interview by Yusra

**Additional information:** Four children

**Name:** Habon

**Origin:** Northern Somalia

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Left Somalia aged twenty six. Via Kenya and Finland.

**Marital status:** Married

**Clan:** Hawiye

**Level of English:** Good

**Location:** City centre

**Role in community:** Prominent active member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Sagal's group meeting

**Additional information:** Worked as an evening office cleaner. Five children.

**Name:** Idil

**Origin:** Northern Somalia

**Migratory year and route:** 2003

**Marital status:** Partner

**Clan:** Isaac

**Level of English:** Level three; speaks also fluent French

**Location living:** Housing estate near city centre

**Role in community:** Fringe member

**Where met:** Henna social gathering

**Additional information:** One child. Pregnant and gave birth during the period the fieldwork period. Suffers from Acute and chronic health problems. Degree educated. One other clan member living in the city.

**Name:** Lana

**Origin:** Southern Somalia

**Migratory year:** 1990. Via Saudi Arabia. In UK since 2006

**Marital status:** Married. Husband lives in Saudi Arabia

**Clan:** Rahanweyn

**Level of English:** Good

**Location living:** Outside of city centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Henna social

**Additional information:** Two children. Degree educated. Only clan member

**Name:** Marianne

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** 2001

**Marital status:** Married

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Level two

**Location:** City centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Sagal's group

**Additional information:** Separated from husband, moved to London during fieldwork. Two children.

**Name:** Mya

**Origin:** Mogadishu, Southern Somalia

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Kenya and Holland. In the UK one year

**Marital status:** Married. Husband living in Holland

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Good. Speaks fluent Dutch

**Location living:** City centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** While visiting Haban

**Additional information:** Marital difficulties. Husband left the family home. Two children. Came to UK to find full time employment and support of her aunt.

**Name:** Nadif

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** 2005

**Marital status:** Married

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Level one

**Location:** Housing estate just outside city centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Sagal's group meeting

**Additional information:** Five children. Husband left Somali in 2003 urgently. Nadif joined him in 2005

**Name:** Sagal

**Origin:** Northern Somalia

**Migratory year:** Unknown. Lived in Sweden several years. In UK four years.

**Marital status:** Married

**Clan:** Darod

**Level of English:** Good

**Location:** City centre

**Role in community:** Women's group leader

**Where met:** Identified as key gatekeeper

**Additional information:** Five children.

**Name:** Sarah

**Origin:** Mogadishu

**Migratory year:** Left Somalia 18 years ago. Via Norway

**Marital status:** separated

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Level three. Speaks fluent Norwegian

**Location living:** Housing estate just outside city centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Out walking around the housing estate

**Additional information:** Five children. Degree educated.

**Name:** Syrod

**Origin:** Southern Somalia

**Migratory year:** 2001

**Marital status:** Married

**Clan:** Darod

**Level of English:** Excellent

**Location:** City centre, housing estate

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Henna social

**Additional information:** Two children. Also attended the sewing group. Degree educated. Came to UK as part of an arranged marriage.

**Name:** Ubah

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Holland. Lived in UK one year.

**Marital status:** Unknown

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Limited

**Location living:** City centre

**Role in community:** Member of Sagal's group

**Where met:** Sewing group.

**Additional information:** Two teenage children. Hanni's aunt.

**Name** Yusra

**Origin:** unknown

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown; Via Holland. In UK five years.

**Marital status:** Single parent

**Clan:** Darod

**Level of English:** Level four. Speaks five languages.

**Location living:** City centre

**Role in community:** Community leader of a women's group

**How met:** Identified as key gatekeeper. Contact by phone and informal meeting

**Additional information:** Eight children including a chronically ill toddler. Degree educated. Qualified swimming attendant.

**Name:** Zahara

**Origin:** Unknown

**Migratory year and route:** Unknown. Via Holland. In the UK eight months.

**Marital status:** Married

**Clan:** Unknown

**Level of English:** Limited

**Location living:** City centre

**Role in the community:** Supported by Yusra

**How met:** Brought by Yusra to small group interview

**Additional information:** Zahara did not formally meet the criteria for inclusion in the study as she had no children, however she was keen to join in the group session. She hoped one day to start a family. She attends college, studying English and is employed by the college.

## **Appendix 7**

### **Researcher attending Eid celebration**



**Appendix 8**  
**Researcher attending the sewing group**



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