‘Will to survive’: the lives of young people with ‘no papers’ in the UK

Yeşim Deveci

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In memory of Parmjit Singh

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Abstract

This thesis explores the everyday lives, life histories, hopes and dreams of young people (aged 17 – 25 years old) with irregular/undocumented immigration status. The project grew out of 15 years’ experience of working with young refugees and migrants in an urban context and a desire to understand more about the lives of those without authorised status in the UK. Drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews with seven young people, the findings suggest that undocumented youth survive on a continuum moving between life and death; their aliveness or closeness to death impacted by multiple psychological and socio-political factors.

This thesis has three main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to document and honour the participants’ stories in ways which represent not only their struggles but also their capacity to continue living in the face of adversity and to hold hope for the future. Secondly, it delineates the ways practitioners in social care, health, education, youth and community work, might help this group of young people to construct their everyday lives safely. Thirdly, building on a psychosocial relational ontology informed by black feminism and decolonial thinking, the thesis looks to advance critical reflexive scholarship grounded in principles of respect, kindness and justice.

Overall, the results of this empirical enquiry confirm that individual lives cannot be understood through attending only to that which is spoken and speakable. Rather, any attempts to understand lived experience must also consider that which may be unspoken or unspeakable. From this perspective, attention to emotions and a willingness to embrace embodied ways of knowing and learning can offer deeper insights into the lives of others. Interweaving participant testimonies, empirical research and theory, with poetry and prose, this thesis attempts both to represent the lives of young people with ‘no papers’ and to speak to the complexity of such an endeavour.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> “All you have to do to see Immigrant X is open your eyes and see those standing in the shadows and hear a whisper that injustice reigns.”
>
> (EBMD Collective, 2014)

> “The boy had a delightful curious face. "Do you live in London?" he asked Obinze. "Yes,” Obinze said, but that did not tell his story, that he lived in London indeed but invisibly, like an erased pencil sketch; each time he saw … anyone in uniform, anyone with the faintest scent of authority, he would fight the urge to run.”
>
> (Adichie, 2013:318)

No-one quite remembered when Anil started attending the Centre I worked in, or how he found us but before long he had become a familiar face. He was charismatic, funny and full of tales about his future plans. He told us that he lived with his father. However, as time passed we realised that he lived alone in a room with two other boys his age, on the top floor of a house occupied by another family. Despite his visibility at school and in the community, Anil was trying his best to remain invisible to the authorities as he had no legal status in the UK.

Reading *Americanah*, (Adichie, 2013), I was reminded of Anil and wondered whether he lived in constant fear of discovery. I wondered how he had ended up in the UK alone, and what the future held for him. Later in the novel when Obinze is invited to a dinner party he reflects that

> “…Alexa, and the other guests … all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty."

(Adichie, 2013: 341)

Anil was from India and like Obinze seemingly 'raised well fed and watered' and yet here he was living with no papers, trying to survive undetected by the state. Reflecting on Anil and Obinze's struggles I realised I have countless stories, from my personal and professional life, that relate to the question of immigration status or 'papers'. I recall taking Munir to claim asylum and being asked "you're British, you have papers?" and reluctantly admitting, "yes, I have papers." I remember feeling acutely aware of the injustice which meant that he, as a refugee from Afghanistan would be subject to endless scrutiny, forced to justify his existence on British soil while I, by virtue of being born in the UK, had a British passport. As a Turkish Cypriot I am all too aware of the good fortune of having 'accidental citizenship in a western democracy' (ImmigrantX, 2013); I remember waiting with my cousin for hours at the French embassy for a visa. Finally we reached the front of the queue for Cyprus and he produced his Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus passport; the response, "this country doesn't exist."

For me the quotes from *Americanah* capture something of the lives, histories and dreams of those whose existence is framed by their immigration status. Questions of belonging, recognition, legitimacy; an idea of lives lived here and now but also elsewhere; of time and timelessness, the tensions between hopes and reality; the possibilities of choice and choicelessness; our agency within the options available to us at a given moment in time.

It is these thoughts and reflections which led me to this research project. This chapter will provide a brief context to the origin of the project, the research questions and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Beginning

This research originates from 15 years of work with children and young people subject to UK immigration control. I started working with young migrants and refugees more by accident than design. I had a part-time job in a community centre in the late 1990s when significant numbers of young people began to arrive from Kosovo and Albania on their own in search of protection and safety. Community work is about responding to need and so relationships are built around the work; my days were spent with young people: going to the Home Office, liaising with social workers, therapists, solicitors, drinking tea, talking (Deveci, 2012: Deveci, 2019). Whether playing Jenga at Youth Club, or on the way to appointments, or during the endless periods of waiting there were ample opportunities to get to know young people, share stories and build relationships. This frontline work exposed me to some of the realities of the lives of those subject to UK immigration control and the uncertainty of life in limbo. However, alongside these well-documented struggles I also observed the tenacity and persistence of these young people's desire for life, their incredible capacity to continue striving for a more positive future and to make use of the possibilities of the present moment.

In 2001 myself and other colleagues took a group of young people away on a residential weekend to plan a conference for practitioners in health, social care and education working with young refugees. After much debate the young people decided the conference should be called 'Dreams, Struggles, Survivors' as this best reflected their experiences (The Children's Society, 2002). The day-long event was attended by more than 100 professionals and young people and included poetry, music, photographic exhibitions and dance alongside workshops led by young people for practitioners on areas such as housing, immigration, and education. It concluded with all the young people on the stage in a spontaneous performance to Destiny's Child '*Survivor*.'

I started the professional doctorate programme in 2010 while still working at the community centre. It has now been many years since I have accompanied someone to sit for hours in the freezing waiting rooms at Lunar House,[1] where the combination of

[1] UK Visas and Immigration, (Home Office) is based at Lunar House in Croydon, London.

metal furniture and air conditioning remind anyone present of how unwelcome they are in the UK. Or danced with the children and young people on a residential weekend, helped to prepare a meal for the Friday Feast at Youth Club, or even written a supporting letter to the Home Office. However, it is this perspective of dreams, struggles and survival that underpins the creation of this research project.

1.2 Searching for understanding

In his call for a different kind of psychological inquiry, Miller Mair (2010)[2] describes a process of searching for understanding. Searching, he says:

> "…is about following what you sense and feel but do not yet know clearly what that is. It is about entering what is still unknown, sensed but still out of reach. It is about giving form to feeling and coming to know more of what you seek and are involved within. It is about conjuring into 'reality' ways of saying and seeing something of what has, till then, been intangible and unimaginable." (Winter & Reed, 2015: 168)

In seeking to learn of the experiences, thoughts and feelings of young people who live in London without legal status I was mindful of trying to involve myself in the lives of those people who often do not wish to share information about their lives for fear that it will place in them in danger. Therefore the focus of my inquiry needed to be broad enough to ensure that I would be able to engage young people in contributing to the study and that whatever they were willing to share would go some way to answering my central research question. My primary research question therefore became *'what are the hopes and dreams, everyday lives and life stories of young people living in London with 'no papers?*'

My interest in undertaking this research was to represent something of the lives of young people with 'no papers' in ways which engaged with the multiplicity and complexity of their stories. I wanted to capture a sense of their past (life histories), present (everyday lives) and imagined future (hopes and dreams). I was concerned to locate their

[2] Keynote address at 10th Conference of European Personal Construct Association, Belgrade, Serbia, 9–12 April, 2010

‘undocumented lives’ in the context of their histories and possible futures as a way of resisting the erasure of these aspects of their lives in public space.

Secondary questions included

- What stories do these young people tell about their lives?
- How do they live their lives?
- How do they imagine their futures?

Once I had a framework of questions that was flexible enough to allow participants to contribute what they felt most relevant I considered how best to create conditions in which they would feel able to speak. The theoretical concepts which inform my reflexive relational approach are introduced in Chapter 2 and the specific methods used are described in detail in Chapter 3.

1.3 The unfolding tale

In this thesis, I intend to take the reader through the research process by mapping the terrain, telling stories and sharing my journey and learning en route. I present a brief overview of the structure below:

Chapter 2: Literature Review examines the research, literature and theoretical concepts that relate to the research topic and associated data.

Chapter 3: Methodology details the research design and approach, including key ethical considerations and how the data was collected and analysed.

Chapter 4: Analysis examines the elements which shape the latter half of the thesis particularly how stories are told and heard, the interplay of trauma, power and relationships and questions of reflexivity and representation.

Chapter 5: Seven Portraits is a collection of portrait poems using the participants' words to represent the young people who participated in the research.

Chapter 6: Nameless Death explores death and death like states in the young people's narratives and the experience of living with death as a constant presence.

Chapter 7: Life explores the ways in which the young people stay alive, hold hope and strive for a better future.

Chapter 8: Conclusion considers the research findings and discusses their implications for practitioners and academics, the strengths and limitations of this project and possible avenues for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I trace the curve of your jaw
with a lover's finger
knowing the hardest battle
is only the first
how to do what we need for our living
with honour and in love
we have chosen each other
and the edge of each other's battles
the war is the same
if we lose
someday women's blood will congeal
upon a dead planet
if we win
there is no telling
(Lorde, 2017: 225)[3]

2.0 Introduction

Audre Lorde has kept me company while writing this thesis. At times when I have faltered or been too weary to continue, I pick up my well-worn copy of *Sister Outsider* or the more recently published *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* and read until I find something to 'give name to the nameless so it can be thought' (Lorde, 1984: 37). I have re-read this final verse of '*Outlines*', countless times in recent months thinking about 'the edge of each other's battles' as I think about those who have lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean in search of safety, those who have been victims of police brutality and the millions who have organised in protest against these systemic injustices.

[3] 'Outlines' was originally published in 1997 in '*The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*'.

Outlines speaks to the urgency of the present moment; Lorde's (1997) words are both timely and prophetic signalling the importance of the choices we make every day. From this perspective this chapter offers an outline of the empirical research, literature and poetry which has informed and influenced this project. In section one, I begin by presenting a brief summary of some of the key empirical research about the lives of undocumented young people in the UK. I have not provided a detailed legal and policy framework in relation to immigration as this is a well-documented context and not the focus of this project; particular aspects of immigration policy emerge in other parts of the thesis as relevant. In section two, I discuss the ontological and epistemological perspectives which inform this study. In the final section, I reflect on the literature and poetry which have shaped my approach to this project and particularly the literary style I have adopted in writing.

2.1 Well-trodden paths

The Covid-19 lockdowns have shone a merciless light on our everyday lives and the continuum of life and death. For some, it is the first time that daily life has been pared back to the essentials. For others, living in precarious circumstances, daily life has always been about survival. As we count the bodies of the dead, the disproportionate impact of Covid 19 on black and brown people has highlighted the deeply ingrained structural inequalities which determine the ways in which we live and die.

2.1.1 Is the Home Office racist?

More than a decade ago a student on placement asked me "Is the Home Office racist?" I paused to consider how to respond and eventually replied "in my experience, yes." Today, numerous articles, reports and books provide clear evidence of systemic discrimination as part of the fabric of UK immigration legislation, policy and practice (Bhattacharya et al, 2021; De Noronha, 2020; Goodfellow, 2019). In November 2020 the Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHCR) published its Public Sector Equality Duty assessment concluding that the government broke equalities law with a raft of measures designed to create a hostile environment for immigrants (Gentleman, 2020). The

Windrush Lessons Learned Review published on 19 March 2020 found that the "causes of the Windrush scandal can be traced back through successive rounds of policy and legislation about immigration and nationality from the 1960s onwards, the aim of which was to restrict the eligibility of certain groups to live in the UK" (Williams, 2020:7). The 'Windrush Scandal' was not an accident, but the inevitable consequence of a system constructed to create an unliveable environment for those deemed 'illegal (The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, no date). In fact, those who had arrived as part of a 'Windrush generation' had arrived from colonies and former colonies decades ago as *citizens* and settled in the UK legally. Recent scholarship which charts the evolution of immigration, asylum and nationality laws and processes of bordering draws attention to the complex interplay between colonialism and empire, immigration control and race in the creation of citizens and non-citizens (De Noronha, 2019; El Enany, 2020; Bhambra, 2015; Yuval Davis et al, 2019). In 'Bordering Britain' El-Enany (2020: 34) argues that British immigration law is an extension of colonialism and that "the decision to include or exclude certain people from legal status is intricately tied to processes of legitimisation of sovereign and colonial power." Furthermore, Bhambra (2016) demonstrates, the Commonwealth Immigration Acts of 1962, 1968, and 1971 were enacted in order to restrict the freedom of movement of these darker-skinned British citizens. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage in an extensive discussion of the politics and racialised nature of immigration control (De Noronha, 2020) and practices of everyday bordering (Yuval-Davis et al, 2019). However, it is an important frame to hold in mind when considering the experiences of young people with 'no papers' in the UK. The legislation, discourses and everyday practices which combine to construct the hostile environment and Windrush scandal provide the backdrop to their stories and significantly impact their everyday lives. In the section below I offer a brief overview of the empirical research in relation to the lives of young people in the UK with 'irregular' or 'undocumented' immigration status and locate this thesis in the context of the extant literature.

2.1.2 Immigration status, numbers and meanings

The ways in which people end up with irregular immigration status are multiple and may include refusal of asylum applications, visa overstaying, bureaucratic failures in processing immigration applications and, to a lesser extent, unauthorised entry (Sigona & Hughes, 2010; 2012). The task of estimating the number of migrants in the UK and

particularly those with irregular status is near impossible, characterised as 'counting the uncountable' (Vollmer, 2008). A report commissioned by the Greater London Authority estimates that there were around 674,000 undocumented migrants in the UK at the beginning of April, 2017 (Jolly *et al.*, 2020: 4). It estimates that 215,000 of the undocumented population of the UK are likely to be children. Considering the situation in London, Jolly (2020) estimates that there are 397,000 undocumented migrants and their UK born children, a figure which includes 107,000 children and 26,000 young people.

Children and young people migrate for numerous reasons - in search of safety and protection, to support their families, for a better life - their immigration status tells us little, if anything, of the history behind the decision to leave home. Much of the literature in this field stresses that young people in particular, transition between regular and irregular statuses during their migratory journey (UNHCR/Council of Europe, 2014, Bloch *et al*, 2014; Schuster, 2011). Bloch and McKay (2017:71) argue that being undocumented is "one stage in a fluid process between different types of status". Similarly, Crawley and Skleparis (2018:59) note that people "can and do shift between and across categories both in their countries of origin and as they travel through space and time." While there exists a tension between official immigration categories and the meanings attached to 'irregularity' or 'undocumented' by young people; immigration status is relevant and significant as a descriptor because it defines the rights, or lack of rights, associated with particular status. Despite the fluidity of meanings, as Crawley and Skleparis (2018: 59) observe, categories of immigration status are "not merely an issue of semantics. Categories have consequences. They entitle some to protection, rights and resources whilst simultaneously disentitling others." Often, as in the context of the hostile environment policies and public discourse there is a merging of irregular/undocumented status and illegality. Gonzales *et al* (2019:25) explore both how this illegality is produced by a range of factors offering the concept of *illegality assemblage* and theorise the lived experience of migrant illegality in relation to belonging. Gordon *et al*. (2009) definition of 'irregular migrants' includes people who have entered the country illegally, migrants who have been lawfully in the country but have stayed beyond their permitted period and children born in the UK to irregular migrant couples (Gordon *et al*, 2009: 4 -5). Acknowledging the contested and complex meanings inherent in any choice of vocabulary in relation to writing about migration, I have used the words 'undocumented' and 'irregular status' interchangeably in this thesis to refer to persons who do not have

the right to remain in the UK. I also use the term 'no papers' as these are the words most often used by young people to describe their precarious immigration status and captures something of the psychosocial experience of being undocumented.

2.1.3 Empirical research with undocumented children and young people in the UK

In their review of the academic literature Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2014) note that there is a growing body of work on irregular migration and irregular migrants to be found in a number of academic disciplines including sociology, geography, social policy, law, politics and anthropology. The experience of living in limbo without status or indefinite leave to remain in the UK is reflected in the literature on young refugees and migrants (Allsopp *et al*, 2015; Bloch et al 2014; Brighter Futures 2013; Deveci 2012; Gladwell & Elwyn 2012; Kohli, 2014; Matthews 2014; Allsopp and Chase, 2019; Chase, 2020) Restrictive immigration and citizenship policies mean that many children and young people have grown up with uncertain and/or irregular immigration status which significantly impacts on their everyday lives, health and wellbeing (Apland & Yarrow 2017; Chase, 2017; Thomas *et al* 2018; The Children's Society, 2018). However, despite the recent growth in scholarship about young migrants, and particularly unaccompanied migrants, there remain a scarce number of publications which focus specifically on the lived experiences of children and young people in the UK with irregular or undocumented immigration status.

To date there have been two major studies in this area and both are funded by independent charitable trusts. Barrow Cadbury Trust funded the first of these projects, focusing on undocumented migrant children in the UK. The study drew on a review of existing evidence and on two sets of in-depth semi-structured interviews: 53 interviews with irregular migrant children and parents and 30 interviews with stakeholders including public service providers. Interviews were conducted in London and Birmingham. The report '*No Way Out, No Way In: Irregular Migrant Children and Families in the UK*', (Sigona & Hughes, 2012: 8) is the first to provide an estimate of the number of irregular migrant children living in the UK and puts the number at 120,000, the majority of whom were either born in the UK or migrated here at an early age. It examines the conflicting

policies governing the protection of children's rights and immigration in the UK and focuses on the children's and families' everyday experiences and highlights their lack of access to public services such as education and health care. These findings are echoed in a report titled '*Growing Up in a Hostile Environment: the Rights of Undocumented Migrant Children in the UK'* by Coram Children's Legal Centre (2013) which reviews cases and queries undertaken by the Migrant Children's Project over an 18 month period.

The second major piece of research in this area was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) and focuses specifically on the experiences of young people aged 18 and above. In 2007 PHF commissioned City University's Department of Sociology in partnership with the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University to carry out qualitative research into the lives of young undocumented migrants in the UK (Bloch *et al.,* 2009). In-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 75 young people aged 18 – 31 from Brazil, China, Zimbabwe, Ukraine and Kurds from Turkey who were living irregularly with no legal right to reside in the UK at the time of their interviews. Interviews were carried out in London, the North West and the West Midlands by researchers with first language skills (Bloch, 2013). The project has resulted in a number of publications; the research report 'No right to dream' (Bloch *et al.,* 2009), several peer-reviewed articles by (Bloch, 2013, Sigona, 2011; Bloch *et al* 2011) and the book '*Sans Papiers: The Social and Economic Lives of Young Undocumented Migrants*' (Bloch *et al.,* 2014).

A key strength of Bloch, Sigona and Zetter's (2009) research is that field researchers were recruited with appropriate first language skills thereby enabling participation by young people with differing levels of English. There is some discussion of the complexity of positioning researchers from the same ethnic and linguistic groups as the participants as 'insiders' (Bloch *et al*, 2014:8). However, there is no consideration of the equally complex power dynamics in the relationships between the field researchers and university team and the impact of these intersections of gender, ethnicity, language, class, status, history on the production of knowledge. This lack of reflexivity is particularly problematic given that the nature of the research is concerned with documenting the lives of those who are not in a position to challenge the representation of their experiences. There is some discussion in the report about the process of data collection (Bloch *et al*, 2009) but none about the process of analysis. Throughout the literature the authors have effectively erased themselves from the project, except by references to the 'university-based

research team,' as if their own position is entirely neutral and has no bearing upon the data which is collected and presented as a reflection of the lives of young people with no papers. This apparent lack of reflexivity raises epistemological questions about the extent to which the authors' theorisation of the participants' lives meaningfully represents their experience. These criticisms notwithstanding, the work by Sigona, Hughes (2010, 2012) and Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2014) has made a significant contribution to knowledge in relation to the phenomena of irregular migration in the UK and the experiences of children and young people who are undocumented. Taken together the two research projects began to map the field in relation to the social worlds of this group of children and young people.

More recently, research by legal and social work practitioners has focused attention on the challenges faced by undocumented young people in England. Skehan *et al* (2017) draws on an analysis of 52 cases of children and young people supported and represented by the Migrant Children's Unit specialist legal service (The PROTECT project) between July 2012 and October 2016. The report draws attention to how barriers accessing quality legal representation and relevant services further compound the challenges faced by undocumented young people and increases their vulnerability, placing them at risk of developing physical and mental health problems, and of exploitation and abuse. Thomas *et al* (2018) research commissioned and funded by Barnado's identifies the prevalence of undocumented children in London and the boroughs with particularly high numbers of undocumented children and families. Alongside this the study identifies the emotional health and wellbeing support needs of this group through a review of the existing research literature and qualitative interviews with nine participants: five young people aged between 17 and 24, all of whom had initially come to the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and four parents. The findings broadly support those of previous research with this population and like Skehan et al (2017), Thomas *et al* (2018) make recommendations for service delivery, policy and research. These two reports are helpful in documenting 'what we know' about the lived experiences of children and young people with irregular status and particularly their experience of health and social care and legal processes. They add to the body of evidence which draws attention to the vulnerabilities and risks present for undocumented children and young people and the necessity of systemic change to address the practices

and policies which create and exacerbate their struggles and limit their opportunities to live full lives.

Despite a marked growth in research around migration in recent years, including a number of publications about young migrants and studies which draw attention to the ways in which bordering policies increasingly restrict the lives of those deemed 'non-citizens' there has been little attention paid to a detailed psychosocial exploration of being young and undocumented. Research about and with this population falls largely into one of two camps; 'academic' research which offers a theorised account of experience and 'practitioner' research which offers an account of experience within a 'service delivery' framework. By this I mean that the focus is on developing an understanding of the 'service user' experience in order to develop more responsive and effective models for service provision e.g. assessment and support.

While both these approaches are necessary and important there is, in my view, a significant gap in the conversation, in the space between these approaches. The space for experiences which cannot be fitted into existing frameworks or understood in relation to an overarching theory. The stories of those who are not linked into services, or for whom participating in research carries too many risks. The experiences which cannot be spoken or easily captured in words. The space in between is where this thesis is located.

I began this enquiry with a desire to learn more about the life histories, everyday lives, hopes, fears and aspirations of young people living in the UK with irregular status. I was concerned to enable them to tell stories about their lives in ways which were whole and reflected the complexity and nuances of their lived experiences. Moreover, I was mindful of my responsibility as the narrator of the stories shared and committed to documenting their lives in ways which honoured the stories told. In the following section, I discuss some of the literature which has informed the ontological approach and epistemic perspectives privileged in this study.

2.2 Hidden tracks

In Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) seminal work '*Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*' she states:

> "Researchers enter communities armed with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets, they bring medicine into villages and extract blood for genetic analysis." (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012: 25)

In drawing attention to the relationship between researcher and researched Tuhiwai Smith (2012) identifies research as an "institution of knowledge that is embedded in a global system of imperialism and power" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012: ix). From this perspective, the researcher is invariably positioned within a system which replicates existing power structures, systemic discrimination and injustices. A view that the research project serves a greater good or has an emancipatory goal for an oppressed community does not in and of itself erase the reality that knowledge creation always takes place within the context of relationships of power (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). *Decolonising Methodologies* explores the intersection of the worlds of indigenous peoples and the world of research and is concerned with the context in which research is conceptualised and designed, and with the implications for its participants and their communities. Notwithstanding the significant contextual differences between the worlds Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes and the location of my own research project, the concerns raised about values and practices of research and its relationship to power offer a helpful lens through which to examine research with young people with 'no papers'. In the section, below I explore questions of power and positioning by introducing some of the theoretical concepts which have informed this project and consider questions of ethics and reflexivity in empirical research.

2.2.1 Theoretical lenses and epistemic perspectives

Gergen's (2009) *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community* opens with a critique of the concept of the individual self as the fundamental atom of society. Gergen's (2009) focus is the exploration of relational being; a move away from an individualistic tradition which foregrounds a bounded self towards an understanding that all meaning is generated through a process of collaborative action, through relationships. Clandinin *et al* (2018: 18) use the term 'relational' to signal "the relationship between knower and what is known, between knowing and action, between how one knows what one knows." The

proposal that all knowledge is produced through relationships is helpful in that it requires us to attend to both power relations and the idea of multiplicity of perspectives; hence the possibility of multiple voices which can challenge the primacy of a single dominant narrative.

Beyond a relational ontology, the epistemic perspectives which inform this project are Black and women of colour feminisms and decolonial thinking, both highly contested fields of thought that offer a multiplicity of approaches with which to challenge single stories, fixed frames and dominant narratives. It is beyond the scope of this project to explore these ideas in any detail and so I have identified aspects which have particular relevance for this study. Garcia-Rojas (2016) in her discussion of women of colour feminisms argues that

> "Since women of color theorize from a structural position that implicates not only their embodied selves but also their communities, the language of self that they put forward reflects how they navigate intricate desires, hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality, institutions of power, and social structures of violence that have historically and continue to disproportionately impact the livelihood of their communities and themselves." (Garcia-Rojas, 2016: 2 -3)

As a woman of colour this quote resonates with both my personal and professional experience and reflects the ways in which I write. In Mignolo's (2011) discussion on (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience he quotes Frantz Fanon's closing prayer in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) 'Oh, my body, makes me always someone who questions' (cited in Mignolo, 2011: 274), arguing that Fanon

> "…expressed, in a single sentence, the basic categories of border epistemology: the bio-graphical sensing of the Black body in the Third World anchoring a politics of knowledge that is ingrained both in the body and in local histories. That is thinking geo-and body-politically. […] Border epistemology goes hand in hand with decoloniality. Why? – because decoloniality focuses on changing the terms of the conversation and not only it's content." [Mignolo, 2011: 274 -275]

I've found the concepts of embodied bio-graphical knowledge situated in the historical context of the colonial project very helpful in thinking about both my own biography and those of the young people in this project; the ways in which our migration stories intersect with histories of colonialism cannot be ignored. In ways which are both similar and different we have become 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004) black and brown bodies whose presence disturbs and disrupts white space (Deveci, 2019). Although a very diverse body of work, common themes that run through the work of Black and women of colour feminism are the ways in which experience and knowledge is anchored in "hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality, institutions of power, and social structures of violence" (Garcia-Rojas, 2016: 2 -3). This attention to positionality which reverberates through feminist and decolonial thought demands a critical approach to 'the terms of the conversation' (Mignolo, 2011: 275) requiring researchers to think across, beyond and within structural and interpersonal relations when considering questions of ethics and integrity.

2.2.2 Ethics and reflexivity

In 2018 the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) adopted a Code of Ethics as an initial position for active, critical engagement with ethical issues in research in situations of forced migration (IASFM, 2018). The Code's definition of 'people in situations of forced migration' includes a broad spectrum of people who have been forced to leave their homes regardless of the reason for their displacement. Setting aside the significant differences between the experiences of those children and young people who left their countries of origin due to fear of persecution and those who were too young to make a choice and left their homes with family or to join family in the UK, the Code offers a helpful framework for critical reflection on research with young people with irregular immigration status. Drawing on the principle of 'Do No Harm' the code encourages researchers to pay particular attention to the ways in which "research – directly or indirectly – can (re)traumatize, as well as contribute to racism, xenophobia and the criminalization of migration" (IASFM, 2018: 2). It calls on researchers to "think carefully about the messaging that will be disseminated through interactions with media and policy makers." In applying research ethics, the Code outlines five key principles to be upheld: autonomy, equity, diversity, competence and partnership. For the purposes of this thesis, the principles of autonomy, equity and diversity are particularly pertinent.

On autonomy, the Code considers issues of participation and representation and acknowledges that "too often forced migration researchers are positioned as 'experts' on other people's lives and experiences, and too often speak for, or in the name of, people in forced migration" (IASFM, 2018:2). I have addressed these questions of participation and representation in differing ways in Chapter 3, in relation to methodology and in Chapter 4, specifically focusing on representation. On equity, the Code identifies 'intersecting, unequal power relations, which are exacerbated in forced migration contexts' (IASFM, 2018:2). I consider questions of power and positionality, below, as a means of engaging mindfully with power relations to mitigate their impact on the research relationship and results. On diversity, the Code draws attention to the diversity of experiences and perspectives on forced migration and commits to proactively seeking out those who are 'marginalized or excluded from decision-making and research processes' (IASFM, 2018:3). Again, an awareness of multiplicity of experiences and of the possibilities and limitations of engaging with and representing this complexity through research, is a theme which runs throughout this thesis.

In Meloni *et al's* (2015) discussion of relational ethics in research with children and youth, Meloni draws on her experience of fieldwork with undocumented youth in Canada as part of a larger mixed methods study (Meloni *et al,* 2014). Meloni *et al.* (2015) posit that this research was inevitably linked to the wider socio-political context and as such the topology of power, rights and relationships which framed the young people's lives needed to be considered. Prior to exploring the specific ethical dilemmas of fieldwork, Meloni *et al.* (2015) outline the context for the research and explore questions which relate to the positioning of their research within this context. The latter half of the article is narrated by Meloni and a number of the questions she raised resonated with ones which preoccupied me in the early stages of my research; is it ethical to document the undocumented? If people seek to remain invisible then how should I approach them? Should I even approach them at all? (Meloni *et al.,* 2015: 6). Alongside these questions she also explores the possibility of paralysis if focused primarily on the potential risk of harm and suggests that in trying to respect the right to remain hidden we may inadvertently exclude participants from the 'right to be properly researched' (Beazley *et al.,* 2009 cited in Meloni *et al.,* 2015). She argues that undocumented children are doubly vulnerable as *minors* and as *undocumented* people but that excluding them from research renders them potentially voiceless (Meloni *et al,* 2014).

Reflecting on this dilemma I was reminded of Arundhati Roy's (2004) acceptance speech for the Sydney Peace Prize where she suggests that "We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." Roy (2004) states that she cannot claim to accept the prize on "*behalf* of those who are involved in the struggle of the powerless and the disenfranchised against the powerful", saying "I am a writer who cannot claim to represent anybody but myself." Undocumented young people are in many respects disenfranchised and unheard. This places a particular responsibility on those undertaking research with this group to think not only about the 'how' in terms of 'negotiating access' but also the 'how' in terms of research methodologies and representation and specifically 'how' to support deliberately silenced voices to be heard. Moreover, Roy's statement that she cannot claim to represent anyone, reminds us of the need for reflexivity in research and in particular the importance of recognising our own positionality.

Meloni (2015) describes her experience of negotiating access to undocumented youth through building relationships and trust with the adults which surrounded them and the ambiguity of her position in various contexts. Reflecting on power relations Meloni notes that many categories of identity, such as her age, ethnicity, and social class, significantly influenced the ways in which the young people perceived her. She discusses these visible and invisible similarities and differences in some detail in terms of her experience of undertaking the research and establishing her position. In Sirriyeh's (2020) research with undocumented youth in California, she draws attention to aspects of her identity which provide points of connection and difference with the participants, saying:

> "I was a child migrant, and I am the daughter of a refugee, but I am also a citizen of the country in which I reside, do not live in the United States and am not of the same ethnicity of my research participants. Therefore, although we had points of connection, I was not an insider researcher.' (Sirriyeh, 2020: 4)

To my mind there is no simple binary in terms of an 'insider researcher' or 'outsider' in research but rather multiple points of connection and difference or disconnection. In the context of my own research, I have some points of connections with the participants including most significantly histories of migration and colonialism and the experience of

being racialised as ‘Other’ (El-Enany, 2020). However, I was born in England, I am a British citizen and have lived with this privilege all my life. Meloni *et al* (2015:113) describe how in the course of their fieldwork they took a political and moral position while acknowledging the complexities of different ethical perspectives. As someone who has the privilege of citizenship but worked for many years with those who do not, I, like Meloni et al (2015) have taken a political and moral position in undertaking this research. In a context where the desire to create a hostile environment for undocumented migrants is an explicit policy objective, it falls on those with the power to do so to make political and moral choices about our own position. In Poh Lin Lee’s (2012: 2) reflections on her work with asylum seekers on Christmas Island she writes:

> “I have come to understand that through these relational ethics I am attempting to embody the very opposite elements of torture and trauma, the very opposite of the detention system that depersonalises, demands justification of people’s experiences, and reinforces notions of power and non-choice.”

This conscious attempt to embody a different kind of engagement with those whose voices have often been silenced is evident in recent scholarship with refugees and migrants (Back & Sinha *et al*, 2018; De Noronha, 2020; Chase & Allsopp, 2020). In Meloni *et al* (2015:108) ethics are conceptualised as relational, an ‘intersubjective and reflexive dialogue’; a conversation between researchers and participants, a research practice which enables the researchers to listen to not only what the participants say but also to attend to the silences. In the final section of this chapter, I turn my attention to listening and imagining and discuss the layered form of writing which has emerged in this thesis as a reflection of the lives of young people with no papers.

2.3 Unknown trails

> "And now here is my secret. It is a very simple secret: it is only with the heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye."[4]

The fox's secret in Sainte-Exupery's (1987) magical fable *Le Petit Prince*, reminds us of the role of emotions in shaping our understanding of the world. The place of emotions in academic research has historically been relegated to the space of the 'subjective experience' to be acknowledged or managed, largely incompatible with the task of 'objective research' (Ahmed, 2014; Behar, 1996; Meloni, 2020). To a large extent, scholarship in the field of undocumented migration has focused on mapping and theorising the phenomena (Bloch & McKay, 2017; Gonzales *et al*, 2019). More recently, ethnographic approaches which foreground the lived experience of those who are undocumented have taken precedence, engaging the reader in stories about the participants beyond the carefully selected 'data extracts' (Gonzales, 2016; De Noronha, 2020; Sinha & Back, 2018). This shift towards giving greater space for the stories of participants has in some instances been accompanied by a more reflexive 'vulnerable' form of writing in which the personal: elements of autobiography, emotional experience of research, reflections on the 'dilemma of witnessing' are included as part of the academic text (Behar, 1996; Meloni, 2020).

2.3.1 Feeling and thinking

Drawing on feminist and post-structuralist critiques which demonstrate that "what is relegated to the margins is often…right at the centre of thought itself" (Ahmed, 2014: 4), Meloni (2020) reflects on the role of emotions in shaping knowledge and ethical orientation in the context of fieldwork with undocumented youth in Montreal, Canada. Emphasising the possibilities of a reflexive approach which invites researchers to "explore issues of power in the field and create more collaborative practices," Meloni (2020:1) calls for rethinking emotions at an epistemological level and re-examining them as central to

[4] My translation, original text "Voici mon secret. Il est très simple: on ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.' (Sainte-Exupery, 1987: 2)

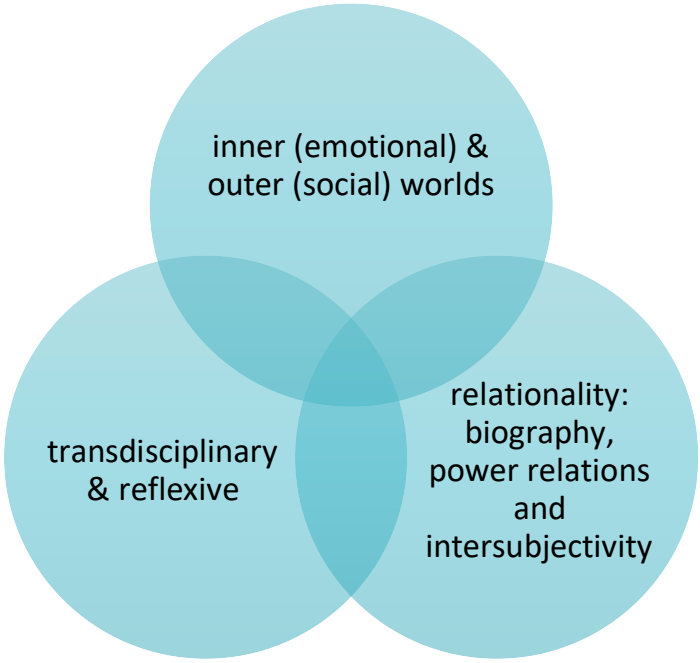
the politics of knowledge. The connection between emotion and epistemology is significant in considering the context in which knowledge is created and then produced through text. My perspective is that knowledge is birthed through an interaction between beings, not only in words spoken but through emotions, which, while intangible, nonetheless shape experience, knowledge and understanding of events.

When Gergen (2009) asserts that "we come into life through relationship" he draws attention to co-action as more than words, refuting the distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication describing them as threads in a seamless whole, "remove the threads of any, and the cloth is undone…or it becomes part of a different garment" (Gergen, 2009: 34). From this perspective any textual attempt to reflect the research process, encounters between researcher and participants and knowledge co-created must attend to both words and feelings expressed and the silences left in between. In my view a text which attends to the fullness of experience cannot rely on a solely 'academic' or 'scientific' form of writing which fits the conventions of a traditional thesis. Instead, it needs to evoke an emotional response in the reader, drawing upon the reader's capacity to imagine the life of another by weaving in threads of poetry and literature beyond the extant empirical research and familiar theories.

As outlined in Chapter 1. the impetus for this research project comes from my experience of direct work with children and young people subject to UK immigration control. Young people subject to immigration control cross countless geographic and everyday borders in attempts to build their lives safely. To my mind it was important therefore to ensure that the theoretical frames my research drew on, or was located within, reflected this movement across time, space and place; the being and becoming, the points of connection and disconnection, rupture and suture and the spaces in between. As in practice my approach was largely pragmatic; I needed a framework that was flexible enough to accommodate different strands of thinking, elements of apparent contradiction and was well-suited to an exploration of complexity and subjectivity. From this perspective, I considered that a psychosocial approach, which is methodologically and theoretically diverse, and "interested in articulating a place of ''suture'' between elements whose contribution to the production of the human subject is normally theorized separately" (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008: 348) would be a good starting point.

At its core a psychosocial approach is one that is interested in an exploration of the links between the internal and external world. My experience of working with young refugees and migrants had made me keenly aware of the ways in which their social worlds impacted on their daily lives not just in practical ways though the limitations of their social existence but also on their psychological state and sense of wellbeing. In a context where the 'social' is inescapably defined by immigration status, a psychosocial approach offers the possibility of exploring lived experience by drawing on a multiplicity of perspectives. Moreover, a psychosocial approach is rooted in an understanding of the significance of the relationality of our outer and inner worlds and as such enables engagement with wholeness and complexity.

It is beyond the scope of this project to consider the many different approaches to the psychosocial and different labels with different intellectual legacies. I note in particular, the complex interplay between psychoanalysis and psychosocial theorisation and the extensive debates in this area. However, while I have borrowed aspects of the conceptual frameworks of psychoanalytic thought (e.g. unconscious thought and emotions) I have intentionally de-linked these concepts from their theorisation of human subjectivity which assumes an ahistoric, 'fixed and universal structure to the psyche' (Woodward, 2015:7). I will therefore focus instead on the key components which characterise my psychosocial approach to this research project. Firstly, psychosocial approaches seek to understand human experience through an exploration of processes in both inner (emotional) and outer (social) worlds. Secondly, a psychosocial approach is relational; attending to biography, power relations and intersubjectivity. Thirdly, the psychosocial is transdisciplinary with reflexivity as a critical practice a core element (Frosh, 2013). This psychosocial frame is illustrated in the diagram below; this research project is theoretically located in the centre of the overlap between the circles and informed by practice experience alongside black feminist and decolonial epistemic perspectives.



I have made use of this these key psychosocial elements in various aspects of the research project, for example in the methodology as outlined in Chapter 3, and in offering a dynamic exploration of the lived experience of young people with 'no papers' in the context of the relationship between the personal and the social in Chapters 6 and 7. In these chapters young people are shown to survive on a continuum moving between life and death; their aliveness or closeness to death impacted by multiple psychosocial factors including biography, relationships with others, their psychological states and socio-political and economic context at a particular moment.

A clear example of my psychosocial approach in practice can be seen in the discussion of my encounter with Muhammed in Chapter 4. In sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 I reflect on the meeting by drawing on a range of literatures from different disciplines and theoretical approaches to make sense of the meeting. I take a transdisciplinary reflexive approach drawing on Hyden's (2013) work on embodied experience and Cooper's (2020) psychoanalytic thinking around emotions alongside Lee's (2017, 2018) writing about trauma and power and White's (2004, 2005) narrative therapy to explore the relationality of biography, power, intersubjectivity, emotional experience and social context in this particular encounter.

As illustrated in Chapter 2 section 2.1.3 much of the empirical research in this field is located within disciplinary borders, attending to broadly the social or emotional aspects of being young and undocumented with limited attention to the relationality of research and knowledge production. With this in mind within the broadly psychosocial framing of the project I have also drawn on Black feminist and decolonial thinking (discussed earlier in 2.1.3 and in Chapter 8 sections 8.2.2 and 8.2.3) as critical approaches which necessitate an exploration of knowledge production, reflexivity and ethical practice. Ahmed (2017:10) describes the writing of Black feminists and feminists of color as "writing in which an embodied experience of power provides the basis for knowledge." I have drawn on Black feminist and decolonial scholarship as tools for thinking and illustrating the ways in which experience and knowledge are historically and geographically situated (Bhambra et al, 2018, Mignolo, 2011) and anchored in "hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality, institutions of power and social structures of violence." (Garcia-Roja, 2016:2 - 3) when offering a psychosocial exploration of the lives of undocumented youth. For example, the embodied experience of power is explored in Chapter 4. in relation to trauma and in Chapter 6. with reference to experience of and closeness to death.

An important aspect of a psychosocial approach is that it enables an exploration of emotions and the unconscious; I use unconscious here to refer to that which is beyond cognitive awareness. In 'Poetry is Not a Luxury' Lorde (1984:37) describes poetry as 'the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.' Lorde's use of poetry to portray that which is 'nameless' resonates with the ways in which I have used creative methods to capture and reflect unconscious thought and emotions in this study. Specifically, I have used letter writing (see Chapter 7. Section 7.3) as part of the process of data gathering and poetry (see Chapter 5) as part of the data analysis. In addition, extracts of poetry, creative fiction and non-fiction are woven in throughout the text. My purpose in using creative methods for this project is that they are able to reflect aspects of experience which are not easily documented using more traditional or 'scientific' methods. Creative methods can offer a liberation from the limits of logic as they are more amenable to ambivalence, passions, uncertainties and apparent contradictions and incoherences; such approaches are more likely to put us in touch with our feelings and emotional states and those of others. In using creative methods my intention is therefore to both honour the lives of the participants (Kim, 2016) as fully as possible and to emotionally engage the reader enabling them to connect with the 'other'; evoking feelings

as a bridge across diverse experiences. In keeping with a psychosocial approach, the use of creative methods in this context offers an additional lens with which to depict and try to understand the lives of young people with 'no papers'.

The subjects of this research are young people who are actively engaged in living despite the bordering of their lives. Their daily lives involve crossing visible and invisible borders, much as psychosocial thought requires frequent crossing of disciplinary borders. In resisting bordering there is something which escapes and emerges; a life lived despite the constraints. As Taylor (2008 cited in Redman, 2016: 75) notes

> "With *transdisciplinarity* we are dealing in part with that which *escapes* disciplinary knowledge."

It is that which escapes disciplinary knowledge, which exists beyond our current knowledge and understanding of the lives of young people with 'no papers', which this project is concerned with. In adopting a psychosocial frame for this research my intention has been to assemble a makeshift house for the project; the various timbers of thought coming together to make a dwelling (Ahmed, 2017) within which feeling and thinking can take place. Returning to Gergen's (2009) analogy of a whole garment, or perhaps more appropriately the metaphor of a patchwork quilt as a field of research, my purpose here is not to create a new blanket or even unique patch with clearly defined edges. But rather it is to weave into the existing quilt different coloured threads, 'finding the joining edge with others' (Kohli, 2021) and to stitch in additional patches as needed.

In explicating the rationale for adopting a psychosocial frame I have drawn on the aspects which relate particularly to the exploration of relationality and complexity. One of the challenges of an approach which favours multiplicity is of course providing coherence across methodological and theoretical tensions and apparent contradictions. In the section below I discuss the role of researcher as 'narrator' and illustrate how I have used this position to bring together different voices and strands of thought.

2.3.2 'Engaging the writing'

In *Relational Being*, Gergen (2009) describes his intention to explore "a form of writing that more fully embodies the relational thesis" (Gergen, 2009: xxv). He describes a series of "punctuated layers" which embody different traditions of communication weaving together elements of scholarly voice, writing for practitioners, personal experiences, art, poetry and photography and expressions of friends, both textual and personal (Gergen, 2009: xxv). For Gergen (2009 the purpose of engaging multiple voices offers several advantages in conveying a relational thesis; the absence of a single coherent voice makes it more difficult to identify the author and boundaries of his being, thus illustrating the ways in which we all carry many different voices, each born of a specific history of relationship. This point is central to his thesis whereby 'I as author' emerges from many different relations and exists at the intersection of these many 'voices.' Moreover, Gergen (2009) has sought to engage a broad range of readers, arguing that in writing for a single audience – for example scholars, practitioners or students - "I strengthen the walls between groups in society" (Gergen, 2009: xxv). Instead, his hope is that by mixing genres it is possible to invite a more inclusive dialogue across existing boundaries. Finally, he contrasts more traditional scholarship which offers finite interpretations and meaning with an approach which juxtaposes mixed genres of writing, hoping that this more fluid approach may open up space for the reader to generate new images and associations.

In this thesis I draw on Gergen's (2009) 'engaging the writing' as a way of emotionally engaging the reader and inviting them to consider the lives of the participants in ways which do not sit within the narrow confines of academic disciplines and service provision. However, my use of multiple voices is somewhat different to Gergen's (2009) in that I have drawn on multiple perspectives 'voices' but taken up the position of narrator of the thesis in order to offer a cohesive narrative voice throughout the thesis. I have discussed the researcher as storyteller in Chapter 4. As narrator I have drawn on different voices in writing as a means of engaging a broad audience, encouraging them to connect with the aliveness of the participants and recognise aspects of experience which may resonate at a personal level rather than viewing the young people as 'subjects' in a research study or 'service users.' I have understood the role of narrator to be one of a guide, weaving a path through complexity, and linking to a multiplicity of perspectives as a way of

highlighting connections between the lives of young people with 'no papers' and others at different points in time e.g. Black women in America in the 1980s (Lorde, 1984), asylum seekers in detention on Christmas Island (Lee, 2012). In narrating the tale of the research process and offering a discussion of my findings, I have provided a framework for thinking about the young people's lives while holding onto the impossibility of 'knowing' with certainty. By choosing to write intentionally against the grain, I have sought to tread lightly in offering interpretations and to open up space for further exploration in the hope of a more inclusive conversation between young people, researchers, practitioners and the public at large.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the key empirical studies which map the terrain of recent research about young people with irregular immigration status. I have offered an account of my intention to engage in epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) both in the method of inquiry and the writing of the thesis. I'm mindful that I have adapted and adopted aspects of a number of different theoretical positions without offering a detailed critique or discussing the nuances of these points of view. I have been intentional in this approach and used only specific concepts and aspects which have helped me to build my own understanding and pathway through this project. This is not a theoretically driven thesis or an attempt to offer an overarching explanation. Rather, like Lorde (1984: 40), I too have come to believe that

> "what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."

My hope is that the reader will engage generously with this work in the spirit which it is offered, as a partial account of the lives of young people living in London with 'no papers.' The ensuing chapters offer a further development of the framework outlined in this chapter by providing a detailed account of the research methodology in Chapter 3 and the way in which the young people's stories were told and heard in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 introduces the young people through portrait poems, the 'skeleton architecture of their

lives' and provides a bridge to the findings and analysis in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. The final chapter draws together these threads.

Chapter 3: Methodology

> "…stories are geography, and empathy is first of all an act of imagination, a storyteller's art, and then a way of traveling from here to there." (Solnit, 2014: 3)

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe 'traveling from here to there' with young people with no papers; I offer an account of the gathering of their stories and the ways in which I have tried to understand them. "What is it like…" Solnit (2014:3) asks "to be the old man silenced by a stroke, the young man facing the executioner, the woman walking across the border…"

This chapter discusses the methods and methodologies used to explore what it is like to be young and living in London with irregular status. The first section discusses the main ethical considerations and recruitment of participants for this project. The second section describes the research design and data collection methods. The third section explains the choices and decisions I made as part of the data analysis process. My reflections on these different aspects of the research process are woven into the fabric of the chapter.

3.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the University of East London and I completed the University of East London's Research Integrity modules. In the section below I discuss the main ethical considerations and safeguards below as required by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance. I then describe the process of recruitment and introduce the research participants.

3.1.1 Presentation of research to participants

In approaching potential participants, I worked through an intermediary 'gate-keeper' or the relevant 'trusted person' in my professional or personal network (Miller, 2004 and Ďuvall *et al,* 2010). I explained the nature and purpose of the project to the intermediary and provided him/her with participant information sheets and consent forms,[5] to share with young people who might be interested in participating in the research. In my initial phone conversations and meetings with potential participants I discussed the nature and purpose of the project including timescales, activities and possible outputs and gave them an opportunity to ask questions. I explained that research meetings would be recorded but that they could stop at any point, ask for the recorder to be switched off or decide not to continue with the project. I explained how data would be recorded, stored, transcribed and that each participant would be given a pseudonym to protect their identity and that details of any organisations, professionals, friends or family members would also be anonymised. I was particularly concerned to ensure that they were not in any way obliged to take part in the research project and were free to withdraw at any time without disadvantage to themselves and without any obligation to give a reason. I gave them a project information sheet and discussed ways in which they could withdraw if they wished to do so, including by informing the person who had referred them, their 'trusted person'. I explained how data would be anonymised and discussed confidentiality. I explained the limits of confidentiality in relation to risk and that in exceptional circumstances I may need to discuss significant concerns with my supervisor and/or the key worker/ 'gatekeeper' but that where possible, I would discuss this with them prior to sharing information. I was mindful to ensure that participants had enough information to make an informed choice about participating but not so much that it would be overwhelming.

3.1.2 Consent procedures

The concept of informed and voluntary consent is inherently problematic when working with young refugees and migrants, not least of all because it involves "culturally bound, western values of individual autonomy, self-determination, and freedom" which are often difficult to fully translate cross-culturally (Ellis *et al.* 2007: 467). Moreover, consent in the context of refugee and migrant lives is particularly complex as these young people have often suffered various forms of violence and ill-treatment by authorities. Furthermore,

[5] See Appendix 1

young migrants are often required to share personal information and relate traumatic experiences for the purpose of immigration control and in order to access resources such as social care. In this context, consent is largely administrative and given for the purpose of accessing protection and resources rather than an active decision or choice. With this in mind, I used an iterative model of consent which aims to develop "consent processes that enable the establishment of ethical relationships' and are responsive to the needs, concerns and values of participants" (Mackenzie et al. 2007: 307). In their discussion of ethical issues in irregular migration research Duvell *et al*. (2008:18) note that "Informed consent may be impracticable or meaningless in some research […] or may compromise the objective of the research. In some circumstances – such as trafficked, smuggled or irregular immigrants – written consent might also create unnecessary risks for the research subjects." In light of the above, I offered participants in this study the option of giving written or verbal consent which could be audio recorded.

3.1.3 Participant experience: vulnerability and risks

The project participants were not deemed vulnerable within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and were not mentally or physically impaired on any diagnostic criteria. However, all were living in precarious circumstances and may have been considered vulnerable in terms of security of accommodation and employment, histories of displacement and current legal, social and economic context. I was mindful of this possible vulnerability throughout the research process from project conception, throughout data collection and in considering representation of their stories and experiences in my final thesis.

The research design was developed to minimise any negative psychological impact by giving participants maximum control over the information they shared. I hoped that young people who chose to be involved in this project would find it helpful to reflect on their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a supportive and respectful context in which they had agency over the stories they chose to share. I anticipated that the opportunity to speak to someone outside their personal network and be heard, might enable them to process and make sense of some of their experiences. From this perspective, I hoped that although they may not be the direct beneficiaries of the research, their involvement in the project would, in some limited way, be helpful to them.

I was mindful that involvement in the project may at times evoke difficult feelings for the participants. In building ethical relationships with the young people, I took care to establish clear boundaries and ensure that they felt safe in their relationship with me. I was honest and transparent about the possibilities and limitations of the research project in terms of its potential impact on their lives, and those of others in similar circumstances. I kept in regular contact with the participants throughout the research project and also gave them my details so that they could contact me if necessary. I tried, as far as possible, to ensure we met in locations of their choice which were easy and safe for them to access and minimised any cost by providing expenses, food and refreshments. I paid close attention to the emotional states of the young people I worked with during our meetings and as far as possible tried to ensure that difficult feelings were processed and contained within the research space. I followed up with phone conversations/text messages, where appropriate, to check-in after meetings.

Several participants were recruited through professional networks and so already had a named key worker and access to specialist therapeutic services. Additionally, a former colleague and retired Family Therapist who has significant experience of working with refugees and migrants agreed to provide therapeutic support for young people participating in this project. The Therapist was deliberately situated independently of the project and organisations involved and was available for young people to consult if needed.

3.1.4 General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR) compliance

Given the sensitivity of the research, a key priority was to ensure participants could not be traced or in any way linked to the research. I took a very cautious approach to issues of confidentiality; I recruited young people via a number of different contacts, always met with them on their own in a location of their choice and did not record any identifying features. All participants were asked to suggest an alternative name for themselves and this was used throughout the project; all audio files, transcripts and other documents were labelled using this pseudonym. Hard copies of signed consent forms were kept in a lockable filing cabinet and audio files and transcripts were password protected. I used a professional transcription service for transcribing data and each individual transcriber was

required to sign a confidentiality agreement. All names, locations and organisations have been anonymised in any written records (e.g. transcripts) and in the thesis.

3.1.5 Recruitment

I used a combination of targeted (Watters and Biernacki, 1989) and snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) via personal and professional networks to recruit participants for the study. The criteria were young people aged 16 – 25, living in London, with irregular immigration status. I engaged potential participants through an intermediary 'gate-keeper' or relevant 'trusted person' in my professional or personal network (Miller, 2004 and Ďuvell *et al*, 2008). I had initial telephone conversations with 12 young people in which we spoke about the project and their everyday lives. All but one of the potential participants were referred to me by people they knew well and trusted. Of these twelve young people, seven became research participants and five have taken part in all three meetings. Of those who did not take part, two initially agreed to participate but withdrew prior to the first meeting. One of them (Afghan, male) was too busy juggling work and family life with a new baby and toddler, the other (Eritrean, male) had recently been granted status after almost a decade of struggle and despite initially agreeing to participate, later said that he just didn't want to think about it (his experience of the process) anymore. The other three young people (Indian, male; Albanian, male; Angolan; female) who declined taking part in the research, did so for a variety of reasons, including not having time, not feeling safe, not wanting to share personal stories.

I have included brief information about the young people who chose not to participate in the project as I feel their absence tells a story about the lives of those who live in precarity and the limitations of research as a means of 'knowing' and understanding. Of the five who did not participate, I had known four of them for several years from when they first arrived in the country and one was the relative of a friend. Notwithstanding multiple complexities, practicalities of time, and differences in individuals, their choices and their contexts, a thread which appears to bind these two different strands, of precarity and research, is trust. I was very mindful that these young people did not feel emotionally and/or physically safe enough to participate in the project and that assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were almost irrelevant, as asking for their trust required a leap of faith which was too much to expect in the present moment. I wondered how much

of their capacity to trust had been eroded by past experiences and the degree to which not trusting had become a survival strategy.

3.1.6 Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Age on arrival in UK	Age at first research meeting	Gender	Country of Birth
Ahmad	15	23	Male	Afghanistan
Muhammed	14	22	Male	Afghanistan
Precious	10	17	Female	Nigeria
Rayyan	9	19	Male	Bangladesh
Sarah	8	22	Female	Jamaica
Sekou	17	24	Male	Guinea
Tommi	3	20	Male	Jamaica

3.2 Research design

In *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Charmaz (2014:33) argues that "how we collect data shapes their content." From this perspective researchers create the framework within which participants can speak and this in turn defines the shape of the stories which are told. It is from these stories that we develop our analysis and represent the lives of others. At a time when questions of identity, belonging and citizenship are highly contested, representation becomes critical for how people are known and treated (Hall, S., 1997 cited in Madison, S., 2005: 4). In this context, decisions about the frameworks within which stories are gathered and then analysed, becomes a political act.

In conceptualising the project, I aimed to foster 'social forms of dialogue' as described by Sinha & Back (2014) in which a genuine two-way dialogue between researcher and participants is the core of the research project. I felt that a qualitative approach to the

research would enable flexibility and was best suited to my question which sought to generate data relating to lived experience and emotional states. Notwithstanding multiple variations in approach, most qualitative research focuses on natural settings concerned with meanings, perspectives and understandings, emphasises process, taking an inductive approach to analysis, drawing on the data to generate theory (Hammersley, 2013, Robson, 2002, Fox et al 2007).

3.2.1 Scaffolding for relationships

As discussed in Chapter 2, this research project is grounded in a psychosocial relational approach to praxis. My experience of working with young people subject to immigration control made me very aware of the precarity of their circumstances and the importance of relationships in sustaining work together. As a practitioner working in community settings I had ample opportunities to build relationships with young people in the course of our work together e.g. travelling to appointments. I was mindful that as a researcher I would need to create a structure within which a relationship could develop. With this in mind, I designed a structure of multiple research meetings, each with a specific focus. I anticipated that the structure of multiple meetings would have the dual function of a) providing a space within which to develop a relationship with the participant and b) create opportunities to address the different aspects of the research question "*What are the everyday lives, life histories and hopes and dreams of young people with irregular immigration status*?"

I intended to hold three meetings with each young person, each focused on one aspect of the research question; present (everyday lives), past (life history) and future (hopes and dreams). The order of meetings was based on practice experience; the present is the easiest place to start as it is a shared moment and the place a relationship begins. I wanted to capture some sense of each participant's biography and chose the second meeting for this task. I wanted to ensure that our third and final meeting offered a space for reflection and hope, hence the focus on the future.

Research meeting 1:

The focus of the first research meeting was to build a rapport with the young person and establish the research relationship.[6] My intention was to offer an open and unstructured space to allow the participant to talk about what they felt was important and to enable me to get some sense of their daily life, their character, preoccupations and the kind of 'interview' that might best facilitate them to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings. It provided a foundation and the parameters for our future work together.

In the first meeting I intended to focus on the 'everyday lives' aspect of my research question and so I sought a method that would enable participants to talk about their everyday lives and aspects of their present which were important to them. For this I drew on Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method. Drawing on the psychoanalytic method of Free Association Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) approach focuses on asking open ended-questions and following the respondents order to elicit stories rather than striving for narrative coherence. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) posit that the research subject (and researcher) are psychosocial subjects; their inner worlds cannot be understood without knowledge of their experience in the social world and that their inner worlds mediate experience of the outer world.

Although, as discussed in Chapter 2, my own theorisation of psychosocial is less psychoanalytically oriented than Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) FANI appeared to be a 'good enough' fit as an approach to adopt for the first interview. Firstly, the element of Free Association made it possible to draw out stories about the everyday life of undocumented young people from the particular perspective of the research participant. Secondly, in naming both researcher and participant as 'psychosocial' and 'defended subjects' there is a consideration of emotions as central to the way stories are told and heard.

Research meeting 2:

The focus of the second meeting was on the young person's life before arrival in the UK. I considered using life history methods (Atkinson, 1998; Hyun-Joo Lim, 2011) to gather

[6] In some cases the first research meeting was my first direct contact with the participant, with others I had spoken to on the phone or had met and/or known them in a different context

the young people's life stories but I wanted as far possible to limit the way in which my questions might shape the story which was told. I was keen to develop an understanding of the participant's biography from their perspective in the way that they wanted to tell their life story.

For this I drew on Wengraf's (2001) SQUIN (Single Question Inducing Narrative) in which a carefully designed single question (SQUIN) is posed by the interviewer with the aim of eliciting a 'whole' narrative. When used as part of Wengraf's (2001) Biographic Narrative Interviewing Technique the SQUIN is posed in the first interview 'sub-session'. This story is then used as the basis for further narrative interviewing and exploration through the use of PINs (Particular Incident Narratives). I considered using BNIM as a method but decided against it as an overall approach so as to have the freedom to make methodological choices based on the young person I was working with rather than the specifics of a particular method.

My decisions about methods of data gathering were guided primarily by my experience of working with young people; my priority was to create a framework within which conversation could take place and so I approached the question of which methods to use much as a craftsperson might choose their tools. I chose the Free Association of FANI (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) and the SQUIN from BNIM (Wengraf, 2001) for use in the first and second meetings as they aligned with my aim of engaging with the wholeness and complexity of the participants lives and provided some guidance for myself as a novice researcher.

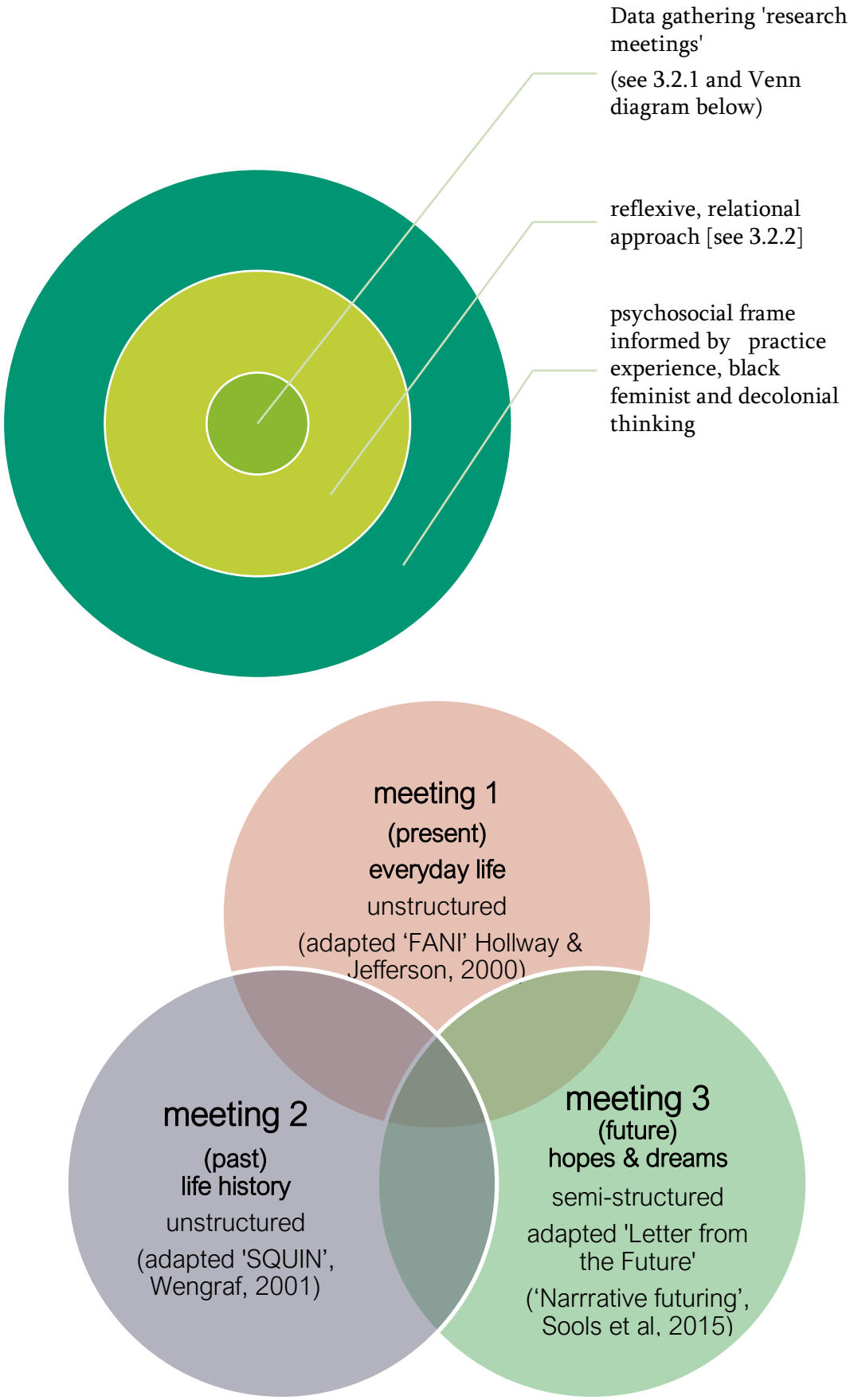
Research meeting 3:

The third meeting aimed to focus on the participants' hopes and dreams for the future. I created a task which invited participants to imagine a desirable future. The activity of creating a 'Letter from the Future' drew on the work of Sools *et al* (2012; 2015) on narrative futuring.[7] At the end of the second meeting I gave participants the option of undertaking the task independently by writing a letter or making a verbal recording. Alternatively, for those who did not wish to do this I articulated the task as a question in our final meeting. I created an outline interview schedule for the third meeting which

[7] See Appendices p.229 for instruction.

brought together threads of our earlier meetings and gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their experience.

I have included a diagram (p.41) below to illustrate my hybrid approach to data gathering and use of different methods;


Data gathering 'research meetings'
(see 3.2.1 and Venn diagram below)
reflexive, relational approach [see 3.2.2]
psychosocial frame informed by practice experience, black feminist and decolonial thinking
meeting 1
(present)
everyday life
unstructured
(adapted 'FANI' Hollway & Jefferson, 2000)
meeting 2
(past)
life history
unstructured
(adapted 'SQUIN', Wengraf, 2001)
meeting 3
(future)
hopes & dreams
semi-structured
adapted 'Letter from the Future'
('Narrrative futuring', Sools et al, 2015)

3.2.2 A reflexive relational approach

When I reflect on my meetings with Ahmad, Rayyan, Precious, Sekou, Sarah, Tommi and Mohammed I am reminded of the central refrain in Michael Rosen's (1989) children's classic '*We're Going on a Bear Hunt*,'

"We can't go over it.
We can't go under it.
Oh no!
We've got to go through it!"

These four lines capture my experience of the data collection; much like the family in the story, I needed to persevere to find a way through the obstacles in my path and retain a flexible, person-centred approach to both the logistics and content of our meetings. I prioritised *relational responsibility*, caring for the relationship as the primary focus, which at times meant the specifics of method became a secondary consideration (Gergen, 2015).

The three meeting structure that I had created to enable data collection, was helpful in that it offered clarity of purpose for our meetings and a clear beginning and ending to the research relationship. However, the practice was predictably somewhat messier as I adopted a reflexive relational approach (Gergen, 2009, Meloni, 2020) negotiating meetings and methods with each participant individually.

Hence, although the focus around everyday lives, life histories and hopes and dreams remained constant, the past, present and future ran as threads throughout and the number of 'meetings' varied between participants depending on their individual circumstances. For example, I only met with Ahmed and Muhammed once and so my concern was less with following the design and rather focused on engaging them in conversations about their lives. With Sarah we arranged to meet several times in different locations before we managed to have our first research meeting. She was so late for our second meeting that there wasn't time for an 'interview' so we went for a coffee and rearranged the 'research meeting' for another time. In practice I found that I drew less on the interview methods I had read about and chosen and rather adapted my approach

to the young person in front of me. For example, in the second meeting with Sekou the SQUIN worked well. He was comfortable to speak at length without any further questions and narrated his life story from birth over the course of two hours. Sarah on the other hand told me that she preferred me to ask questions and so our meetings were more conversational. Rayyan responded well to open, unstructured space to talk. His life history emerged in our second meeting on the back of an opening conversation about his plans for university; the narration stretched across our second and third meetings as he recounted life in London and then Bangladesh alongside his preoccupations with politics and religion.

Reflecting back on the process of data gathering I am mindful that any 'research method', can only ever be a 'good enough' fit for the purpose of research design. Certainly, any research with young people in such precarious circumstances the 'best fit' is likely to be a pragmatic decision in the moment. In Chapter 8, I reflect on the limitations of interview-based methods and consider alternatives. However, I would suggest that anyone considering research with young people subject to immigration needs to prioritise relationship-building; a 'relational approach' as primary. The specific 'methods' or techniques used to facilitate data gathering should be, to my mind, a secondary consideration.

The next chapter includes a more detailed commentary on the process of data collection with particular attention to questions of trust, the limitations of language and embodied experience. These themes are further developed in the concluding chapter which considers the strengths and limitations of this research project.

3.3 Data analysis

> "It was not because of Ah Fatt's fluency that Neel's vision of Canton became so vivid as to make it real: in fact, the opposite was true, for the genius of Ah Fatt's descriptions lay in their elisions, so that to listen to him was a venture of collaboration, in which the things that were spoken of came gradually to be transformed into artefacts of a shared imagining." (Ghosh, 2008: 391)

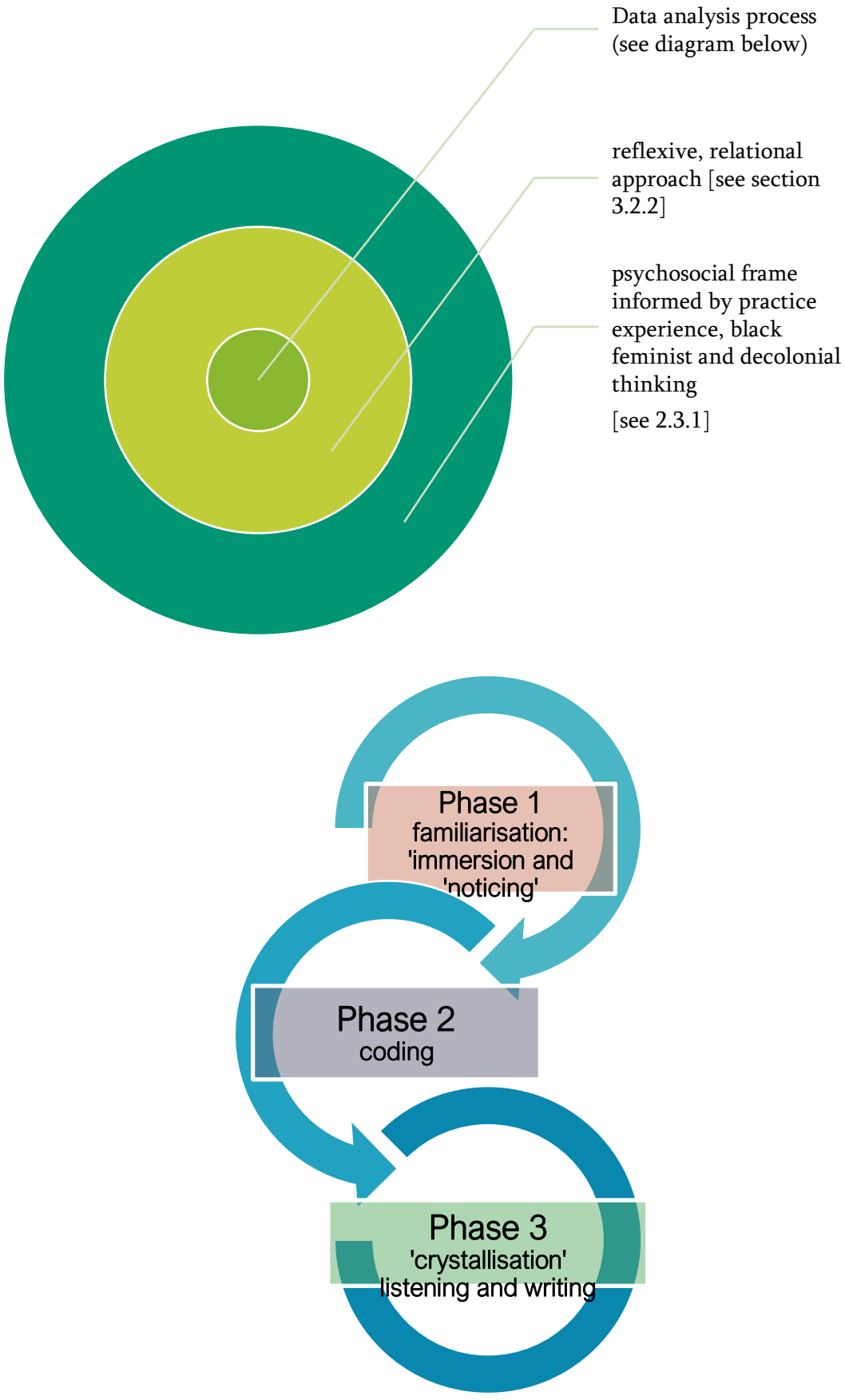
The fieldwork for this project took place between May 2016 and January 2017. By the end of this period 'the things that were spoken of' comprised 17 interviews with seven young people. In addition, there were three written letters and an audio letter. Alongside this, I kept a research journal throughout the project using both a paper notebook and the Evernote app. In this I kept detailed records of my contact with participants (phone calls, texts) and field notes about the meetings. My field notes combine ethnographic approaches to record keeping (Abu-Lughod, 1986) as well as process recording drawing on a psychoanalytic tradition of infant observation which pays attention to the emotional dynamics of experience (Bick, 1964; Rustin, 2009). I documented my observations and wrote to make sense of my own experiences during this period. The raw data therefore consisted of transcribed interview data and letters, supplemented by written records of my encounters with the participants.

3.3.1 A psychosocial approach

Psychosocial approaches are explicitly inter and transdisciplinary; with this in mind I have adopted and adapted several theoretically diverse methods to create a relational, reflexive, hybrid analytic process with which to explore subjective experience and social life in the data. In this section I consider potential tensions in combining methods and offer a rationale for a hybrid approach. A more detailed critical evaluation of the particular techniques and aspects of methods used is provided in the remainder of the chapter which describes the three phases of analysis; 1. Familiarisation: 'immersion and noticing' 2. Coding 3. 'Crystallisation': listening and writing (see diagram on p.46).

In the original research design, I outlined a data analysis plan which drew on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013) alongside the free association method (FANI) proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, positions the researcher as active in shaping the data and calls on them to acknowledge the theoretical frame s/he brings to the data while also allowing for an inductive analysis. A key aspect of Thematic Analysis (TA) involves coding the data to identify patterns and themes across the data set. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psychosocial approach is rooted in psychoanalysis. However, as explained in 3.2.1. I have made use of FANI as a specific technique – drawing on the practice of free association rather than adopting it as a blanket approach based on psychoanalytic principles. As a narrative method FANI (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) seeks to preserve the 'gestalt' of the data and suggest that coding may lead to fragmentation in which the form and 'whole' of the data is broken (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; 69). I recognise the potential tension between pattern-based methods which use coding to segment the text into smaller 'parts' for analysis and narrative methods which explicitly claim to hold in mind the 'whole.' However, I suggest that the process of segmenting the data allows for closer examination of the parts, making visible elements of the 'whole'. From this perspective data analysis becomes an iterative process moving between inductive and deductive approaches through an in-depth exploration of the parts and the whole.

Alongside this tension between the parts and the whole I'm mindful that the diverse methods I draw on are beholden to different ontological assumptions. For example, Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psychoanalytic framing and Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (2014) could be considered contentious approaches. However, I concur with Charmaz's (2014: 26) view that "Methods *are* merely tools" and instead argue in favour of methodological eclecticism wherein methods with different theoretical underpinnings can be synthesised to enrich our ways of seeing and understanding the data. To my mind this hybrid or kaleidoscopic approach, in which multiple analytic lenses facilitate refraction brings into view different aspects of feeling, social and political structures, and facilitates a deeper understanding of the complex and multi-layered lives of young people with 'no papers'.


Data analysis process (see diagram below)
reflexive, relational approach [see section 3.2.2]
psychosocial frame informed by practice experience, black feminist and decolonial thinking
[see 2.3.1]
Phase 1
familiarisation: 'immersion and 'noticing'
Phase 2
coding
Phase 3
'crystallisation'
listening and writing

3.3.2 Phase 1 Familiarisation: ‘immersion’ and ‘noticings’

Braun & Clarke (2013: 204) suggest beginning the analysis of qualitative data with a period of ‘immersion’ to become ‘intimately familiar’ with the dataset and notice things that might be relevant to the research question. To my mind this process of immersion is similar to Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000:70) reading of all the raw data, taking notes and highlighting significant extracts. Both approaches call on the researcher to hold in mind the whole, to observe and notice elements which appear significant; I describe this initial phase below.

The interviews were transcribed using a professional transcription service and I listened to the audio to check the accuracy of the transcription. I corrected inaccuracies and added specifics such as tone of voice and details I could recall from the meeting, to ensure that the transcribed text reflected as much as possible of the meetings. I noted anything I felt to be significant and particularly data which connected with my fieldnotes and journal entries. As I listened to the interviews, I created a list of initial concepts which recurred across the data:

Faith
Belonging
Love/Life/Survival
Death/Violence
No Choice
Hope/Future/Constraints
Resistance/Agency
Relationships – sustaining life
Society/Justice/History
Time
Everyday life
Existence
Money/Citizenship

In some cases, the concepts, such as ‘no choice,’ were words used by the participants based on things they spoke about. In other instances, such as ‘belonging,’ I chose words

to represent my interpretation of the young people's stories. In *Teaching to Transgress* hooks[8] (1994:62) reminds us that naming is an act of privilege which "affords those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition and description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place". I was mindful that in organising the data according to concepts, I was already beginning to create a framework within which the young people's stories could be thought about. In the sections below I explore how I sought to ensure that my interpretation of the data reflected, as accurately as possible, the lives of the young participants. The privilege of naming and of representing the lives of others is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

I listened to each set of interviews in the order that I met the participants. Listening to each set of interviews gave me a sense of the progression of our conversations and the relationship over time, as well as a sense of the way in which certain themes resonated with a particular individual. I used the writing package Scrivener to create headings for the concepts (e.g., belonging, faith) as well as for each participant (e.g., Rayyan, Precious). I pasted relevant extracts from the interviews under single or multiple headings as a means of sorting the data into more manageable 'conceptual' and 'participant' chunks.

As I listened, read the transcripts and highlighted significant extracts (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000:70), I recorded my 'noticings' (Braun and Clark, 2013:204) and wrote memos. Memo-writing is a crucial method in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). My research is not a grounded theory project, but I found Charmaz' (2014) text '*Constructing Grounded Theory'* very helpful as a 'how to' guide. Charmaz describes memos as analytic notes, "the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers" (Charmaz, 2014:162). Scrivener has various tools which allow the writer to both highlight texts and write in the margins and so I used these functions to critically and reflexively engage with the data to capture any thoughts, comparisons and connections that occurred to me while listening to the interviews. Additionally, I made notes in relation to the participant's voice, my memory of the encounter and my own embodied experiences of listening to the interviews. By the time I had listened to all the interviews

[8] It is hooks' practice not to capitalise her name and so I have followed her here

twice I had a sense of the whole shape of the data in response to my research question, both in terms of cross-cutting themes and also as individual stories.

3.3.3 Phase 2 Coding

In what follows I describe the process I undertook to code the data and reflect on some of the complexities and limitations of this method of analysis. Coding is a process of identifying aspects of the data which relate to the research question by breaking down the text of interviews and letters into small segments which can be categorised and labelled (Braun & Clarke, 2013; 206). Tweed & Charmaz (2012:137) suggest that "line-by-line coding is particularly helpful for analysing in-depth interviews or personal accounts" Charmaz (2014:127) argues that line by line coding prompts you to look at the data anew, separate data into categories and see processes. Furthermore, she suggests that it frees you from becoming immersed in participant world views and encourages the researcher to be critical about the data. Within qualitative research there exist many different approaches to coding, for example thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) code for themes, whereas the grounded theory emphasis on analysing processes begins with using gerunds for coding. "Because a gerund is the noun form of a verb, it preserves action by stating what people are doing, such as 'defining', 'explaining' or 'accounting'" (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012: 137). Given the focus of my enquiry I was keen to identify action and explore what the participant was 'doing' so I started to code segment by segment using CGT coding for gerunds. I used a software programme AtlasTi to manage the process supported by Friese (2014) and coded the interview for Ahmad using the CGT approach. At times it was difficult to code using gerunds as I struggled to identify actions and wanted simply to note 'life is hard', 'death' in the margins; it seemed as if the struggle to be active in the face of adversity was at times too great.

> "…when he got sent back to Jamaica he got killed as well…" (Sarah)

I had been working through the transcript of my first interview with Sarah when I came across this line and stopped. It was during my first meeting with her, within the first hour of meeting, and I was trying hard to follow the thread of her narrative as she'd just told

me about being made homeless. I was reading the transcript in AtlasTi working through, adding short codes to summarise segments of the story. I was focused on coding for gerunds, noting what the participant was 'doing' and had just clicked on 'death'. I needed to code but could think of nothing but 'death' as a descriptor.

Something about the unthinking action of clicking the 'death' code made me stop and reflect back. I remembered hearing her say it at the time but not responding directly. I had been uncertain about whether to follow the thread of her narrative or pursue this other, more complex and potentially difficult line of questioning. She had mentioned her father's murder as if in passing, she *had* told me, but, oh so casually. What had she wanted from me then? Was it part of the testing? How would I respond? Would I ask questions? She had after all given me permission, even instructed me to ask questions just some 20 minutes previously. Would I take up the invitation? Was it an invitation to engage in conversation or was that just the way she spoke, narrated her life?

Engaged with
Life and death.

So casual
Cannot be held onto too tightly
Too risky
Better to just drop it in
Said
On the record.

I heard but didn't respond
Trying to keep pace.

I noticed that there was a note in the text and went back to the original transcript and saw that I had put a note in the margin

> "This is said in a quiet voice almost as an afterthought and not important. I don't acknowledge this comment – why?"

I started thinking about how much is lost when reading the transcript as a text, bereft of the person's voice. I considered how coding, as a method that separates voice from text, risks losing important non-textual data in the process. I thought about the 'death code' and looked back on Ahmad's transcript and noticed how early this code appeared and how often. I thought about Sarah and the way in which death had interrupted the process of coding and the ways in which death seemed ever present in the participants' lives. And how the text, without voice, appeared lifeless, almost disembodied. I thought about how the process of coding required the deliberate breaking down of text so as to label and categorise. A kind of dismembering. Or disremembering?

As I write, I remember listening to that interview with Sarah and the way in which death stopped me in my tracks. I didn't know it at the time, but death had also entered my own life. I was very aware that much of the 'data' which had enabled me to identify initial concepts did not come simply from reading the transcripts but from my years of working with young people subject to immigration control and an embodied engagement with all the 'data', including the unspoken, relational aspects of the research. The participants' capacity and desire to articulate their thoughts, feelings and experiences in words varied greatly, in some ways depending on their level of fluency in English but also in relation to the degree to which they felt safe in the UK and in our meetings. I wanted the analysis to be able to capture these layers of complexity and contradiction; ontological security and insecurity, moments of despair and desperation and capacities for resistance and resourcefulness which lay within the narratives.

In the first phase of analysis I had immersed myself fully in the data remaining open to the emotional aspects of the work. This had put me in touch with the painful and upsetting emotions and states of mind experienced by the participants; and enabled me to understand aspects of experience which are not readily available through a purely textual analysis. By the time I returned to the data following bereavement some years later, a lifetime had passed. My perspective had shifted and I was somewhat apprehensive about listening to the data again mindful of the rawness of voice without the presence of the speaker and the emotions evoked by such engagement. I decided to continue systematic coding of the as a way of seeing the data anew and looked for connections that challenged and/or strengthened the concepts I had identified in Phase 1.

I coded each set of interviews with the participants in the order that I had met with them. I worked primarily from the transcripts; I was interested to observe what meaning could be derived from a purely textual analysis. I noticed that separating voice and text reduced the emotional intensity of the experience, enabling me to work systematically and map some of the detail which supported my initial concepts. In total I created 287 codes; a combination of gerunds and thematic codes which both reflected the nuances in the data and could be mapped on to the initial concepts. By the time I had finished coding all the interviews I was confident that I had reached the point of data saturation (Saunders *et al,* 2018)

3.3.4 Phase 3 'Crystallisation': listening and writing

> "Look, I don't want to make a judgement but I think after doing this research you will have a better understanding of this - the circumstances that people go through even though you haven't personally may not have experienced this personally but this is as far as you can go in terms of being able to understand the situation of other people that you have not been personally in touch with in terms of experience." (Rayyan)

Coding the final transcript, I was reminded of Rayyan's comments about the possibilities and limitations of research. I felt that I had gone as far as I could in being able to understand experiences which were not my own. Paying attention to the feelings evoked, during and on listening to the interviews, helped me capture aspects of the experience that I may have missed through coding alone. Likewise, the rational and systematic framework of coding acted as a counterbalance to a purely experiential reading of the encounters.

Framing these different approaches to data analysis as 'emotional' or 'rational' as binary positions is problematic as it suggests a divide between feeling and thinking. In fact these two aspects are closely related just as internal (psychological) and external (social worlds) worlds impact each other. To an extent this mirrors the split in the 'refugee literature' between the psychological (e.g. trauma, individual resilience and resourcefulness) and the sociological (e.g. borders, immigration processes, human

rights). More recently, clinicians working with so-called 'hard to reach' and marginalised communities have sought to bridge this divide between the personal and the political by drawing on the work of liberation theorists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Paulo Friere to develop 'liberation practices' (Afuape & Hughes, 2016). Practitioners engaged in liberation practices readily acknowledge the impact of systemic discrimination, adopt a reflexive approach and explicitly name power relations. This liberatory approach has long been part of community based-practice (Aggett et al, 2015) and reflects my critical praxis as a Practitioner Researcher concerned with making sense of and conveying the wholeness of the participants lives.

After engaging in a process of immersion (phase 1) as well as detailed coding (phase 2) of the interviews, I sought a way of bringing these strands together in phase 3. My intention here was to further explore the themes identified in relation to life, death, relationships and power and find a way to represent the 'whole story' of the data. Drawing on the work of Charmaz (2014) and inspired by a multi-layered, relational, voice-centred interpretive approach called The *Listening Guide* (LG) (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan et al, 2006) I developed a series of questions to use as a framework for further analysis.

- What are the relationships in this story? How are they represented?
- How does the participant speak about the people in the story? What does s/he do in relation to the individuals? What does s/he say they think or feel about these people?

- Where is power in this story? How is it represented in the story?
- What does the participant do in relation to that power?
- What does the participant say s/he thinks or feels in relation to power in this story?

- Where is life in this story? How is it represented in the story?
- What does the participant do in relation to life?
- What does the participant say s/he thinks or feels in relation to life in this story?

- Where is death in this story? How is it represented in the story?
- What does the participant do in relation to death?

- What does the participant say s/he thinks or feels in relation to death in this story?

Initially I decided to use the questions to undertake a case by case analysis and write individual case stories using the structure outlined above. This worked well with Ahmad and I was easily able to organise the stories about his everyday life, history and hopes for the future, under the headings of 'relationships, power, death and life'. I was pleased to have adapted well-established methods into something I could use as a framework and triangulate my findings (Fusch *et al*, 2018). I moved on to think about Sarah and from the outset the method I had employed to make sense of Ahmad's stories felt out of tune with Sarah's data. I started with thinking about the relationships in her story but found it difficult to disentangle them from the constant flow of stories about countless moves, the numerous nameless characters that peopled her stories and the determined positivity and acceptance with which she recounted the multiple separations and losses she had experienced. Re-reading the transcripts again and again trying to impose an ordered coherence on the text, I realised that the content was largely the same in each of our meetings, slightly different tellings of the same stories; her father died, he was killed, he was shot in the face ten times.

Much of what I had understood about Sarah's life could not be found in the transcripts of the interviews; her story unfolded in the space between the words she said and in the back and forth snatches of conversation before and after 'meetings.' It wasn't that she didn't tell stories; it was that they required a particular kind of listening to be understood. Listening for the meaningful fragments "amid the profusion of informational debris" (Back, 2007: 21). I struggled for several days to organise Sarah's account of her life within the framework of questions I'd identified. Try as I might I couldn't find a way to tell her story which both fitted the framework and reflected the complexity of her stories. Eventually I abandoned this mechanical approach to analysis in favour of a more creative and flexible method.

In Richardson and St. Pierre's (2006: 962) essay on writing as a method of inquiry, they describe creative analytical processes (CAP) which are, "in and of themselves, valid and desirable representations of the social." Traditionally staged research valorises 'triangulation' which uses different methods to 'validate' findings. Moving away from the concept of validity being determined from a fixed point, Richardson & St Pierre (2006:

963) describe an analytical process in which the central imagery is not a triangle but a crystal;

> "Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallisation. […] Crystallisation, without losing structure deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity"; we feel how there is no single truth, and we see how texts validate themselves. Crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. "

The concept of crystallisation helped me shift my analytic approach to embrace a more fluid immersive way of understanding the data. By approaching writing as a method of inquiry I started to think about analysis as part of a process by which different stories took shape. Engaging with the data from this perspective freed me up to listen to the many different 'voices' within and across the young people's narratives, as I no longer felt compelled to impose an all-encompassing framework upon the data. Instead, this creative analytical process, conceptualised through the image of a crystal, valorised the possibility of multiple truths and diverse aspects of a single story. Taking a creative approach thus made it possible to make space for both individual stories as in Chapter 5, and to articulate themes which formed common threads across experience.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter I have offered an account of how this research project was conceptualised and the methods used to collect and analyse data. These ideas are developed further in the following chapter where I reflect on the research process from the perspective of listening to and telling stories. I consider how storytelling processes are impacted by the interplay of trauma, power and the relational context. Moreover, I explore questions of reflexivity and representation in theorising and imagining the lives of others.

Chapter 4: ‘A Litany for Survival’

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children’s mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother’s milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid

of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

(Lorde, [1997] 2017: 200 - 201)[9]

4.0 Introduction

Reading Audre Lorde's 'A Litany for Survival' I am reminded of the lives of young people with 'no papers.' Writing as a 'Black lesbian feminist socialist mother' (Lorde, 1984: 114) Lorde's description of living 'at the shoreline/ standing upon the constant edges of decision' resonates with the stories that Ahmed, Precious, Sarah, Muhammed, Rayyan, Sekou and Tommi tell about their lives. As young people in precarious circumstances they do not have the luxury of indulging the 'passing dreams of choice,' rather they are 'imprinted with fear' and afraid. Yet despite this they hold on, fighting for survival, 'seeking a now which can breed/ futures.' Their words are 'rarely heard/ nor welcomed' but still they choose to speak and share stories of their lives for those who are ready to listen.

[9] 'A Litany for Survival' was first published in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* in 1997.

In this chapter I trace my journey of listening to and trying to understand these stories. I met with the young people over a period of nine months; the meetings are documented in my field notes and the interviews capture a moment in time in all our lives. My own life journey has been dramatically altered by the death of my husband. This experience has deepened my understanding of aspects of the young people's lives in ways I could not have imagined. In '*The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*' Lorde describes "becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality" as she grapples with a possible diagnosis of cancer and her realisation that in the face of death, silence offers no protection (Lorde, 1984: 41).

> "…of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I *ever* been afraid?"

My experience of death has brought life into sharp relief; it has given me the courage to ask uncomfortable questions of myself and others, to speak and write against the grain. In undertaking this project I have struggled to fit within a paradigm, to find a framework that I can work within and a discipline that I can belong to. There is a constant tension in research between what the researcher brings and what the participant brings that leads to the knowledge which is created. My interest in the production of knowledge has shifted in recent years from a theoretical interest to an embodied understanding as I come to realise how much is left out in the telling of other people's stories. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to offer an honest reflection of the ways in which my lived experience and theoretical lenses have influenced and been shaped by my encounters with the research participants. My intention is to provide the reader with an explanation of how I made sense of the stories, feelings and thoughts evoked by the research process in order to enable them to engage more fully with some of the complexities of this project.

> "We are powerful because we have survived" (Lorde, 1984:139)

Survival and triumph are constant themes in Lorde's work as she weaves together personal narrative and political analysis. In the introduction to '*A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer*' she writes

> ‘The struggle with cancer now informs all my days, but it is only another face of that continuing battle for self-determination and survival that Black women fight daily, often in triumph.” (Lorde, 1988: 41)

In locating her struggle with cancer within the broader socio-political context in which she is writing, Lorde offers a framework for making sense of the interplay between personal experience of traumatic events and questions of power, positionality and representation. Ahmed, Precious, Sarah, Muhammed, Rayyan, Sekou and Tommi have survived multiple traumatic events, including displacement, separation from family and the loss of loved ones. As people subject to UK immigration control their bodies are denied the right to belong and their existence is precarious. Their lives are lived on the borderlines of history, the present a daily fight for survival and constant struggle for a better future.

This chapter describes how the young people’s stories were told and heard; it discusses the interplay between trauma, power and relationships and explores questions of reflexivity and representation. The first section considers ‘the lived life and the story told’; I discuss the relationship between lived experience and the storying of that experience. I then consider how experiencing traumatic events may impact on the process of storytelling. In the second section, I explore questions of love and belonging as they relate to experiences of being alone or accompanied on journeys to the UK and in everyday life. In the third section, I consider questions of reflexivity and representation; I discuss the creation of the portrait poems in Chapter 5 which represent each of the young people and the ways in which I have imagined and represented their lives in Chapters 6 and 7.

4.1 ‘The lived life and the told story’

Narrative is described as a ‘popular portmanteau’ by Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013: 2) for a broad range of contemporary western social research. In the section below I outline the relationship between lived experience and the storying of that experience.

4.1.1 Narrated lives

Lived experience (2021) is “personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement” in everyday life. Stories may be accounts of imaginary or past events, the history of a person, people or place, facts or experiences that deserve narration (Hawkins & Allen, 1991:1429). Lived experience and stories about that experience, can therefore be considered as separate, albeit related, concepts. In Wengraf’s (2018) discussion of his Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) he draws a useful distinction between the ‘objective living of the lived life’ which he describes as the “‘objective data’ about the life period an uncontroversial in-principle verifiable record as in a truthful-factual CV” and the “subjective telling of the told story” which he refers to as a ‘situated subjectivity’ (Wengraf, 2018:221). All experience takes place in a temporal frame and so it follows that both oral and written accounts of experience are situated in time and place bound by individual subjectivities. The particulars of the self in any given context may be claimed and named, as in Audre Lorde’s self-definition as “a forty-nine year old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple…” (Lorde, 1984: 114) or left untold; but it is these particulars, spoken and unspoken, similarities and differences which may be visible or invisible (Burnham, 2012) which frame the narratives and the stories we tell.

In ‘*Understanding Narrative Inquiry’* Kim (2016), provides a helpful discussion of the difference between and interplay of ‘narrative’ and ‘story.’ She argues that many literary theorists (citing Abbott, 2002: Cohan & Shires, 1988) agree that a narrative is a recounting of events that are organised in a temporal sequence and this linear organisation of events makes up a story. A story is thus a detailed organisation of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time, although events are not necessarily in a chronological order (Kim, 2016:8). She writes

> “…a story has a connotation of a ‘full’ description of lived experience, whereas a narrative has a ‘partial’ description of lived experience...Narratives constitute stories, and stories rely on narratives”. (Kim, 2016:9)

Both narrative and story are thus representations of ‘events’ or ‘lived experiences’ told by a narrator “one who knows and tells” (Kim, 2016:6).

4.1.2 Listening and hearing

Thus far I have focused on the ‘speakers ’ or ‘narrators’ but not all stories can be or are told in words. Therefore the task for the researcher or ‘hearer’ is to listen to the ‘sound of silence,’ to what young people say and do not say (Kohli, 2006). The need to listen to what is said and not said is echoed by Tommi

> “To listen - to listen and to listen to what's not being said. That's my biggest thing. Listen to what's - what isn't being said. That's what I would say and understanding and patience. Those are the biggest things for me. Understanding, listening and having patience. All the speaking and stuff and the work that you do, that's all fine, that can come after. But these things that need to be put in place first. You need to listen and you need to understand what you're listening to and you need to be patient that things don't happen overnight. That's the biggest thing for me.” (Tommi)

In Squire’s (2013) discussion of socio-culturally oriented approaches to narrative she draws on the work of Ricoeur (1991) describing narratives as “jointly ‘told’ between writer and reader, speaker and hearer.” (Squire, 2013: 51). Squire (2013) posits that in telling and understanding stories, we are engaged in the relationship between “life as a story in its nascent state” (Ricoeur, 1991:29 cited in Squire, 2013) and it’s symbolic translation into recounted narrative (Squire, 2013: 51). This conceptualisation of storytelling as a co-construction between teller and hearer is particularly relevant for making sense of the stories of the “deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (Roy, 2004) as it calls on the ‘hearer’ to listen and bear witness to experiences which may be beyond translation into language.

Simmonds (2007:3) reminds us that the stories we tell, and the stories we keep for ourselves, are precious as they define who we are, where we’re from and what we are connected to (Deveci, 2012:12). Young people with ‘no papers’ carry with them the many stories of their lives. These stories are multi-layered; they are stories of home, of journeys, of loss and separation, of constant movement and everyday life in a place where their right to belong is still in question (ibid).

Alongside the stories of struggle are those of hopes and dreams for the future. For those who have survived unspeakable pain and tragedy, finding the words to describe their experiences or dream of a better future often feels an insurmountable task (Deveci, 2012:13). Melzak (1995) argues that the central character of trauma is disconnection; in this context, stories are disrupted and disturbed by traumatic experiences which 'haunt' the teller (Mock Muñoz de Luna, 2020). The constant presence of these ghosts haunt the teller and take up precious space in the stories they tell, in the silences and mistrust which, if left unattended, destroy any possibility of connection and coherence. From this perspective it falls on the 'hearer' to take note of the spaces in between and the moments which allow for linking. An alliance between 'teller' and 'hearer' can thus be a bridge across experience and make it possible for stories to be told and heard.

4.2 Love and belonging

Children and young people subject to UK immigration control are 'processed' either as dependents of adult parents or carers or as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). This categorisation tells us little about experiences of being alone or accompanied and suggests a permanent state which belies reality. In the section below I draw on hooks (2001) writing about love, Gergen (2009) on relational being and Rushdie (1991) on displacement to offer the reader a way to think about the meaning of being accompanied or unaccompanied as part of the picture of the participants' lives rather than static descriptors of fact.

> "When I was a child, it was clear to me that life was not worth living if we did not know love. I wish I could testify that I came to this awareness because of the love I felt in my life. But it was love's absence that let me know how much love mattered." (hooks, 2001: ix)

In the preface to '*All About Love*' bell hooks (2001) describes the moment when "that feeling of being loved left me. I just knew one day that I was no longer precious." She equates love and belonging saying "…where I felt loved, where I felt a sense of belonging"

(hooks, 2001: ix). The concepts of love and belonging as articulated by hooks are helpful for thinking about the lives of young people with no papers as they can enable us to understand something of the quality of being a child or young person who is alone and/or accompanied beyond a mere technicality. Four of the young participants arrived in the UK accompanied from commonwealth countries and three arrived alone in search of protection as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Information about 'country of origin' and whether children arrive in the UK accompanied or unaccompanied is important as it may indicate something of their history, journey to the UK, their circumstances on arrival and crucially, the way in which their claims for protection and citizenship will be processed.

4.2.1 Being

Although 'arrival in the UK' is a fixed reference point, it is just one moment in the young people's lives and the ways in which they may be alone and/or accompanied change over time (Wade *et al*, 2012; Kohli, 2014: Wade, 2019). In considering the presence and/or absence of others in the participants' lives it is necessary to look beyond the simple binary of accompanied or unaccompanied. If we take the view that life is lived through and in relationships whereby "the individual represents the common intersection in a myriad of relationships" (Gergen, 2009:150), then the quality and availability of the relationships we are engaged in become key to our health and wellbeing (White, 2017). Although solitude can often be restorative and generative, it can also mean isolation and loneliness for those who do not feel precious and loved. From this perspective, supportive attachments are crucial to create a secure base and foster a sense of belonging and safety, enabling young people to "endure rough seas ... [and] be sure of a safe haven" (Holmes, 1993: 70).

In Gergen's (2009) seminal work '*Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*' he proposes the concept of 'being' as opposed to 'self' arguing that "the 'self' is a noun, and thus suggests a static and enduring entity" (Gergen, 2009: xxvi). In contrast, 'being' he describes as "subverting the idea of a bounded unit" stating that "in being, we are in motion, carrying with us a past as we move through to the present into a becoming" (ibid). The idea of being constantly in movement is useful in reminding us of the fluidity of the young people's lives, and the ways in which they may be, at different times, alone and/or

accompanied in the present. Past and present commonly appear to be simple markers in time and yet often these temporal frames are porous.

4.2.2 Belonging

Rushdie's (1982: 9) essay 'Imaginary Homelands' opens with a description of "an old photograph in a cheap frame…a picture dating from 1946 of a house which, at the time of it's taking I had not yet been born." The photograph hangs on a wall in the room where Rushdie works; "it reminds me", he writes "that it's my present that is foreign and the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (Rushdie, 1991: 9). Rushdie's essay is a reflection on being a writer 'out-of-country' and even 'out-of-language'; writing about the fragmentation of memories, he describes an intensified experience of loss due to the "physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'" (Rushdie, 1991: 12). Some of the participants have lived in the UK from early childhood and so their present is not necessarily lived in a different land from their past. However, the discontinuity and fragmentation of personal histories intensified by the loss of people and place still resonates.

There is a complex interplay between questions of belonging and legitimacy, questions of being and of identity, which are brought to the surface in conversations about immigration. When Muhammed says 'I'm now illegal' he is echoing the language of those who continue to divide and rule; for some the right to belong and the protection of the state, for many the denial of the most basic humanity and right to exist. Being cared for and cared about is fundamental to human survival. In the context of a hostile environment (Goodfellow, 2019) the presence of love and care can offer young people with no papers some protection against the onslaught of daily tyrannies.

4.3 Telling stories

> "What's your story? It's all in the telling. Stories are compasses and architecture; we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all

> directions like arctic tundra or sea ice. To love someone is to put yourself in their story, or figure out how to tell yourself their story." (Solnit, 2013: 3)

Telling stories is at the heart of qualitative research. The focus of this storytelling is most often on the part played by the participants; the ways in which they tell stories and construct narratives. However, in this final section I focus on the researcher as storyteller. I explore the experiences and ideas which have shaped the way in which I have understood and represented the participants' stories.

As Solnit highlights,

> "We think we tell stories, but often stories tell us to hate, to see or to be blind…[…] The task of learning to be free, requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them and then become the storyteller." (Solnit, 2013:4).

4.3.1 Storytelling

My storytelling journey began in the late 1990s when I started working with young refugees in East London and also with Migrant Media, a collective of radical filmmakers. I joined Migrant Media at the start of the post-production on *Injustice* (2001)[10] a documentary about the struggles for justice by the families of those who died in police custody (Fero, 2015). The film focuses on the stories of Brian Douglas, Shiji Lapite and Ibrahim Sey. Hundreds of hours of footage, filmed over seven years, including personal testimonies of family and friends, funerals and memorial events, protests outside police stations, silent rallies and family photographs were carefully edited into a powerful narrative of love, struggle and resistance. Twenty years have passed since the film was released and it is as relevant today as it was in 2001. The death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter mobilisations (Buchanan *et a*l, 2020) call on us to remember all those who have been killed by police violence. Placards bearing photographs of those who have died and campaigns such as #SayHerName keep the memories of those who have been killed alive as part of a struggle for justice (Khaleeli, 2016).

[10] http://www.injusticefilm.co.uk/

4.3.2 Honouring lives

As I turn my attention to writing about the lives of the young people in this study I am mindful of the ways in which their lives connect to these global struggles for justice and reminded of how Brian Douglas, Shiji Lapite and Ibrahim Sey were brought to life in the opening scenes of *Injustice* (2001) through the use of family photographs and stories told by loved ones. In this way the stories of those who died in police custody were not simply 'thin' stories of victimhood and death, but the 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of a whole life, a person who was loved and held precious. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) in her TED Talk '*The Dangers of a Single Story*', tells stories about her childhood saying

> "All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me."

She reminds us that

> *"*It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power...[…] How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person."

I'm mindful that as the author of this thesis I am telling stories about the young people's lives and that in writing, I am interpreting, articulating, fixing and making concrete experiences which are not mine. Power relations are inescapable; my intention in naming and making visible the power of the storyteller is to demonstrate that this thesis can only ever be a partial account of the young people's lives. As researchers we take our participants' stories, break them apart and remake them to tell new stories; new understandings, knowledge and theories. As I grappled with the process of analysis, I organised the young people's stories into the aspects which resonated across all their stories (discussed as concepts in Chapter 3) and those which were particular to the individual. I was concerned to find a way to represent the participants and their particular

stories “honouring the told story and persevering the value and dignity of the teller” (Kim, 2016:111).

Initially I experimented with writing case examples. These were based on interview extracts interwoven with a brief commentary and summary of key themes in the young person’s life. There were several issues with this approach. Firstly, each case example totalled 3,000 – 5,000 words, I simply didn’t have the word count to do justice to each participants’ stories. Secondly, I struggled to find a framework which would work across all the stories honouring the diversity of stories told. Finally, I was concerned about writing a definitive story of the young person. I wanted to be able to offer the reader a portrait of the young person which captured something of their character as well as the essence of their everyday lives, life history, hopes and dreams rather than a definitive account.

Writing about art, aesthetics and research Yasmin Gunaratnam (2007: 275) describes how often “the impulse for artistic representation springs from a profound irritation at the inadequacy of my analysis, use of language or attempts to represent a fullness of lives.” Looking for ways to represent the fullness of the young people’s lives I began to explore the possibilities of using a portraiture approach and poetry as part of a research strategy. Hill (2005) describes how poetic portraits can be used to capture the richness and complexity of participants' lives in their social and cultural contexts. In her study of the experiences and practices of Black women teacher educators, Hill (2005) created poems using quotes from the interview transcripts, her own reflections and specifically analysed documents. “My goal,” she writes “was to describe the stories of my participants becoming and being teacher educators so that the reader would feel a familiarity with, and connection to, each respondent” (Hill, 2005: 96). Enabling the reader to feel a connection with the participants was an important part of my decision to include portraits of the young people at the heart of the thesis before the analysis chapters. I wanted the reader to be able to hold in mind the participants as individual human beings, not just research subjects characterised by their immigration status.

Rinehart (2019: 864) describes using poetic “portraiture” as a multidimensional and more accessible way of “seeing, hearing and feeling” participants and contexts (Hill, 2005). She argues that research poems can be used to convey key learning from research for diverse audiences by evoking a sensory response and, bringing them into the actual lived

experiences of the participant (Rinehart, 2019:862). Rinehart (2019) describes how she created six research poems using transcribed participants' words. She acknowledges that her field notes would have influenced how each poem was crafted but, unlike Hill (2005), these elements were not explicitly included in the poems. Notably Rinehart (2019) uses the participants words to illustrate knowledge which emerges from what she describes as 'all the evidence' – not just the transcripts. Like Rinehart (2019) I created seven portrait poems using the participants' words; in crafting the poems I aimed to represent the aspects of the young people's stories which appeared to be particularly significant to them as individuals. Rinehart (2019) posits that decisions about representation in research are deliberate and intentional; the poems in this project are therefore an attempt to capture something of the individual biographies and stories which are not represented elsewhere in the thesis.

Audre Lorde (1984: 37) describes poetry as "a revelatory distillation of experience". Poetry, she writes, is the most economical of all art forms

> "...which requires the least physical labour, the least material and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway and on scraps of surplus paper." (Lorde, 1984: 116)

In many ways writing poetry is the antithesis to writing a doctoral dissertation which requires somewhere to sit, a computer and plenty of time. I originally started to play with poetry as a means of distilling the lengthy transcripts into shorter forms. I worked and reworked the words, playing with punctuation to find a way to honour the stories told and convey something of the participants' voice, their energy and emotions expressed. I was concerned to balance fidelity to the participants' stories with coherence for the audience, disentangling details and reordering sections, playing with rhythm and pacing. Unlike the often-laborious grind of academic writing, it seemed as though if given space, the poems revealed themselves. Noting "the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose", Lorde (1984:116) claims that poetry has been "the major voice of poor, working class, and coloured women." Reflecting on Lorde's words I noted how poetry had enabled the young people's words to take up space amongst the prose, claiming a right to be heard. Their lives, histories, hopes and dreams, as though imagined in space between shifts, represented in this most economical of art forms.

4.3.3 Beyond words

In honouring the lived experiences of participants, Kim (2016: 11) reminds us of the importance of maintaining fidelity to both the stories they tell but also to that which the person may be unable to articulate about the story and its meaning. In the section below I discuss how I have understood the participants' experiences by drawing on our conversations, both recorded in the meeting transcripts and the 'off the record' dialogue in between, as well as my interpretation of that which was left unsaid, the silences, and bodily presence.

Hyden's (2013) essay on '*Bodies, embodiment and stories'* discusses how bodies are involved and engaged in the telling and listening to of stories, 'bodies', he argues 'intervene in the stories that people tell or try to tell.' (Hyden, 2013:126) I've found the concept of embodiment very helpful for making sense of some aspects of the young people's experiences; particularly those which appeared most painful or difficult to verbalise. These experiences 'beyond words' lingered in the room, with a heavy presence and power which was difficult to shift. In my meeting with Muhammed in particular there was heaviness and world weariness that hung on him like the overworn, faded t-shirt and trainers coming apart at the seams. As I talked through the consent form it was visible in the slump of his shoulders and the flippant 'I don't care' which signalled the erosion of his capacity to engage with anything beyond the present moment. His casual 'I'm illegal now' underwritten by years of trying to remain invisible to state authorities; of being exploited at work, trying to stay alive in a system which offered no hope of a better life. As he talked about being homeless and hungry living on the streets, feeling scared and cold, it wasn't so much his words as the 'powerful flow of feelings' (Cooper, 2020) which filled me with hopelessness, an overwhelming sense of despair which was hard to shake.

4.3.4 "This looks like immigration"

When early on in the meeting Muhammed said "this looks like immigration" I was horrified. I had tried to create a structure of collaborative meetings rather than interviews and embody the very opposite of the immigration system "that depersonalises, demands justification of people's experiences, and reinforces notions of power and non-choice"

(Lee, 2012: 2). Yet for Muhammed this 'meeting' looked just like all his other interviews, with the Home Office, Social Services, solicitors. In the moment I was disappointed, my own ego bruised by the fact that he couldn't see my attempts to be different. I had brought fruit and offered tea, but I had also sat opposite him at a large table in an institution and was asking questions.

Later, talking about his family he became tearful and put his head in his arms, collapsing onto the table. The table between us marked the gulf in our experience; the ghosts of his past ever present and the injustice of an immigration system which denied his humanity painful to witness. I wanted to offer comfort but didn't know how. I was struggling to manage my own feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and guilt that I had possibly inadvertently recreated a re-traumatising situation. I made him a cup of tea which he refused but when I sat down beside him, he lifted his head and took the tissues I offered. We sat side by side for a long time, speaking occasionally.

After about an hour inside Muhammed went outside to smoke. I followed him onto the balcony and as we sat together in the bright sunlight Muhammed told me that he had been worried that I might call immigration. Our meeting took place just days after the targeting of staff at a dozen Byron Burger restaurants in London which were part of planned raids by the Home Office. The company trapped staff by summoning them to meetings about cooking burgers shortly before immigration officers arrived on the premises (O' Carroll and Jones, 2016). Muhammed had been issued with 'removal directions' several years ago and so was at risk of immediate deportation if he came into contact with authorities. I was shocked and horrified that he thought I might betray his trust in this way and that he had been worried that the research meeting might've been a trap. I had known him since he first arrived in the UK and came to the Youth Club where I worked; it was unthinkable to me that I would collaborate with immigration services. However, on reflection I realised that this unthinking assumption was the luxury of someone who had always enjoyed the security of British citizenship and did not live with the daily threat of deportation.

He seemed to relax a little after I'd reassured him that I would not call immigration and I was able to engage him in a conversation. We talked about when he first came to the community centre, learning to speak English and gaining confidence at work. He was

proud of the specialist skills he'd developed as a tailor and there were glimpses of hope for the future, his desire to study at college and be able to design and make clothes. Reflecting on this meeting I am reminded of Poh Lin Lee's (2018) framing of trauma as power in therapeutic encounters "….trauma does everything to disrupt the conversation…trauma happens because of power" (Lee, 2017). Lee highlights the ways in which trauma is always seeking to disconnect us; from our bodies, ourselves and the world. Drawing on narrative therapy and the work of Michael White (2004, 2005) on 'double listening' and attending to the consequences of trauma, Lee (2013) describes a process of making visible histories of skills and strengths as part of a 'moment by moment' practice as a counter to trauma and power. I've found these ideas helpful for making sense of the encounter with Muhammed and understanding some of his experience.

Sitting inside, separated by a table, with the audio recorder set to capture our conversation I had unintentionally set up a space which, for him, replicated the meetings with authorities that required him to tell a linear, factual, singular story to access resources, support and protection. It was only when I moved to sit alongside Muhammed and we sat in silence together that other stories and conversational entry points had the opportunity to emerge (Lee, 2018). As Muhammed talked about his work as a tailor, showing me photographs of the intricate work he undertakes making adjustments to expensive designer clothing, we began to make a connection outside of the 'dominant problem story,' and begin a conversation in which Muhammed was in a position of knowledge and ability (Lee, 2018: 6).

Later when he left the room and I followed, the balance of power shifted again, he was happy to talk but didn't want me to record anything. Moving outside, giving up the power to record and engaging in a more therapeutically focused 'moment by moment' practice disrupted the dominant story, the trauma story, and enabled a process of co-constructing stories about capacity and ability as Muhammed talked about what he could do 'with papers' (Lee, 2013; 2018). As we walked down the corridor after the meeting Muhammed appeared more relaxed, his posture was straighter as he indicated that it had been good to speak. When we exited the building he was visibly relieved, commenting that there was no immigration; a stark reminder of his daily reality.

4.3.5 Indefinite detention

In Poh Lee Lin's writing about her work with asylum seekers on Christmas Island she describes indefinite detention as 'act of institutional power and harm' (Lee, 2018:2)[11]. As I reflect on the meeting with Muhammed I realise that for many young people living with no papers is a form of indefinite detention; imprisoned by fear and the constant possibility of deportation, their daily lives are an attempt to use their limited power to minimise the harm enacted by the state. Even those who did not face the risk of immediate deportation often lived as though bound by a straight-jacket. The hyper-vigilance of survivors of traumatic events and abuse is well documented (Hardy, 2013, Smith et al, 2019) and the idea that 'the body keeps the score' is familiar in the literature on this topic (Van der Kolk, 2015). Although I was familiar with these concepts it was not until I started to listen to the audio of my interviews with Rayyan that the full force of these acts of power and harm hit me;

> "Have been listening to the audio from my second meeting with Rayyan. Really hard going to listen to him speak about feeling suicidal but heavier is listening to him in the present express how utterly empty he feels. Zombified - a wasted life. He talks about feeling like a prisoner in himself and it is heartbreaking to listen to. I have been selecting extracts, making notes and linking themes but I have not been able to do this with this last section about his feelings as it is too overwhelming and intense. I don't really know how to work with this material as it is too much. I am reminded of my meeting with Muhammed and how completely numb I felt after our meeting. Like I couldn't continue with normal life because the emotional experience was too intense. And as I was listening I remembered Darwish - when he was very young and I had noticed the burns on his arms and he told me he did it to release tension. I so clearly remember him telling me that he didn't want to live anymore because there was no point as he had lost everyone he loved - I just remember thinking. Yes, what can I say to convince him otherwise. We live to love and without love there is no meaning. I actually feel really upset

[11] Lee (2018) uses the term 'people seeking asylum' rather than refugee to draw attention to the way in which being held in indefinite detention while waiting for asylum claims to be processed in order to be determined as a 'genuine' refugee is an act of institutional power and harm. In this context, as in the experience of those with 'no paper's in the UK, those subject to immigration control are held in limbo with limited opportunities to exercise control over their present or future.

and tearful. Am not sure if it's because I am tired and rundown but listening to Rayyan is heart-breaking. So much pain and hurt. Brutal." (Field notes)

"…I'm suddenly right back in the room…[…]…The boundaries of the [research] task in many ways limited my exposure to the raw emotion - I couldn't think or feel too deeply as I would not be able to manage the being present and listening. However, without the young person's presence the experience of listening is altogether different - much more intense, anxiety provoking and painful. The experience literally gets under my skin and inhabits my body – it's a very physical sensation and the only thing I can compare it to is a kind of secondary trauma. I'm conscious that this experience is not mine and yet it has taken over my body and mind." (Field notes)

"Realised today that listening is having a physical effect on me - listening to the audio I feel like it gets inside me - under my skin…I feel so in touch with the experience that it becomes almost unbearable - I can't think." (Field notes)

Three years have passed since I last listened to those recordings but the memory is vivid. I remember the tightness in my body, a dull pain and feeling of constant tension which hung over me at all times. It was weeks before I was able to connect these bodily sensations to the experience of listening to the audio and begin to use this knowledge to help me to understand something of what it must feel like to live everyday in this invisible prison, held in limbo 'with a vivid uncertainty about the future.' (Lee, 2018:14)

4.3.6 Narrative imaginings

In her discussion of narrative writing Kim (2016) draws on the concept of narrative imagination, defined by the American philosopher, Martha Nussbaum as "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself.." (Nussbaum cited in Kim, 2016: 113). I have offered these accounts of my embodied experience of the research as a way of highlighting for my readers some of the different influences which have impacted my imagining of the young people's lives and shaped the poems and analysis. I have tried to offer an honest and self-reflexive account of the research process but as Squire (2013: 67) reminds us

> "….we cannot be fully reflexive, that there will always be material that lies beyond the realm of our interpretations and that we may get things very wrong.."

Certainly, there is much of the young people's experience that is beyond my understanding and as such any attempts to story their lived experiences will only ever be a partial representation. However, to cite Geertz (1973:318)

> '…it is not necessary to know everything to understand something."

The portrait poems are an attempt to re-story the 'something' which I have understood, to cultivate narrative imagination thereby enlarging empathic understanding (Kim, 2016:13). My intention is that they offer the reader an entry point into the lives of those who are often nameless, invisible outside their own networks and hidden from public view.

The young people in this study are survivors of a brutal immigration system which holds them in "liminal spaces of uncertainty, with limited abilities to take action or consider a future" (Lee, 2018: 2). I have been mindful of this context when writing this thesis; thinking about spaces in which stories were shared and those in which they may be read, understood and interpreted by others. Seen from this perspective storytelling carries a relational responsibility both to the individuals whose stories are represented but also to the broader community of those about whom we produce knowledge. As Clandinin et al (2018: 25) note

> "we create stories through our actions and interactions, we create them in our living. We are […] part of a storied landscape and with that there is culpability, responsibility, answerability in the way we carry ourselves in the world."

Through this project I have become part of the storied landscape of the lives of young people with no papers and this awareness informs the decisions I've made about how to present my analysis of the data. I have found Kim's (2016) discussion of Bakhtin's theory of novelness and concepts of polyphony, chronotope and carnival helpful in thinking about how to represent their accounts of their lives in ways which are responsible, respectful and meaningful. Polyphony refers to the concept of multiple voices, a "plurality

of independent, unmerged voices" (Kim, 2016: 75). Chronotope means time (chrono -) and space (-tope) in Greek and this concept highlights the intrinsic connectedness of time and space as significant aspects in our lives as individuals and as social beings. From carnival I have taken the importance of respecting and privileging voices that are most often marginalised or silenced. These essential concepts enable the presentation of a multiplicity of perspectives situated within shifting temporal and spatial frames and underscore the different ways in which states of life and death are experienced, spoken about, present and absent for individuals. From this perspective life and death are framed as a continuum through which to consider the complexity and multiplicity of the lived experiences, hopes and dreams of young people with 'no papers.'

4.4 Summary

This chapter has explored some of the thoughts, feelings, methods and knowledge which have informed the analysis and representation of the research data. The chapter is intended as a walkway between the fixed entry point of a literature review and methodology and discussion of findings. The next Chapter 5. *Seven Portraits*, offers a collection of poems as portraits of the young people. Taken together Chapters 4 and 5 offer a bridge between the 'why' and the 'how' part of this thesis and the latter half which is concerned with 'what', what have we learnt and what are the implications for practice and research.

Chapter 5: Seven Portraits

This chapter is a collection of poems curated to hang as portraits of the research participants; Ahmed, Precious, Rayyan, Sarah, Muhammed, Sekou and Tommi. The poems are presented in the order of our first research meetings. The purpose of this chapter is a) to represent the participants as individuals b) to offer an impression of their individual everyday lives, life histories, hopes and dreams and c) to honour aspects of their accounts which do not 'fit' into the analysis.

Representation is inevitably a partial depiction of a whole, reflecting as much the perspective of the creator as the 'truth' of the original. As such these poems are not an attempt to offer a definitive representation of fact. Rather they are an attempt to evoke something of the individual lives of the young people and bring to life important parts of their stories which may otherwise have been 'discarded data'.

Ahmed

They can go everywhere –
British –
why they can go
everywhere?
Why can we not go
anywhere?
They're going by
plane.
We come by
lorries,
and they still don't take us.

The place I live there is not even address.
There is not even address.
It is no good place to live
but I live
because I need it.
I don't have
a choice.

What can I do?
I don’t have a choice.
I have to work hard.
I’m just always
hiding myself
from everyone.
I’m so scared.

Customers likes me,
they say oh,
you’re friendly

when he's not in the shop I am
the manager

I have friends, like good customers,
sometimes they ask me,
oh come brother,
we're going to go out in
the weekend,
but they don't know
I'm illegal.
I just say to them, oh,
I have something else to do.
I make excuses.

I go work and
after work
I go to the gym as well.
I meet other people.
They think
I am not illegal here.
I can't say the truth because
they're gonna,
they’re gonna call the police,
maybe,
Immigration

But I am a good barber.
If I was not illegal I'd maybe
have my own business.
I have a lot of customers
that like me
because
I have been cutting hair for a long time.

Two days ago
in my country
25 people died
for no reason.
Three hundred people
were injured.
I'm just always scared
what's going to happen
to me.
I've been here longer.
I'm used to it here.
I know the people,

the life.

So I just save little bit of money
for myself,
every week when I work I save,
maybe, I just think,
if anything happened to me
in the future then
I can use this money for
again to come to the UK
or to other country,
to do something.

My mosque is near my shop.
I go in the daytime,
sometimes.
I pray in my shop as well,
and sometimes I pray at home.
Sometimes I miss it because I'm going to the gym
and then I pray at home.
But I pray.

I try to pray five or four times
it makes me feel happy.
It is the right way.
You're not going to find happiness in other things,
but when you start praying you feel happy.
My heart.
It's healthy because this life
everything is temporary.
You're not going to take anything from this world.
It's temporary.

Precious

Everything is just about the immigration now
I'm turning 18 next month.
I still don't know what to do.
It's just not really fair,
now there's nothing I can do.

But if I don't go to college,
what am I going to be doing at home.
I just keep pushing myself every time
So I keep doing
I hope
my dream will come true.

I always have a hope that
one day
I will have papers,
I'll be able to work.
I want to be a social worker
I want to have a public school for children
So that was my plan
I'm still hoping
my plan and my dream
come true.

now my mum is dead
and my dad,
he doesn't care about me,
he doesn't even remember me.
I'm just by myself.

Life's just been so difficult for people who don't have papers

I know life has been difficult for me
for over two years now
I've learned a lot
I've achieved a lot
I'm hoping to achieve the papers,
I hope to achieve
I'm doing my best
in my education,
trying to be as educated as I can be,
trying to focus,
trying to do something,
trying not to think.

But I just can't

Because when the Home Office
sent me a letter
that said they're going to
send me back home,
when I start crying
and I don't know what to do,
I was going crazy,
start screaming,
I was so stressed,
I'm having chest pain,
like proper pain.
I couldn't sleep

sometimes
I've got in front of the car
and said
I just want to die here,
I'm just tired,
I know that I'm free,

I don't need to think about immigration,
I don't have to think about anything.

So
I just focus on my education
because
even if my immigration comes
I'll continue
and if my immigration doesn't come
I'll still try to continue
until I get
what I want
just focus more
on education
try to achieve my goal.

Every day
just keep moving,
keep moving,
keep moving,
keep moving
until you reach there,
until you reach that goal.

Rayyan

we had a very large house
the biggest in the village
as big as the entire
university estate
massive house
extensive lands

all different sorts of trees
lychees, coconuts, mangoes
a pond with fish

it's lonely as well
I was just the child
there's no other people

my dad
he wasn't stable
he had this paranoia
not just depression
he would be violent
cause trouble with the neighbours

my dad wasn't always like that
he was educated
the government trusted him
with conducting the census
people would ask for help
with writing letters
understanding
translating

he was quite respected
but he would not lie

my great great-grandfather
came to the UK in 1901
this is where our history with the UK
starts from
he was working for a merchant
he travelled all over
Cairo, Lebanon, Syria,
Japan, China
He's buried in London.

technically
he was a British national
he had the nationality
technically
I would be a British national
if I could prove all these chains

my dad was in hospital again
my granddad gave notice to keep him
for six months

We got the visa
we came to the UK.
I was nine, nearly ten
my uncle can’t stay long

I stayed with my aunt’s family.
I felt like I was at home
it was like moving house
from here to there

I wasn't really interested in Bangladesh
I can educate myself here
I can live my life here
I'll have a better
secure
safe
more peaceful life
than there

I knew I was different from everyone else
I couldn't go to the doctors
I couldn't get the Oyster card
I had to walk an hour every day
in the morning and in the afternoon
to go and come back from school

I couldn't go to the doctors
when I was ill
I couldn't travel
so I knew
I was different

my education
has always been
precarious

Year 10
They were doing immunisations.
The government
they were very forceful
everyone must go through that
the school wouldn't take no for an answer
but my guardians said
you can't get the vaccine

you have to put details of your doctor
and they have to check

they explained the situation
I was very, very upset.
because it's been so long
and they haven't done anything
about it

I felt expendable
that people wouldn't take
risk for me

people say they love you
they care about you
but there's no way to know
until someone
has to take a risk for you

that's when you know
whether someone cares about you
or not

the decisions weren't up to me

the decision was made
that I cannot continue with education
I had to drop out

it was a very, very difficult time for me.

it was very, very difficult for me to accept
I'd done so much hard work over the years
and I had to drop out

I became from a very sociable person
with lots of friends and a lot to do
to a person who doesn’t have
any connection
with anyone
and has
absolutely nothing
to do

from then the problem with the family started
as a child and as a young person
I would expect more from my family
I would expect them
to look out
for the best for me

we went to a solicitor
she advised
new names
date of birth
new story

for a time
I was younger than I was
for a time
I was older than I was

I went to college
I had to pretend
that I couldn't speak English.

I didn't really know who I was
as a person

because
I wasn't anyone really

I was just in limbo
between two different persons
and personalities
the lost years of my life
stolen years
I was suicidal

I was completely ready to give up everything
there wasn't anything to hold on to

I wasn't afraid to do it
I almost wanted to do it

but
I have certain beliefs
these are non-negotiable
no matter how bad it is
it's never bad enough
to kill yourself

the only way to deal with this feeling
was to do self-harming

it’s like you're walking through
a very muddy track

it becomes very difficult to go through
after a while you stop
you become exhausted
that's when the possibility is
that you kill yourself

when you self-harm it elevates your distress
it makes you feel better
it makes you feel lighter
like you
have accomplished something

I feel very insecure
the danger is from me
I'm with myself all the time
I'm living with the danger
all the time
there is no safety

I was afraid of myself

you can't hold on
to anything
not family
not friends
not your legal situation
no support

I didn't know who I was
I was afraid
I went to her to say goodbye

I tried to be abstract
but she knew
something was up
and she didn't let me go
she stood
in front of the door
she said

I can't let you
go

he said
we are with you
we're going to help you
the college is with you
we are going to be with you
every single step
of the way

I feel suicidal
but
I'm not actively suicidal

I completed my A-levels
got offers from unis
secured a scholarship

but it may not be possible for me
to take it
because of my current
immigration situation

I would say
I'm a very confused person
not in terms of religion
but in terms of a person
looking for an identity
I don't have British nationality
yet

it's not just about having
an identity document

but about belonging
somewhere

I have a long way
to go

Sarah

I remember the day
that the house got knocked on
by the police
they came to get my dad
and everyone else.

And because we were young
they told us to
go to school

that lady took us to London
we lived in a house
with bare people
when you're foreign
everyone is cramped
in one house
and you have to share beds

we travelled around
a lot
a lot of moving

when I was 19 going to 20
I got kicked out
my sister's crying
saying
I have nowhere to go.

I was just going around
from one place to another
until they found me somewhere

She’s really, really nice
the nicest person I've ever met in my life
we have dinner together
it's like I'm still a part of the family
I don't want to leave

a stranger took you in
I really don’t want to leave
her house
she's been there for me

I'm not allowed to work
I'm with Positive Futures
I get free travel
I get food at home
I get food when I go to my sisters
the charity shop
they give me clothes

it's a lot of moving around
until I get my own place
then I can stop
moving around

if I
when I
get my start
I can help out my mum
it's really bad
she's in a house
it's cramped
her legs hurting
I tell her

you need to take care of yourself.

my mum will be on the phone
when there's gunshot firing
she has to be on the floor

I don't want my mum
living that life

so why am I going to go to Jamaica
when I can be here
helping her
getting her out of that life

I don't remember a lot about Jamaica

I remember when I was with my mum
the whole family went to the beach
we had a nice meal after swimming
I remember that

I was grown in a proper Jamaican home
even though I've been here for so long
I was growing up in a Jamaican home

you can't really give up on your country
Ras.
You have to go back
because that's your country
that's the place that you know

for me
the reason why I have to go is because
I was born there

that's the motherland

So even though you're here
trying to make a life
make a living
trying to stay here
you still have that respect for
your motherland

because
that's where you were born
and that's where most of our family are
that's where your mum is
that's where your dad died.

He got killed.
They shot him in the face.
My mum had to move
from where she was.
she had to disappear from there
so that she don't get hurt
and my sisters don't get hurt

Everyone goes, it's lovely,
it's lovely
But my dad died down there.
How is it lovely?

He was killed.
Got shot in the face seven times.
Why would I want to go there?

He was a nice person.
He took care of us

I still see him as someone
that took care of us,
someone
that's there for us
when we need him
no matter what they say

I've learnt a lot
you can't give up.
You have to keep trying
and always,
always,
always stay positive

never give up on your dreams
the faith and the hope
the reaching for your dreams
it still helps you to get by
everyday

I'm always positive
I’m always fine
always happy
probably because
I've got my sisters

Muhammed

I'm a tailor
I just start here
that is my job now
learn in UK for my future
these skills

when the court refuse
solicitor said
you don't have any chance
up to you, you can go

I'm now illegal.
I left everything.

it is okay now
that’s secret
if I get the paper
I can find a good job
but not any chance

library skills
I learned from England

I can't write
but I can read

I never got chance
go to college
or anything
to speak

I left England
travelled to Sweden
and then back

I got scared from here
for government
for my case
they fingerprint.

they bring me back
deport to London.

Now like normal
sometimes scared
but that's happened

I don't scared for anything
just normal

enjoy play snooker.
drink after work
back home

I got mental health problem

I love to work
but I can't move
or sometime
I can't sleep all night

I don't care about the paper
this happen when I come to UK
it's not easy life
pass different country

different people
live alone

It's very hard.

It start from Sweden,
one month in hospital
that mentality
then come here

because all family
long time now
only my sister and my brother left

I don't know what happened

My mum is three years ago
she is passed

I just thinking this immigration.
It's like immigration.

I don't care.
there's nothing happen
for my life or anything
if I can help.

I'm difference, I'm change
looks like I'm mental now

pressure try to
make free inside
[but it
doesn’t happen].

It's a difference when I was a child
now this happen
for my life
come here alone

I now understand
why is that the life

but I'm happy

every day when I wake up
try to thinking good, make fresh
and good thinking

any bad thing or bad dream
ignore it
just leave it alone
[refuse]
from my brain
that's it.

that is
my plan
what shall I do
you can't do
anything.

I just play sometime
play football
before Afghan league
but then I have not any time
just play sometime
go and play football.

I got now big trouble
when I sleep now no one wake up me
just stay home.

all the times are different there
because you got mum

school
a village
a small place
and all the children
there

very real difference.

when I was come from Sweden.
I don't have money
for eat
this happen.
no-one that can help me
I'm stay hungry in the UK.

homeless

that time I never said to anyone
nothing
the day is past.

that time
living alone
a lot of time I'm still hungry.

but anyway

I am happy

the dream is past
is dead.
Nothing.
this happen
can't do anything change.

Now for me everything is like black,
dark place.

Then you can't move,
just go to work to live
pay for rent
nothing else.

Nothing is difference.

if got paper, easy.
They can work
they can open business
so some plan.

They easy move

You can't move.
You can't do anything.
many worries.
You can't do anything.
It's like hard work
for nothing.

If I've got paper
I like to continue study

design cutting, pattern cutting,

but not any chance

if it's one day maybe it's come,
but it's too late,
age is gone.

See future back again
black world.

You can't sit in the sun here
this is England,
not like us country.
In the summer every day is sunshine.

It's not safe
the news
how many people died
last week
how many people
die every day

Sekou

Saturday we wake up together,
my wife makes breakfast.

I go to work
Saturday evening
I reserve for
my wife.

We go to cinema,
I get free cinema ticket.
Or if we have
friends who've got
birthday parties or events,
we often go.
I like eating at home
but they're French;
they love eating outside.

What I do is all over the spectrum
Cinema Customer Assistant
Programme Intern
Coach
Recruiter
Consultant
Care Leaver panellist
working with Local Authorities

When I'm home I don't miss
the news.

I've seen

two
different lives.

I was born in Guinea
in the capital city

my mum passed away
during childbirth.

The people here haven’t seen
what it's like in Guinea.

Where I'm from in Guinea,
when people support you,
there’s a saying in my language,
if somebody is watching your back,
you've got to watch your stomach,
because
they can't reach your back
and your stomach
at the same time.

I'll always feel lucky.

I felt lucky
When I first got here
and I still feel lucky.

The first day I came here,
I was wearing just a jacket
in cold weather.

Somebody took me to a house.
It was everything to me,

because I was cold.

I have this sense of debt
I've got to give back.

that's why I do
my tutoring.

You've got to
understand someone first
before you teach them.

maths is not just school;
it's about every day
of your life.

when I used to
live with my dad,
my dad used to tell me,
Sekou,
you've got to do this.
You've got to do this.

waking up every morning,
going to school,
that's how I was brought up.
I know my responsibility
every morning on the weekdays,
I've got to go to school
and study.

My dad would give me food,
but he would expect me
to clean up my plate.

We all have responsibilities.

When I was growing up,
my dad had one job.
He always saw me.
He took me to school.
That's the parent
I want to be.

I've got to see me taking my children to school
I've got to see which school my children are going to

My life has changed completely,
but my identity hasn’t changed.

I am always a Guinean
in the face of law,
in the face of the country.

what I know today
as an immigrant you can portray
all these different things.
I know why I'm here
and I know why I came here

no matter what people think
unless you speak to me
or you hear from me
That's your opinion.

I don’t think where I was born
should define what I get in life

the effort I put in life
should define what I get
not where I was born

he believed that
he could change the world,
my dad.

he believed in education.

back home
I was always first in my class.

I've learned a lot
from this country.

It's opened my eyes to
so many things.
But the barrier I face
is bigger than
what I've learned

Everything I've learned
I could put into something.
But the biggest barrier
is identity.

If you don’t have an identity –
even proper work.
Why do I do six or seven different jobs?
Because I'm surviving.

sometimes I don’t talk about immigration
because you don’t want to forget

the good things you have.

whenever you talk about immigration,
all you see is the bad things.
But no matter what you do,
sometimes
the shock comes.

I can't finish my degree.
At the moment I'm working
Probably six years it will take me

we all applied for medicine
the same year.
She was refused.
I was called for an interview.
I didn’t take an interview offer,
because I didn’t have
the right immigration status

She's finished now.
I'm still on my first year degree,
because what?
I don’t have
the right immigration status.

When I was a child,
I knew what my dad's responsibility was
in the house
and what my responsibility is.

my responsibility to the Home Office
is to tell them everything I know,
give them evidence.

It's up to them to find out
what the truth is.
it can sit there
for four years
and suddenly they say
we refuse you.

it doesn't make sense.

When I wake up tomorrow morning,
I know I can be sacked
from my workplace
because
I don’t have
immigration status.

they're playing with
my life.

I want to have children.
But I don’t want my children
to live life
like that.

Immigration is the one thing
you can't control.
It's out of my hand.
when they need
my information,
I'll give it to them.

When they want me to speak,
I'll speak to them.

But who decides?
Not me.

my struggle has been
immigration status,
it's been
the hardest hill to climb
and still
the hardest hill to climb.

Tommi

I have a real passion
for fashion

your image,
no matter how much struggle
you've been through,
if you look okay
then
no one can know your story.

I like to go out,
I like to party,
I just do whatever I do
for me,
however I feel,
I just go with it.

My aim in life
is to be respected for my craft
be respected for what it is I do
that would be my success.

I've learned collaboration is key
You can't do anything on your own.

in order to learn,
you have to fall on your face first
over time
always questioning
why
process

moments
things happen for a reason

it's not forever.
Nothing's forever.
it will go back up
then
come falling down
again

Nothing is ever what it is
on the surface.
there has to be
something underneath,
something I'm not seeing
through questioning
and questioning
and questioning
and questioning
I got to understand
that's why that happened.

I didn't have my parents around as much.
So, I had to learn to be
independent.

I didn't want my bad experiences
to make me bitter

we have to be a voice for people
you have to show people
that you can come from nothing
and become something,
something positive within yourself.

I'm showing you,
you can be whatever you want
it's your choice.

When I tell you my story,
I want to show you through performance
you're going to see it
I'm going to take you there.

my talent,
it has a purpose,
to drive change.

doing rehearsals
auditions
I was in a hostel
one room.
no one knew
I worked hard
sitting in this room
learning my lines,
doing it.

I didn't have space in my own room
where I could put on music.
this grey room with white walls
and two beds.

I would rehearse,
work to get where
I needed to be.

When I performed,

you would never know
that I had people walking around
all the time.

I had my dad in my room
all the time.

I came here when I was three years old

my childhood living on the estate,
my friends, my community

I wouldn't change it for the world,
Because that's the only thing
that made me feel normal

your neighbour, your best friends,
coming knocking at your door
walk to school.

you never have to
go to school alone

I didn't understand
you're not a citizen,
you don't have status,
you don't have leave to remain

I just knew you're Jamaican
there's a problem being Jamaican here
they want you to go back there

we got kicked out
it happened so quickly

my mum was head of the family
application
she got deported
they removed her
knowing that
she has a family here

months later,
I got told that
she was in Jamaica.

we had to move
just me and my dad
moving around
like crazy

before citizenship
a lot of moving around,
a lot of hassle,
hassle with the council,
always having to leave
and go to meetings.
missing school
money was hard
my sister supported me
doing whatever she needed to do
to get where
she needed to be

when I got citizenship
it was the hardest months
for me
setting up life

it happened so sudden
the same night
they drove him to Dorset

that was the last time
I saw my dad.

Lunar House
wasting my time
take someone, lock them up
not giving any information
to me.

I'm family
they have power
they just do whatever they want
in secret

he is a Commonwealth citizen

this is injustice

I'm numb to that pain
I've been through so much

I want to work in fashion,
I want to learn to dance
I still want to do acting.

I'm going to do it all
because at a time
you couldn't do anything.

Now you can,
you might as well
try and do
everything.

It is impossible to know when writing what a reader will make of the words on a page. In prose it is perhaps easier to offer the reader some direction, to specify what is intended, to delineate a framework within which ideas can be thought about. Poetry is rarely accompanied by such instructions and so is perhaps a more risky endeavour. The poem formed by the writer may disturb and be disturbed by the reader, the interpretation may be a reformulation and reframing some distance from the form created. My hope is that these poems can, in some limited way, evoke in the reader an impression of the participants, and of lives which we cannot begin to understand unless we listen to all aspects of their stories; past, present and possible futures.

With this in mind, the chapters which follow explore how young people with 'no papers' survive on a continuum between life and death. The following chapter, Chapter 6. *Nameless Death* evokes Bion's (1962) concept of 'nameless dread' to capture something of the traumatic, unpredictable nature of being subject to immigration control alongside the invisibility of being without papers, a kind of social death (Seale,1998). In this chapter, I explore the presence of death in the young people's narratives through a framework of separation and loss, the hostile environment and despair and erasure. Chapter 7, *Life* explores the ways in which the young people resist death, live and love.

Chapter 6: Nameless Death

> " The truth is, sir, that men do what their power permits them to do. We are no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you, that will never be forgiven by history." (Ghosh, 2009: 275)

6.0 Introduction

It is impossible to live in this current moment without a sharp awareness of death; the deaths of black and brown bodies crossing the Mediterranean, victims of police brutality and Covid19. For the young people in this study, death is ever present; the loss of loved ones, the denial of citizenship and inhumanity of being cast as 'illegal', the destruction of family life through the bureaucratic processes of border control, the daily exploitation of working with 'no papers', the risk of death from self-harm and suicidality.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which death appears in the young people's narratives and the experience of living with the risk of death as a constant presence. In the first section I consider experiences of separation and loss in the young people's lives and the impact of these bereavements. In the second and third sections, I discuss the hostile environment and living in the face of possible deportation and constant threat to life. Living with no papers is conceptualised as a form of psychosocial death (Seale,1980) and dying, whereby young people are erased by state processes and at risk of premature death (Gilmore, 2007).

6.1 Separation and loss

All seven of the young people I spoke to had experienced the death or permanent separation from one or both of their parents. Sekou's mother died during childbirth and he arrived in the UK alone aged 17 seeking protection as a refugee. Precious' mother also died early on in her childhood and she was cared for by her paternal grandmother who died when she was seven years old. Later she travelled to the UK with her father, stepmother and siblings

> "The day we came in, London City Airport, we get off there. We went to sleep in a hotel, then the next day…he find us a house and we get to the house, we clean that house, we cook, we eat and everything. That night, he just - just don't see him anymore. I think, yeah - which is - we came in 26 December 2010, five o'clock." (Precious)

Rayyan did not have contact with his mother during his childhood and when his father was hospitalised for an extended period he was brought to the UK by his uncle and grandfather and left with extended family. Ahmed and Muhammed came to the UK alone as refugees; when I met with them for this research neither had any contact with their families. Muhammed told me that his mother had died three years ago. Sarah separated from her mother when, aged nine, she came to the UK with her father. Her father was subsequently deported to Jamaica where he was shot in the face and killed. Tommi came to the UK with his parents when he was three, they lived together until his mother was deported when he was 12. When Tommi reached adulthood and was granted citizenship, his father was also deported to Jamaica.

6.1.1 Death as loss of protection

Although the narration of these losses often did not take up much space in the interviews, the loss of a parent, at whatever age and in whatever circumstances, is a significant life event. My intention here is not to attribute meaning to these events but rather to note that the young people in this study are all bereaved and to acknowledge the magnitude of the losses they have suffered. The work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1991)

on attachment theory is helpful here in thinking about the potential impact of separation and death as a loss of protection. One of the major tenets of attachment theory is that being cared for and cared about is fundamental to human survival. Much of Bowlby's work focused on the 'making and breaking of affectional bonds' (Bowlby, 1977). Bowlby was particularly interested in the development of an emotional bond between mother and infant and the way in which this bond functioned as a form of protection (Bowlby 1958, 1959). The limitations of the dyadic model has been criticised as a substantive reservation regarding attachment theory by systemic practitioners (Dallos and Draper, 2015:134). However, my purpose here is not to critique Bowlby's (2005) work or theorise the young people's experiences within an attachment framework but to use this perspective to illuminate the significance of the loss of a parent and the potential impact of this on the young people's sense of security.

It is notable that for most of the young people these losses were experienced in childhood and the separation was premature; by premature I mean a separation which did not take place within an 'ordinary' lifecycle whereby the child reaches maturity and separates from their parent and/or the parent reaches the end of their natural life cycle. Notwithstanding the huge variety of perspectives on death and dying across different social and cultural contexts, death always disrupts life. Opportunities to make sense of and find a way to live with the death of loved ones are important. The ways in which the participants spoke about separation from loved ones or the death of a parent/primary carer varied. Most often it was presented as a fact to be noted, briefly in passing, almost as if part of a forgotten history. In my conversations with the young people, I was mindful that some had had opportunities in their lives to mourn and grieve for the passing of a loved one, while others had not. Precious remembered her grandmothers' funeral in Nigeria

> "… that day, everyone was crying, I didn't cry. I don't know why I didn't cry. Because everyone, afterward they cry, but me. When she died, I didn't really feel anything, because I was still young at that time, I don't know anything. Then a few days later, I start missing her." (Precious)

For others, such as Sarah and Muhammed, their circumstances at the time had made it impossible for them to take part in the rituals and rites which mark the passing of a life.

Sarah was living with ‘no papers’ in England when her father was shot and killed in Jamaica.

When Muhammed described his ‘mental health problem’ beginning with hospitalisation in Sweden, I asked about life in Afghanistan

YD: Was it okay when you were in Afghanistan? Did you feel better there?
MU: Yeah, because all family. [*Long pause*]
YD: Yeah
MU: [*Yawns while speaking*] Now it's not easy.
YD: Are you in contact with your family?
MU: I used to - long time now, because only my sister and my brother left. My mum is - three years ago she is passed.
YD: Oh, I'm sorry. [long pause]. Are your sister and your brother older or younger?
MU: Younger. I don't know what happened. [laughs]

Nine words “my mum is – three years ago she passed” is all he said. I could feel the weight of this most immense loss buried under the daily struggles to survive; working to pay rent for the single room somewhere above a shop, rather than sleep in a doorway. Muhammed’s mother died in Afghanistan while he was trying to survive undetected and undocumented in England. I remember, a few days after this conversation, feeling an incredible sadness wash over me as I realised that he would not have been part of the funeral, the prayers and communal rituals which enable the living to mourn the death of a loved one. And that most likely he would have faced that loss alone in a country which considered him ‘illegal.’ Separation is a common feature of migration, particularly for those who are undocumented (Gonzales et al, 2019). Emerging research on transnational dying and bereavement draws attention to the complexity of grieving when separated by geography and immigration status (Bravo, 2017; Girait, 2018). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore transnational bereavement and grieving in depth and thus my intention here is rather to draw attention to the scale of the losses, disruption and dislocation which were key aspects of these young people’s lives.

6.1.2 Death as everyday violence

Another aspect of death which was notable in the young people's narratives was the way in which acts of violence were spoken about as part of the familiar every day. Ahmed described the constant fear of living in a conflict zone

> "People were scared because the situation was bad. We had a lot of Taliban allowed in the village so the whole village was under them, they controlled it. So, it was bad. They were taking - they were saying to young people, oh come. They were making young people brain-washed, like to say, oh, come join us. We're going to kill these people. We're going to go to paradise and this that. They were brain-washed. So, everyone they got older there was more leaving the village. People were leaving when they got older. They were scared. They said, we didn't go with them, they're going to kill us. They was giving warnings to people. They're still until now. Look other day every month people are dying, even in the capital, in the city, Kabul, people are dying... There is no life. If you go out in the morning you have to say bye forever to your mum, because maybe you're not going to come [home] alive. It's very hard." (Ahmed)

Rayyan describes growing up in a culture of injustice, fear and oppression. He recounted a story he had been told by his grandmother about a murder in the next village where a man was hacked to death

> "…what happened is that they basically hacked him to death in front of hundreds of people and people just stood and watched. Then the authorities were involved and they were just trying to find witnesses, what happened. Not that the police really care anyway. But I heard people were running all over the place just to avoid encountering the security forces so they wouldn't have to say anything to them. This is the culture of - this is the level of injustice…[…]. This is excessive force. But here you have a murder very unjustly done in front of hundreds of people and no one is willing to do anything about it….[…] So you have a culture of fear, a constant state of injustice in the society ..[…]..it's sort of like Darwin's struggle for survival principle; if you have what it takes then you would be okay, but if you don't then you're at the mercy of wicked people. So, it still exists very much. It's very

potent. In fact, it got worse to an extent. So, this is the society, this is the culture I'm coming from."

For Precious her earliest experiences and memories of childhood are framed by her father's violence.

> "The only thing I can remember that people always say is that when I was still in my mum's belly that my dad is a like kind of abusive person. He could tell my mum to kneel down with the big belly of me, kneel down on the floor and carry something on his hand [claps] for punishment. They said my dad always abused my mum, by beating her and all this stuff. Then when I grew up and when I was two years old, I remember I wee on myself and my dad used a belt to beat me. Because he think that I must know when to go to toilet now, by that age. But it isn't that I weed on myself, but I was sleeping then I wee on myself, and he beats me."

Tommi describes a state of constantly moving around during his childhood, at times living in highly precarious circumstances.

> "After Croydon I moved to Tulse Hill again and when I moved there we were living with some of my mum's - she knew these people and they let us live there, but they used to take drugs, so they were very violent with each other. They were a couple, so he used to hit his girlfriend and stuff and when we were there and stuff. I mean, they had respect for us. They didn't disrespect us in any way. But I think after that point, my sister, she came back at that point and lived with us for a while. They had another room, so she had that room by herself and I stayed with my mum and dad in that room. We lived there for a while which was comfortable. I guess it was okay. I eventually got back into school."

6.1.3 Death as insecurity

Although the context of each of these experiences of witnessing violence is different, they're nonetheless a significant part of the backdrop of the young people's lives. When Rayyan described the conflict over land as a seemingly endless battle between the powerful and the powerless, I was reminded of his struggle to secure citizenship;

> "So, basically, the father sold the land to my great-grandfather but his children would say, no, this is our land. But they know very well that this has been - that transaction has happened. But having said that, even if you have papers to say that this is your land and it is rightfully yours and there's no doubt about it, there is still a question of how to remove the person who's already there unlawfully because he's quite a powerful person, he has people that can fight for him. Then you go to the authorities and you're just stuck in the legal process for years and years."

Reflecting on this experience he says,

> "So, like I said, there is a culture of oppression and a principal one is land. People always fight for lands and they will always fight for land…[…] So this is the mentality I have; this constant state of insecurity. You don't know where it's going to start and people die over things and crazy stuff happens."

Rayyan's description of his 'mentality' as a 'constant state of insecurity' is evocative of many of the participants' descriptions of life with 'no papers'. Vaquera *et a*l (2017) argue that the emotional well-being of undocumented young migrants is intrinsically tied to the erosion of 'ontological security'. Anthony Giddens (1991) defined ontological security as the "confidence that most human beings have in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action." (Gidden,1991: 92 cited in Vaquera *et al.* 2017: 299). Vaquera *et al* (2017) posit that this state of security is eroded as undocumented youth learn about their status and begin to understand the magnitude of the impact this will have on their lives. This is reflected in my own research with those who initially arrived in the UK accompanied by family members and learnt later in their childhood that they did not have leave to remain in the UK. This is particularly evident in Rayyan's case which is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

A further aspect of ontological security is a "sense of the reliability of persons and things" (Giddens 1991:92 cited in Vaquera *et al,* 2017:299) which functions as a sort of protective cocoon. For young people that have experienced the loss of one or more of their primary carers, witnessed violence and injustice as part of everyday life, the presence of this

protective cocoon cannot be assumed. From this perspective, a sense of the world as a dangerous, fearful place in which it is difficult to trust in others or have any sense of the reliability of persons or things is perhaps to be expected. In this context, ontological insecurity is insidious and living without papers an omnipresent threat.

6.2 A Hostile Environment

> "…it's really hard when you don't have a paper in this country. Not really good. You ask for a job and they no give it to you because you don't have anything. They're asking for insurance. Like everything. Sometimes you don't have a place to live so if you go to someone they're asking for a paper. They can't give you a room. They can't give you a house… In the whole place if you work for someone and you don't have a paper, they annoying you. They give you less money and you're working hard. You're working hard and you can't say anything. You have to listen to them….if you don't work, they're going to say go because you don't have papers. You don't have a choice…you can't go out with your friends at night, in weekends. You're scared. You feel scared always. When I go to sleep like I feel scared, I'm thinking, oh the immigration, they're going to come now to take me. Always scared. You don't think how I'm going to be here tomorrow or not. They can catch me any time. It's very hard." (Ahmed)

I first met Ahmed when he arrived in the UK in 2008 as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) from Afghanistan. When I approached him as a possible participant for my doctoral research into the lives of young people with 'no papers,' he agreed without hesitation. When I called the day before the interview to confirm arrangements to meet, he was apologetic and regretful and said that he couldn't take part. He worked six days a week and his days were organised around that which was essential for his survival; work, exercise and prayer. His life regimented by necessity, with little room for flexibility or error.

When I suggested we could meet just once, he agreed. He promised to call the next time he had a day off. He rang a few days later and said that he could meet that afternoon.

He arrived two hours later, casually dressed in new trainers, jeans and a freshly pressed shirt. His hair was sharply cut and neatly groomed. He could easily have been a student at the university. It was only after he left the building following our meeting that I realised how much he had risked in travelling to meet me. His public visibility a stark contrast to the hidden life of his everyday existence. I remembered him saying "Maybe if I had a paper, maybe I would study for longer. Maybe I would come to uni, or the city, doing something else…."

6.2.1 Labour exploitation

Ahmed describes a life with little choice; subject to exploitation and constantly at risk. This experience was echoed by many of the participants. Rayyan was saving to pay for his immigration case by distributing leaflets for £2.50/hour and Sekou describes being in work with no rights.

> "He's paying me £2.50. The way I see it is that people in my situation if people can exploit you, they will exploit you. Don't expect to get paid £10 an hour when they can pay you £2.50 an hour where you have to take the job - you don't have any options. You don't have any status. You don't have anyone to complain to. I am offering you a job. […]…it's not slavery. You're choosing that. But obviously you're being compelled to. So I was grateful to him. He was paying me on time. If he wasn't paying me I couldn't have done anything anyway. So in that regard I am grateful." (Rayyan)

> "For me, the shocking part for immigration is this idea of human rights. I don't have any rights at work. My employers could treat me anyhow they want. I look at Theresa May saying child slavery. There's adult slavery in this country. There's adult slavery. Being in a country without immigration status, it makes you slave to the things you do." (Sekou)

Both Rayyan and Sekou draw comparisons between their experience of work in the UK and slavery. Although none of the participants interviewed were working in conditions of slavery, it is a relevant parallel to draw as modern slavery exists on a spectrum of exploitation (Anti-Slavery International, 2021). Many migrants work in low paid

employment earning far below the minimum wage, on zero hours contracts, with no employment rights, often in poor or unsafe conditions (Focus on Labour Exploitation, 2021). Those without settled status are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Dwyer *et al* (2011:5) argue that the combination of restrictive immigration policies and insecure immigration status can create "an environment conducive to exploitation by employers." As part of an undocumented labour force, young people such as Ahmed, Rayyan and Muhammed, are criminalised as 'illegal workers ' (Immigration Act, 2016). However, the creation of these 'illegal workers', a 'precariat' (Standing, 2011) is directly attributable, at least in part, to regimes of immigration control which deny individuals civic rights and protections (Bloch & McKay, 2015, Blomfield, 2015).

Unveiling her flagship immigration package as Home Secretary in 2012, Theresa May boasted of her ambition to create a "really hostile environment for illegal immigrants" with a raft of policies designed to make their lives unbearable (Goodfellow, 2009: 2). The creation of an intentionally exclusionary hostile environment can be traced back to the policies of the preceding Blair/Brown Labour government. In 2007 the Immigration Minister Liam Byrne announced a new drive to 'flush out' so-called 'illegal migrants', people like Ahmed, working with 'no papers.'

> "What we are proposing here will, I think, flush illegal migrants out. We are trying to create a much more hostile environment in this country if you are here illegally" (Travis, 2007)

Proponents of the hostile environment focus attention on a false divide between those who are 'illegal' and do not have authorised rights to stay, work and access services in the UK and those with settled status and/or citizenship. This construction of illegality (Ackerman, 2014; De Genova, 2013) perpetuates a divisive narrative of 'genuine' versus 'bogus' migrants which legitimises the inhumane and ill-treatment of those deemed 'illegal'. As El Enany (2020: 25) argues

> "People who do not have the right of entry to Britain are forced to undertake treacherous, often fatal journeys. The absence of the right of stay can mean homelessness, lack of access to healthcare, confinement to a camp or detention

centre and deportation. People in these conditions are at risk of being subjected to physical and mental violence and death."

The hostile environment can therefore be thought about as a form of state violence enacted on those subject to immigration control. Those without papers are put at constant risk of exploitation and ultimately death;

> "Look, being undocumented or to put it with no papers, in a country like this, it's almost impossible, but people are living it, right. People are living the experience [in somewhat] amazing ways. You don't have documents. You can't access the GP. You can't have a bank account. You can't have National Insurance number, so you can't work in a legal job. So the only thing you have is do underground jobs. They are obviously always exploitative in nature. […] People will exploit you. For you, that's the nature of reality. You can't do anything about it. You can't demand more than someone else willing to give, because given your situation, that's the options you have. There isn't many. The government is doing everything it can do to make as impossible as possible. They're doing quite a good job, making people's life harder."
> (Rayyan)

As Rayyan explains, living with no papers in a hostile environment is a daily struggle to survive, a life or death situation;

> "But then again people will find innovative ways to support themselves, because this is a question about survival for many people. It may not necessarily be for everyone. When someone wants to survive, people will throw everything they have, because that's just what everybody wants. It's a natural instinct to survive, isn't it? […] So even though it's an exploitative situation, even though people have to go through great length, people go through it…[,,,] because it goes to an extent where it's almost like life or death situation. ..[…]..so it's basically like if people willing to go through this exploitative situation and they're working under by definition or de facto slave labour kind of situation and they are not willing to go back, it tells you what difficult situation they're coming from that they'd rather go through this than go back." (Rayyan)

There has been a growth in scholarship in recent years about the impact of the hostile environment both on those directly affected by the policy (De Noronha, 2020; Back and Sinha, 2018) and the ways in which processes of immigration control have affected society as a whole, both materially and normatively (Bhambra, 2016; Yuval Davis et al 2019). In '*Bordering*' Yuval- Davis *et al* (2019: 5) argue that bordering constitutes a "principal organising mechanism in constructing, maintaining, and controlling social and political order" and that this mechanism determines both who is and who is not entitled to enter the country but also entitlement to stay, work and acquire social, civil and political rights. In the section which follows I explore the ways in which the young people's encounters with bordering processes impact on their lives and possibilities for the future. In this I am focused particularly on illustrating the ways in which young people with no papers are subject to the mechanisms of state power. The ways in which participants engage with these mechanisms and limitations and resist death are discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2.2 'No choice'

Many of the young people described living with no papers as having 'no choice'; they are denied the opportunities available to their peers about where to live, study, work.

> "You have a key worker and in there all of them, because four of them, they have papers, I'm the only one that doesn't have papers, three of them - no, three of them doesn't do anything, stay at home, eat, enjoy, bang the door, bang everything. One of them goes to work and later comes home at night and me, I go to college and I come home at evening, because after I finish college I just come home because I don't have anywhere to go. So, I stay home. Sometimes they just start fighting, food fighting, everything fighting," (Precious)

For Precious, 'life is a bit unfair' as she observes the differences between her own life and those of her peers who have the freedom to live as they please. She describes a food fight between residents of the shared accommodation where she lives. This depiction of those who appear to waste precious resources offers a stark comparison to her own precarious existence. The juxtaposition of abundance depicted in the

wastefulness of her peers, contrasted in my mind with the scarcity of resources available to those without papers. She describes coming home from college to a shared house where she cannot rest

> "I just come from college, I just finished and I'm just so stressed. I just want to sleep; I just want to be alone to think. But due to the fact that you guys are so making noise and just - are you just making me feel worse about myself."

The constant noise is oppressive, bearing down on her as she tries to find space to think

> "sometimes I just feel like….I just start hitting myself, like beating myself because I feel like I'm not being able to do what I want to do because you guys are just making noise, doing things. I just feel like - can't you just put yourself into my consideration, think about me, that I'm trying to focus on my life now."

Amid the chaos of her everyday life Precious is trying to focus. She is holding on to her dreams for the future as they offer hope in contrast to the limiting and crushing weight of her undocumented status. She describes her frustration with her peers who do not take the opportunities available to them

> "…sometimes I have advise them why can't you just go for an apprenticeship... No, we don't need to go, we have papers, we can do anything."

She is keenly aware of the privilege and entitlement of citizenship

> "you can't choose, you have to follow everything that they give to you because you can't choose. But if you have papers you can choose, I want this, I want that. Like the place I moved into I can say oh I want that place, I don't want that. But because I don't have papers I just have to go wherever they put me."

For many of the young people living without papers is experienced as a constant state of insecurity. There's no solid ground as they are constantly moving, living in temporary accommodation, always at risk of homelessness and destitution

> "…within a year, my second year, we got evicted from our house and the council stopped supporting us and we had to go to the council in order to get housing, got a community care lawyer that got us temporary accommodation, it was a temporary hostel or something and then tried to send us to High Barnet which was like - my school is in Croydon. How am I going to go from High Barnet to Croydon every day? That doesn't make any sense whatsoever. They sent me to Edmonton. I had to go - I had to accept in the end …[…] they didn't want to support my dad because we had no status, so it was like really and truly the only duty we have is to your son, because your son is with you. [,,,] I made it clear I'm not leaving my dad and so we went. We stayed in a hostel, same situation, one room together. How old am I? I was 17 at this point. You're 17 and still don't have your own space." (Tommi)

Like Tommi, Sarah's accounts of her everyday life involved constant moves, staying with friends and acquaintances, often with strangers, 'sofa surfing,' being evicted and having to move

> "Then we kept moving around quite a lot…So we used to live in Ilford - moved from Ilford to Gants Hill and then from Gants Hill to Redbridge, then Redbridge to Romford and we lived in Romford for quite a long while. Then we got evicted so we had to stay with some friends in Ilford then - that was after my sister left off basically Redbridge….[…] We stayed in Redbridge, Barkingside, yeah I forgot about Barkingside. Yeah, we stayed in Barkingside right and there are a lot of problems there […] then we moved again and we moved again back to Romford […]

When I meet Sarah she was living with a host who provides temporary accommodation to homeless young people in her own home

> "July 2014 is [...] the first ever time I became destitute I had no money, no food, no clothes and had nowhere to go […] it wasn't easy at first, moving from one host to the next but at least I had a roof over my head at night, somewhere to sleep, nice warm bath, breakfast in the morning and dinner in the afternoon."

Periods of destitution and homelessness are common amongst young people with no papers. Muhammed was street homeless for six months after leaving care at 18. Ahmed described his current accommodation

> "The place I live, there is not even address. There is not even address. This is like upstairs the coffee shop, they're Turkish and there is some rooms. It is no good place to live but I live because I need it. I don't have a choice."

For many of the young people living with no papers means a lack of freedom to make significant decision about their lives and futures;

> "…without papers I can say it's hard, it's just too hard because you just have to cope and deal with everything and live with it, think about it every day. From this morning, I was crying. I keep crying every day. Every time I wake up it's just like - I wake up again to this mystery of what - I can't do anything. I can't do what I want to do. I don't have the right to choose. I just want to be able to choose..[…] like everyone has the right to do, but due to the fact you don't have papers you can't choose rights […] When they say I'm going to call police I'll be like excuse me, don't even bother to call police because I don't have anything…. Sometimes when people slap you you're supposed to call police but if police start asking about where's the paper then you actually put yourself in trouble …than putting that person in trouble because the person will go for free and have papers… You don't have papers, you just see yourself back in Africa and … it's no life." (Precious)

> "Because now next year I'm doing my Level 3 Health and Social Care. I'm in Year 1 now. Next year I'll finish my Year 2. I'll finish all my Level 3 and next year I don't know what I'm going to do. So, I don't know, I still don't know, until the papers come. I don't have the right to choose, the right to know if I'm going to uni or not, if anything's going to happen to me. I don't have this, I don't have anything. I just keep waking up in the morning, start crying. Every day I just keep going through this." (Precious)

> "There's no doubt I appreciate everything they give to me but if I could do something, I could choose, I could choose my own step, I could say this is my goal

> and talk about to my goal. But due to the fact I don't have papers I can't..[…] I appreciate everything, it's not that I don't appreciate everything they give to me. Even I appreciate I have a room to sleep in. I appreciate that. I appreciate that I'm going to college, I appreciate that I'm having a friend. But I just don't feel like I have the right to choose what I want to do…I don't have the choice to choose what I want to do. I have to follow every step they give to me. It's too hard, too hard, too difficult. It's unbearable, unbearable at all. I can't just bear it but I just keep bearing it because there's nothing I can do…[…] It's not fair. It's not fair that we don't have the right to choose what we want to do." (Precious)

I remember listening to Precious talk about her frustrations and feeling the full weight of the struggle. The restrictions and limitations of her circumstances are echoed in the stories of other participants

> "What can I do? I don't have a choice. I have to work hard. I'm just always hiding myself from everyone. I'm so scared. When I go out - I don't even go out much. I'm just - one day, I just go to sleep and have the day in and have the day with friends at home. That's it. I don't even go out because I am scared." (Ahmed)

This experience of being held in a liminal space with no papers and 'no right to dream' is well documented (Bloch *et al*, 2009). Deprived of legal status, civil rights and recourse to public funds, young people with no papers experience a kind of social death (Borgestrom, 2017) always at risk of premature death (Gilmore, 2007). However, we should not equate living no papers to lacking subjectivity and agency to resist, nor assume that those with no rights to citizenship are passive bystanders in their own lives. Rather, as illustrated in Chapter 7, young people subject to immigration control often focus on the future, making tactical decisions and choices everyday (Allsopp *et al*, 2015). Sekou describes the predicament of living in liminal space

> "You can express your view, but you can't actually say well take your job, I'm going, because you don't have that choice. Because for me, telling people actually well, I don't agree with you, that's fine. I'll do that…But I think I'm in the point where I just want to say well I have enough. You take your job. I'm going. But I don't have

that opportunity at the moment. I think it will come around. I just need to keep pushing." (Sekou)

6.2.3 Destruction of family life

In Arundhati Roy's (2004) acceptance speech for the Sydney Peace Prize she describes how justice for the rich is juxtaposed alongside human rights for the poor and argues that violating human rights has become "an inherent and necessary part of the process of implementing a coercive and unjust political and economic structure on the world." The injustices of our racialised systems of immigration control are well documented and the violation of human rights an everyday occurrence (Bail for Immigration Detainees, 2019).[12] The right to respect for private and family life is enshrined in Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights to which Britain is a signatory;

> "1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
>
> 2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." (Council of Europe/European Court of Human Rights, 2020:7)

And yet these protections are routinely violated by the British government with regard to families who are subject to immigration control

> "… me and mum had gone on the bus and we'd gone to a friend's house just to do some washing I think and she had an altercation on the bus…[…] She just literally - there was a woman sitting down on the outside seat and she brushed past the

[12] The charity INQUEST keeps a record of the deaths of people held in Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) and Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs) by calendar year (January-December) in England & Wales since 2000. Available at: https://www.inquest.org.uk/deaths-of-immigration-detainees

> woman to sit down and I don't know if they exchanged words, but it was mumbling under your breath, nothing serious at all. There was no commotion on the bus and the bus driver called the police…. The police came on the bus, my mum just ignored them, she came off the bus, carried on walking, walking and I was literally walking with her and she stopped. They stopped to talk to her and she told me go round the corner and knock for her friend to get her friend to come out. […] So, I went round the corner to knock and I came back and that was it. I just saw the van driving off. That was the last time ever I saw my mum to this day, which is crazy to me. Just like that. In a split second. I was on the bus. Boom. Then she's just gone just like that. That's the system." (Tommi)

The attack on family life is documented in Luke De Noronha's (2019) ethnographic study of Black Britons. De Noronha's (2019) moving portraits of Chris and Denico and their accounts of forced separation from loved ones, illustrate the denigration of family life by the Home Office. Reflecting on the brutality of a system which tore his family apart, Tommi asks

> "Shouldn't they have known that she was with her son? He's a minor. He's only 12 or 13. They just leave him on the street and just take his mum in a van and that was it. I never saw her until I got a call, "I'm in Jamaica." That's crazy. So, I was with my dad and we got kicked out of the B&B after."

As Tommi reflects on his relationship with his mother he says

> "I'm aware that you don't know me as such, which is sad because the system did that. They just removed you and I never saw you again and this is where we're at in our lives. Six years later or seven years later you don't know anything about your son. You never got to see him grow, you never got to visit him. Nothing. He couldn't visit you. They literally ripped you guys apart and said - do you know what I mean? Which is disgusting. Because I'm sure that a lot of people that make decisions in these places, they've got families and they've got kids. I'm sure they wouldn't like it if it was done to them."

Listening to Tommi I am reminded of Sarah's account of immigration police coming to the family home and removing her father;

> "…they came around eight o'clock in the morning. You know that thing they use to knock the door down…[…] and everyone was running because no one knew what it was. You only see your door getting knocked off. The guy that was staying with us, he started running, and obviously there was police everywhere and my younger sister was just sitting there eating breakfast. …[…] I don't think my dad was there that day..{…] so it was just me, my sister, his girlfriend and the guy that was staying with us. Obviously, they were asking them questions…. 'We're going to drop you to school today, what school do you go to? We're going to talk to your dad' and all that kind of rubbish…."

In my third meeting with Tommi he got a call from his father. Later he told me that his father had been picked up by immigration and was in detention

> "They waited until I turned 18…[…] because that I guess was always the plan. Wait until he turns 18, he's no longer a minor and he doesn't need to have his dad around. So, that was what I gathered from the situation. Because they kept asking for extensions. It was like why do you keep doing that? Why are you not responding? You're the Home Office; do what you're supposed to do. All of a sudden, I've turned 18 and now you've decided to give it [citizenship] to me. But what about my dad? We're not on the same ground now. Then they refused the application that me and him done, but it was like they've already given me citizenship now, so it's okay…[…] Was that a plan to wait until I'd turned the age where I could look after myself?... the kids are okay. […] Is it they just waited for me and her to get to a certain point so now they can get rid of our dad? I mean, they'd got rid of our mum already. "

For Tommi there was a clear injustice being enacted, his father was a Commonwealth citizen

> "... he is a Commonwealth citizen because whether you guys want to hide or ignore the fact that you lot had put laws in place, you have to abide by them. People fall

> under that old law, it's different. You can't use a law Immigration Act 2002 for a man that came here way before 2002…[…] It's bogus, it was absolutely bogus to me. I just feel like he got removed because they wanted to do it and they just were going to do it anyway regardless."

In 2017, less than a year after Tommi's father was detained and deported to Jamaica it emerged that hundreds of Commonwealth citizens like Tommi's father had been wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, no date). Many of these commonwealth citizens were from the 'Windrush' generation (ibid). The *Windrush Lessons Learned Review* which was finally published on 19th March, 2020 makes it absolutely clear that the Windrush scandal was not an accident but an inevitable result of the hostile environment policy (Williams, 2020).

These accounts of a brutal system which forcibly removes parents from their children, dehumanises people through exploitative labour and denial of citizenship rights, evoke images of slavery and colonial exploitation (Morrison, 1987). Writing in 1984 about the experience of Black women in the United States, Lorde (1984: 42) reminds us that

> "For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most important lesson - that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings."

In naming the systemic racism on which the United States of America has been built, Lorde's work resonates with Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2007: 28) definition that racism is "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." Gilmore's (2007) definition is helpful in that it "focuses on racism as a set of political and economic conditions that compromise the quality or longevity" of the lives of the global majority[13] and draws attention to the "costs of survival under these political conditions" (Brooks, 2006: 313). From this perspective, we can consider the ways in which racialised migrants and refugees are made disproportionately vulnerable to harm. The final section of this chapter discusses the costs of survival and risk of premature death for young people with 'no papers' in the UK.

[13] See Riaz et al (2014) for discussion of 'global majority' terminology

6.3 Despair and erasure

> “There's no life. Who's going to leave their country? People who love their country, if my country was good, what was I going to do here? I'm not crazy to come all the way in this dangerous way, I go to prison everywhere, in Greece and everywhere, when I was coming… [,,,]…I go prison, in Greece, in Turkey, I go prison. I was lost. I was lost for one month in the mountains. I was lost for one month in the mountains when I was coming and then we found out …other friends, other people, we were lost…the people in Turkey, they catch us, the army on the border, and they send us back to Iran. At the border they just leave us, so we lost our way in the mountains. We were nearly going to die because we don't have food and nothing, we were just drinking water and biscuit. We had lost our way because we didn't have a phone, nothing….Then later we were just walking for like many days and we find some village. We were scared, we were thinking if we call there, maybe the police are going to catch us again. They're going to send us back to Iran again. Maybe they're going to kill us, the Iranians. We were lost and after that, when we came to Turkey - when I was coming from Greece to Italy, I was in a lorry for three days, three nights, alone…. In the lorry, inside. I was alone for three nights, three days….[…] It was very hard. It was dangerous. Even my neighbour is die. My neighbour is die in the sea, when he was trying to go from Turkey to Greece he died. He was my neighbour, and he died.” (Ahmed)

6.3.1 ‘Dying every day’

Ahmed describes fleeing Afghanistan to escape death and yet for him life in the UK with no papers is like ‘dying every day’;

> “Because this is the worse life. It didn't change anything. It's the same stress like. The life is the same thing for me because I am scared still, I'm alive and I can't do anything. I come here, I was put my life in danger, from Afghanistan to come to the UK, I thought my life is gonna be different. But I come here, the same stress and

same thing I thought what is going on. What's the different? If I was die there it's better, but now, I come here, I am dying every day now."

Death appears in the young people's narratives in a multitude of ways including despair and desperation, fear and erasure from public life. The constant effort to live without papers or any certainty about the future was so stressful and exhausting that at times death appears as a kind of respite from struggle. For Precious

"…when the Home Office sent me a letter that said they're going to send me back home, when I start crying and I don't know what to do, I was going crazy, start screaming, I was so stressed, I'm having chest pain, like proper pain. I couldn't sleep…[…]…like sometimes I've got in front of the car and said I just want to die here, I'm just tired, I know that I'm free, I don't need to think about immigration, I don't have to think about anything."

Precious was entirely pre-occupied by her fear of being sent back to Nigeria, a place which she no longer had any connection with and could not imagine a future

"So if they send me back it's just going to be pointless because they should better kill me in here instead of sending me back to Nigeria. That's what - even if they were going to take me back I would've planned it. If they said that they're going to send me back I would just tell them just kill me in here and send my dead body home because there's no point you sending me alive to home because I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't have any future plans. But in here I would have a future. I would plan everything but if you do that there's nothing for me to do. I would plan myself that okay this, this, I will do this, I will do that, and if they send me back home I don't have a plan, I don't have anything. I just - be a dead body. [00:39:51]

Precious describes an existential, social death as erasure from public imagination. Having 'no papers' meant that you did not exist

" …if you don't have papers [you're out] of the system, even the government doesn't even know you exist if you don't have papers… They don't know if you

> exist … [it's only if you have papers that's when they know] you exist. No one cares if you're alive or you're dead. But if you have papers they know if you're alive or you're dead because you're going to be paying tax. They're going to be taking everything and they will know that you are - and even you have a National Insurance number because they don't know that you're alive so they won't even send you National Insurance number... It's only your school that will know that you are alive because you are going to school, you have been registered to school. But otherwise they won't know. They won't know you exist; they won't know anything about you."

Living without papers she described herself as a nameless body, that no-one knew or cared about

> "… they won't even know, they will not even know who's Precious…they will not know me… no one who cares…if you don't have papers, if you don't have anything, no one will know."

6.3.2 Zombified existence

When I met Rayyan death was ever present; although he was no longer actively suicidal, he was still struggling with depression, feelings of anger and great sadness. Rayyan had been brought to the UK by his uncle and left with his aunt's family. Initially he was very happy to be in London; he was enrolled at school and the family took care of him. He was aware that his situation was different to the other children, but he was able to get by and continued in school

> "…I couldn't join the doctors and stuff like that. I couldn't get the Oyster card[...] I had to walk like an hour every day in the morning and in the afternoon to go and come back from school…obviously this is a difference for me compared to other people. I couldn't go to the doctors when I was ill…So I obviously knew I was different. "

It was only when he reached Year 10 of secondary school that his lack of status became a serious issue

> “I just started GCSEs. [...] They were doing immunisation. The government, whatever the vaccine was for I don't know but they were very forceful that everyone must go through that. So, they wouldn't take no for an answer. [...] they were very, very forceful - the school - and they wouldn't take no for answer….my guardians [said] you can't get the vaccine because you have to put the details of your doctor in and stuff like that and they have to go and check...”

The family made a decision to withdraw Rayyan from school

> “the decision was made that I cannot continue with the education. So, I had to drop out.”

The impact of this decision had significant and far reaching consequences for Rayyan not just on his education but also his physical and mental health and relationship with his family and peers. He says

> “It was a very, very difficult time for me. It was very, very difficult for me to accept that I've done so much hard work over the years and just prepared myself for GCSEs and I was doing well - I was doing really well. It was a really - a real big struggle. Finally, I came to the top sets […] and that's when I just had to drop out. And the second most important thing was basically I became from a very sociable person with lots of friends and a lot to do to a person who doesn’t have any connection with anyone and who has absolutely nothing to do.“

Without the structure of a school day, the opportunity to study and a community of his friends and teachers around him, Rayyan became increasingly depressed.

> “This has been the trigger of depression really which I'm still suffering from. At first obviously I didn't know what exactly I was suffering from. Everyone gets sad and stuff like that but the sadness was very, very extreme, to the extent that it was difficult for me to get off the bed...”

When the family eventually sought legal advice about Rayyan’s status

> "…the solicitor advised…completely new names, date of birth..."

A further risk to those with no status is that they are often given poor and unlawful advice by unscrupulous or ill-informed solicitors.[14]

> "I wasn't very happy but I went along with it anyway. But now I am very regretful that perhaps I should have just run away somewhere and not gone through this because the consequence of this has been very, very severe for me. It's a permanent, it's a permanent problem for me and I'll be living with this for the rest of my life. If I get over the emotional and psychological trauma of it, I will still be living with the practical problem he has created for literally the rest of my life, certainly for the next 10 years at least."

Rayyan describes being lost between two different identities; 'Zakir' the name he was given by his parents, his identity from birth and 'Rayyan' the identity which was created for immigration purposes as a means of securing legal status. The erasure of 'Zakir' marked the death of his birth identity and this was replaced with a new identity 'Rayyan'

> "…other people made the decisions…. But it was something that I was imposed with and I had to deal with it. So, for two, three years at least - I was pulled between my two different identities and that wasn't at all very helpful for me in my mental health because you don't know who you are. You don't know how old you are. You don't know when to celebrate your birthday. You're just pulled between places really […] I mean, should I celebrate my old birthday? But that's not who I am anymore. But should I celebrate my new birthday that everyone thinks is the case? But that's not the real one."

Rayyan describes this period as the 'stolen years' where he is in between identities with no clear sense of self, relationships with family and friends are strained by this erasure of his old identity and creation of a new one.

[14] For access to high quality immigration advice see https://prcbc.org/ and https://www.freemovement.org.uk/

> “Emotionally these were the lost years of my life. These are stolen years because although a lot happened in terms of education and things…[…] But emotionally these were the lost years of my life and I still feel the same because this is why it is. It's not helpful. Things did get very bad at that point and things were very bad - I mean, the depression was to its severest extent and I was almost suicidal - I was suicidal. I wouldn't want to put it any other way. There was a lot of thinking involved and a lot of planning involved.”

He is actively suicidal, but his religious beliefs prohibit killing oneself under any circumstances

> “You can never, ever justify killing yourself. And that's not negotiable. But I was in a very difficult situation because in one way I was almost compelled by my emotion because what I was having to deal with was very difficult for me to cope with and at the same time, I cannot morally justify it. So I was afraid that I'm going to kill myself unintentionally […] So these emotions, it's almost like you're walking through a very muddy track - I don't know - through a pool - it's very muddy and when you are walking it becomes very difficult to go through and is - after a while you stop because you become exhausted and that's when the possibilities that you would kill yourself is, let's say, 90 per cent or 95 per cent…”

Unable to reconcile his religious beliefs with his desire to die, Rayyan started to self-harm as a means of managing his distress

> “…when you do self-harming and stuff like that. It elevates your emotional distress. It makes you feel better […] It makes you feel lighter and it makes you feel like you have accomplished something - you know, obviously you can't do anything else. Let's just do something to yourself. So, I've been self-harming for a year and a half, two years and there was a point where it was regular - every day - burning, cutting yourself and stuff like that. “

Rayyan describes choosing to self-harm as an alternative to suicide. Rayyan describes being in a state of deep insecurity, fearful that he may kill himself by accident as he is too exhausted to keep fighting for life.

> "… the fear was still there….So I was afraid […] So every time I'm having these thoughts I feel very insecure because the danger is not coming from external sources. The danger is from me and I'm with myself all the time. So, essentially, I'm living with the danger all the time. So, there is no safety. So, I was afraid of myself. I was afraid I was going to do something stupid unintentionally and there was many points where I almost did it anyway. But it's not a pleasant experience to go through because firstly…the sense of security is not there and secondly there isn't any improvement in your social situation. […] So, you can't hold on to anything. Not family, not friends, not your legal situation."

Rayyan held the family responsible for the events which led to his depression and desire to kill himself. When faced with the prospect of having to explain to the British authorities the presence of Zakir they chose, on the advice of the solicitor, to erase 'Zakir; and create a new identity 'Rayyan'. Listening to his account of the death of 'Zakir' and his subsequent struggle to survive, Rayyan's sense of betrayal and abandonment by the family was palpable and raw to witness, the hurt and anger he expressed was barely contained, always present;

> "..things stabilised to an extent that I could live with myself and not worry about killing myself…Til now where I don't feel emotionally anything really. I feel angry but I don't feel happiness."

He describes being in a zombified state

> "So essentially I have been zombified to this day where I'm living but I don't feel like I'm living…It's like - it's been like that for the last good six years - certainly since 2011."

Rayyan's description of himself as zombified resonates with the original zombie myth which emerged in Haiti in the 17th and 18th centuries. Haiti was then under French rule

and known as Saint-Domingue, Africans were brought in to work as slaves on sugar plantations. Slavery in Saint-Domingue under the French was extremely brutal: half of those brought from Africa as slaves were worked to death within a few years (Mariani, 2015). Rayyan's depiction of a zombified life 'living but not living' is echoed, albeit in different words, by Precious and Muhammed as they describe surviving on the brink of death.

The zombie myth arose in a context where humans were denied bodily autonomy and death was as an escape from slavery; the myth represented the real-life horrors of dehumanisation. Although the context of 21st century Britain is very different, the dehumanisation of those without legal status in the UK is evident in the policies which deny some 'bodies' the freedoms of citizenship. In this context, it becomes difficult to hold hope and sustain life

> "The dream is past, is dead…[…] this happen, can't do anything change. [..] Now for me everything is like black, that's it, dark place. Then you can't move, just go to work to live and pay for rent, nothing else. Nothing is difference." (Muhammed)

It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that death is considered by some as a possible escape.

In Ta-Nehisi Coates' foreword to Toni Morrison's (2017) *The Origin of Others* he argues that "it is impossible to read her thoughts on belonging, on who fits under the umbrella of society and who does not, without considering our current moment" (Morrison, 2017: ix). The moment Coates refers to is America under Donald Trump but with the perspective of 400 years of American history, a nation built on racism, through slavery, exploitation and "the creation of aliens and erection of fences" (Morrison, 2017: X). Death, he writes

> "…is but the superlative example of what it means to live as an "Other" to exist beyond the border of a great "belonging." (Morrison, 2017: xv)

I am mindful in writing that the American context and history of Black people in the United States is different to the context of young people with no papers in the UK and I do not

wish to flatten or merge these histories into one. However, my purpose here is to draw attention to the parallels across time and place of what it means to live as 'Other.' Moreover, to illustrate the resonances between the lives of those denied citizenship or a legal right to stay in the UK and those 'Others' who exist and struggle to survive beyond the border of 'belonging.'

6.4 Summary

In this chapter I have shown the ways in which death takes up space in the young people's lives both through the loss of loved ones and as a constant risk they must navigate in a hostile environment. In this context, both social death and the end of life are daily realities for those deemed 'Other' by virtue of their lack of status. In the next chapter, '*Life'* I consider how the participants hold hope, focus on the future and engage in purposeful activities as a way of resisting death and surviving with no papers. I explore the importance of love and community as central to living and conclude with the participants' dreams for the future.

Chapter 7: Life

Knowing or not
knowing
as you go

Days rise
nothing dies

A tiger's eye
and snow

(June Jordan, *1997 birthday poem for b.b.L* in Levi & Miles, 2007: 577)

7.0 Introduction

As I write I am mindful of the limitations of prose. There are aspects of experience that do not fit into sentences but can be evoked in the spaces between words. When asked why I began this chapter with Jordan's (1997) poem I initially struggled to explain, it appeared obvious and yet difficult to articulate. There is something in the organization of the words and the rhythm that resonates with the young people's lives; the uncertainty of everyday life reflected in the 'Knowing or not /knowing/ as you go' coupled with the certainty of the sunrise 'Days rise' and possibility of hope if they survive the day, 'nothing dies.' For me the poem evokes a sense of the continuity of the natural world sustaining life, alongside impermanence and the inevitability of change. It reflects something of the young people's aliveness as they negotiate daily life; the continuity and change and moments of stillness, at times surrendering to circumstances at others resisting.

Reflecting on the experience of being undocumented Tommi described living with "just hope and the will to survive." In this chapter I explore the ways in which young people with no papers stay alive and keep striving for a better life. In the first section I discuss

how participants hold hope, focus on the future and engage in purposeful activities as a way of enduring the everyday challenges of living with no papers. I draw on Kohli and Kaukko's (2017) formulation of waiting as both a prison and prism for everyday life, Papadopoulos' (2002: 33) concept of 'psychological hyperthermia' and Vallentine's (2016) framing of self-harming as resistance, to explore moments of stillness and movement in the young people's lives as they reach for solid ground. In the second section I reflect on what sustains the will to survive with reference to Jordan's (1977) 'Love is Lifeforce', hooks (2001) on love and community, White's (2015; 2017) work on relational well-being. The third section offers a brief reflection on the limitations and possibilities of the future in precarious circumstances and concludes with the young peoples' 'Letters to the Future.'

7.1 Waiting and holding hope

> "Every day just keep moving, keep moving, keep moving, keep moving until you reach there, until you reach that goal." (Precious)

7.1.1 Continuing to live

A vivid uncertainty about the future is an everyday reality for young people with no papers. Like many of the young people interviewed in Bloch et al's (2009) report '*No Right to Dream'*, the young people I met with often spoke about the difficulty of imagining a future and of holding onto hopes and dreams.

> "You can't do anything. It's like hard work for nothing. [*pause*] If I've got paper I like to continue study…[…] design cutting, pattern cutting, [*pause*] but not any chance. If it's one day maybe it's come, but it's too late, age is gone. See future back again - black world." (Muhammed)

For Muhammed and Rayyan, continuing to live in the face of despair is the closest thing to hope

> "So to me personally, the only options you have is continue with life - doesn't matter how shit it is - and just hope that things will be positive in the future. That's the

> motivation..[…] It can be years. I mean, for me it's been five, six, seven years. It's continuous rolling and rolling and rolling, but nothing seems to be changing. But I'm hoping things will change soon." (Rayyan)

However, narratives of despair and frustration were often immediately countered with narratives of hope. The future offering the possibility of freedom from the limitations and restrictions of the present.

> "But life is hard [*whispers*]. Every time I cry. Every time, every day I cry that I don't want to be like this.
>
> But I know that - I always have a hope that one day I will have papers, I'll be able to work. Because my plan is I want to be a social worker ..[…] because my plan when I was younger, I want to have a school. I want to have a public school for children who are in need, who doesn't have anything, who doesn't have warm parents because like now my mum is dead and my dad, he doesn't care about me, he doesn't even remember me. I'm just by myself. So I want to do the same thing for children because I'm having the benefits now so I want people in the future, if I have the ability to have my papers and study more and work I want to do the same thing like I'm having now I want to give to other people in future." (Precious)

Despite the precarity of the present, many of the young people had clear plans for the future; they were determined to keep going and strive forward

> "I still want to be a social worker..[…] I'm still going to do it. I'm still going to call the College and get my interview again and go back to college, so I can do what I want to do." (Sarah)

Those in education articulated the steps they needed to take to reach their goal

> "I just focus on my education because even if my immigration comes I'll continue and if my immigration doesn't come I'll still try to continue until I get what I want and just focus more on education, try to achieve my goal. I haven't achieved it but I'm still achieving. I will see…just have to put that faith, put faith that I'll achieve…

> Even if I had like 20 steps, I've reached like five steps, it means 15 steps to go." (Precious)

Precious, Rayyan, Tommi and Sekou all told stories about how they had held onto their ambitions and aspirations, and the multitude of ways in which they had been hindered by their lack of papers and the education systems they were in. However, within these stories of struggle there was the clear determination of the young people to continue striving towards the future

> "I'm doing Open University, because I can go to university. When I first started, my intention was to study for 12 years, pay one unit every year. But actually, I've had people helping me. I'm doing my second year from this September." (Sekou)

> "I just have to use what opportunities I have to do what I can do, until I don't have that opportunity anymore. Now, if I said I will stop my education, what if my paper come in next week? Then I have to start going for education. So it's better for me to have time to do my education now…the only thing I know I want to do is go to university…. But if my paper doesn't come, there's still some stuff I could do like to help me. Maybe just volunteer jobs, maybe some work where they won't ask for paper. I could do that" (Precious)

7.1.2 Having a goal

Research by Allsopp et al (2015) explores young people's experiences of building futures while subject to immigration control. The research examines young people's understanding of time as a tactic of immigration control and considers the ways in which they respond creatively to counter the system and construct possible futures of their own making in the UK. For some of the young people I spoke to, engagement in education offered a framework within which to construct an idea of the future and organize daily life. For others preparing for the future was enacted in the micro-management of everyday life. Although Rayyan had been offered a place at university and had a scholarship for the first year, his focus was on working to fund his immigration case and gain status. Likewise, Ahmed could not commit to future plans so organised himself in the present to stay physically and mentally healthy, dividing his time between home, work, gym and

mosque. Like Rayyan, planning for the future involved focusing on employment and saving as a priority

> “So that’s why I just think, let me wait..[…].. if they send me back home…I'm going to come again. I'm not going to stay in Afghanistan because if I stay in Afghanistan that’s it, I'm going to die there. I'm going to come and put my life in danger again but I have to come here, because I can't stay there. So I just save a little bit of money for myself, every week when I work I save, maybe, I just think, if anything happened to me in the future then I can use this money for - again to come to the UK or to other country, to do something.” (Ahmed)

Reflecting back on his experience of living without papers Tommi identified the importance of having a goal to hold onto

> “Have a goal. Having a goal will get you through far. If you have a goal I believe that will get you far in life. Because when you have nothing to hold on to it makes situations worse. Whereas if you can channel your frustration into reaching for something that you want, eventually you're going to get that thing…” (Tommi)

This importance of a dream to hold onto was echoed by Sarah

> “You know when you really want something, and you want a change? That's what it is. When you're actually passionate about something, it will make you hold on to that thing until you get …[…] And never give up on your dreams. That's a big one, because even though you haven’t got what you have, the faith and the hope and the reaching for your dreams, it still helps you to get by in everyday life” (Sarah)

For Precious and Sarah accepting the limitations of their present circumstances offered a way managing the everyday uncertainty of life without papers

> “I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow so you have to enjoy today so then we can go what is going to happen tomorrow. I enjoy my day… [..] think what I'm going to do tomorrow. Every day I keep thinking okay what is going to happen tomorrow, what is going to happen tomorrow. Then yeah, but it's been a great,

> great experience for me because I've learned a lot. Without not having papers I've learned a lot and I've achieved a lot. I'm able to have a lawyer who helped me to put my papers in but even though they haven't said yes, they haven't said no. They haven't even decided what they will do. So. That's it. I just have to hope. That hope is still there with a question mark. That dream is still there, hope and dream with a question mark. Yes or no." (Precious)

> "My sister always says to me yeah, 'relax, it's going to come. Stay humble.' That's what she always says to me.. 'relax, it's going to come […]. Stay humble. I stayed humble, and it came. It was, like, wow. Result. That's a good one, relax. It's going to come. No matter what you want, it's going to happen." (Sarah)

Kohli and Kaukko's (2017) research with asylum-seeking girls in residential care in Finland illustrates how the girls, like Sarah and Precious, experience waiting as both debilitating and productive. The length of waiting was unknown and often felt unbearable:

> "[Name] told me that sometimes, on bad days, they feel like prisoners. What is even worse, the difference is that prisoners know the length of their sentence, unlike these young people (Field notes)." (Kohli and Kaukko, 2017: 10)

The parallels between imprisonment and living without papers echo in evidence given to the APPG Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom in 2015 by an individual who had served a prison sentence for working illegally, before being held in detention, who said "*in prison, you count your days down but in detention you count your days up.*" (Bail for Immigration Detainees, no date).

The frustration and stresses of waiting are well documented (Elwyn et al, 2012; Brighter Futures, 2013; Mistiaen, 2017; The Children's Society, 2018) and evident in the narratives of all the participants

> "…so you have all that opportunity and all the dreams and that but you still have to wait because the thing that you're waiting for is not there…" (Sarah)

For those on the cusp of adulthood reaching 18 with uncertain immigration status exacerbated their anxieties about the future

> "Now they told me that they delay my application for three months now, which is kind of stressful because I don't know what - actually I'm going to be 18 in the next two months and if I don't have papers it's just going to be too difficult for me." (Precious)

Research by Meloni and Chase (2017) into young migrants' uncertain futures illustrates that those 'becoming adult'[15] with precarious legal status frequently experienced significant changes in social care support. Young people, like Muhammed and Ahmed, whom the local authority considered no longer eligible for support were forced to survive by illegal means or risk destitution.

Although living in limbo was often experienced by the young people as intensely stressful and debilitating, they nonetheless continued to live their lives

> "…it was so tough, because that stress, it was stressful. Caroline wanted to do civic marriage. I couldn't. She has to wait for two years for me to provide a document for that wedding to happen. It was stressful, but we made it. It was good. It was a joyful day. The good thing for my wedding, it was not - you wouldn't call it Guinean or French or any wedding. It was a wedding…I just want to do a wedding where everybody will come and enjoy themselves." (Sekou)

7.1.3 Hope

For the girls in Kohli and Kaukko's (2017) study this extended period of time spent waiting for 'papers' is hard to bear. However, their everyday present is shown to be not merely a liminal gap between the past and the future, but rather a time which is rich with both activity and stillness, a time in which living continues (Kohli & Kaukko, 2017:17). Kohli and Kauuko (2017) describe how having experienced the loss of everyday life in their countries of origin, the girls wanted to be active participants in their liminal present and attempted to be regenerative each day (Kohli 2014 cited in Kohli & Kaukko, 2017:17).

[15] https://becomingadult.net

These new beginnings for the girls were fragile, “like plants growing between two blocks of concrete” (ibid). This analogy resonated with my experience of the participants in this research project;

> “…thinking about what the young participants have in common and there is something about their capacity to live and thrive in adversity. They are like rhodiola rosea. They come alive in such adverse circumstances.” (Field notes)

Rhodiola rosea (R. rosea) is a flowering biennial grown in high latitude and altitude regions of the world with apparent adaptogen qualities (Ishaque *et al*, 2012). It has been used for endurance, stamina and its healing properties in traditional medicine systems in parts of Asia, Russia and Europe for centuries (ibid). In my mind the young people’s persistent tenacity and capacity to endure the harsh climate and hostile environment they found themselves in was reminiscent of this vibrant green plant with a yellow flower surviving in the cracks between the slabs of rock. A steadfast commitment to living with hope

> “For me, my hope is one day this immigration thing will be behind me. It's a big hope for me, because I know when it's behind me there are other things I can do. Now I'm very time-conscious about this, because I think I'm the place now where I have to take big responsibility. I'm a husband. …[…].
>
> Also my hope is - I always wanted to be a doctor, not because it's a dream, but it's actually a realistic dream for me. I just want to do this, because what happened to my mum, I don’t want that to happen to anybody else. Yes, I can help other people to save lives not even being a doctor, but I do want to work in medicine. I think I could make more impact knowing what I know today and doing what I'm doing today. I think when I'm a doctor I can make a greater impact.
>
> My third hope is I could have a beautiful family, raise my family. I do want to have a family when I'm stable. I'll spend more time with them not worrying about what's going to happen to me. That is a big thing for me. Family is very important. Career where I'm stable. Offering something to people that I care about, I'm passionate about. And also these immigration things, I want to leave it behind. I don’t want my life to be about immigration. I really don’t.” (Sekou)

Alongside the resolute determination to keep living, 'keep moving' and engage in generative activities (Kohli, 2014) were notable moments of stillness, of apparent frozenness where living was pared down to the bare essentials. The past and future, yesterday and tomorrow, separated from the present. Writing about refugees, home and trauma Papadopolous (2002:33) describes this state of frozenness as a kind of 'psychological hyperthermia' which can limit the damage done and also activate the self-healing mechanisms. This temporary withdrawal, he writes

> "can provide unique vantage points from where to review and assess their lives, their past, present and future; it may also assist them to digest the impact of their losses, by creating a respectful stance to mourn the dead by enabling them to regroup and direct their energy more appropriately." (Papadopoulos, 2002 :33)

In my conversation with Muhammed it was harder to identify hope. He seemed to struggle to articulate dreams for the future as the present was so precarious. In this context making plans for an uncertain future appeared unthinkable. He spoke of how his life would be different if he had papers, that he would like to study design at college, develop his skills as a tailor. Yet almost as soon as these thoughts were expressed they were crushed by the reality of his present. For Muhammed living in the present consisted of staying alive, of working and limiting activities to the essentials, conserving energy. He told me that when he was not working he would often sleep all day. He was fiercely self-critical and described himself as 'lazy.' I was mindful that he had suffered multiple losses including the death of his mother, separation from siblings and was trying to keep at bay memories of a recent past where he had been homeless, hungry and frightened, living on the street for many months.

Papadopoulos' (2002) 'psychological hyperthemia' is helpful for thinking about young people like Muhammed for whom life exists in the daily breaths, the barely noticeable acts of living. These acts, although perhaps less visible than the actions of those who strive determinedly towards a future goal, are nonetheless full of resistance. Wade (1997) identifies these small acts of living as 'everyday resistance' proposing that whenever people are badly treated, they resist. Drawing on his therapeutic work Wade (1997:23) argues that alongside each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative, and determined resistance.

Muhammed's apparent withdrawal from the world beyond what is immediately necessary may be understood as a coping mechanism for everyday life. Equally his continued existence and survival in the UK at a point where he is deemed 'illegal' by the state can be understood as constituting a form of resistance. For young people like Muhammed, those who survived apartheid in South Africa, who continue to survive in Palestine, in the USA, at Europe's borders where Black, Native and migrant lives are negated, to exist in the face of systemic injustices is to resist (Davis, 2016: Emejulu & Sobande, 2019).

7.1.4 Making choices

In the introduction to '*Some of Us Did NOT Die*,' June Jordan (2002:3) writes

> "Once through the fires of September 11, it's not easy to remember or recognize any power we continue to possess.
> Understandably we shrivel and retreat into stricken consequences of that catastrophe.
> But we have choices, and capitulation is only one of them."

All the participants spoke of having 'no choice' and this was a common refrain throughout their narratives. However, the idea of 'no choice' seemed most often to refer to the circumstances within which they found themselves, rather than a passive acceptance of the status quo. One striking example of active decision making in the midst of despair can be seen in Rayyan's decision to take his life. Speaking of being actively suicidal he says

> "And in one instance it did get very, very, very, very bad and I did write notes…when I die I didn't want the family to be responsible…So I wrote notes explaining the situation and telling that this is a personal decision […]. So this is a completely independent choice and I don't want to hold anyone responsible for it."

He cannot reconcile his faith with the decision to commit suicide and worries that he may unintentionally kill himself, so he chooses to self-harm as a way to stay alive

> “So I was afraid that I would intentionally kill myself - unintentionally sorry. So the only way to deal with this feeling was to do self-harming ... […] It elevates your emotional distress. It makes you feel better….It makes you feel lighter and it makes you feel like you have accomplished something - you know, obviously you can't do anything else. Let's just do something to yourself. So I've been - I've done self-harming for a year and a half, two years and there was a point where it was regular - every day - burning, cutting yourself and stuff like that. So - but the fear was still there….So I was afraid - I mean, when you're really afraid - someone going to come and kill you but you're not - you don't want to die. You want to live for longer and…your heartbeat is elevated.” (Rayyan)

Jennifer Vallentine’s (2016) thesis ‘*Bodies in Protest: Understanding Self-harm in Detention’* explores self-harm in the context of immigration detention. Vallentine (2016) argues that explicit protest self-harm (commonly lip-sewing and hunger strikes) and individual self-harm carried out in private (cutting, burning) exist on a continuum wherein the body is used as a tool for communication and agency in opposition to injustice and human rights violations (Vallentine, 2016: 12). Vallentine (2016: 51) posits that acts of self-harm can be understood as both desperate and symptomatic of mental ill-health as well as ‘powerful, self-actualising acts of resistance.’ From this perspective Rayyan’s self-harming as a means of managing his distress can be understood as both symptomatic of his mental state but also an act of resistance, claiming agency and making a choice to stay alive.

In the preface to ‘*Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora*’ Nuruddin Farah (2000:vii) writes

> “My exile got me acquainted with living on the peripheries of societies which I’ve not been a full-fledged member.”

Living on the peripheries of society, young people with no papers navigate a complex path between yesterdays and unknown tomorrows in multiple ways. The ordinary and extraordinary are woven together as they persist and resist, pause and continue, fighting for a life worth living. This is evident in Sarah’s account of life with no papers

“Hi my name is Sarah and I'm 22 years old, yea 22 people always tell me "oh when I was your age I use to do this and that" or "if I was your age the amount of things I would be doing" but the difference between you and me is that your not me our situation is different. My life hasn't been harder than anyone else's but it hasn't been any easier. I believe the way you live is the life you chose to live, no one can put you in a situation unless you wanna be but for some it's not a matter of choice.... Some people find it hard to cope in a certain situation but for others they might find it much easier... Me? I just take it as it comes. When I tell people about my situation they mainly ask how you do it, how do you live your life cause it must be hard not being able to support yourself depending on other people who constantly let you down. All my life I've been living but not really living I feel like I spend my whole life since I was 16 looking over my shoulder, praying that people can understand what it’s like being on the outside looking in. I was asked to write a letter about my past so here we go... I never really like talking about my past cause I'm that type of person that don't like being judged about who I am and where I come from, when I started and how.

When I first came to the UK I came to stay with my dad but he got himself caught up in some bad things but really it was just for him to make money to keep us alive. When he got deported we moved to london with one of my dads close friends they knew him from Jamaica, I lived with them for a couple of years till I was just turning 20 I remember when I use to walk from romford, chadwell heath to little heath where I use to go college, I use go college with nothing to eat cause you see I wasn't really getting any support, well not properly I would get food when am in the house... How would you feel for every time you eat something there's a complaint about you eating it? I felt like I wasn't allowed to eat. Sometimes I would hide, take a crisp and run to my room and eat it. Other times I would just wait for the food to cook so I could eat something. Me and my sister used to sit in the living area to watch TV when their not around but when we hear the car driving up the driveway we would turn the TV off quickly, fix up the sofas and run to our rooms cause we're not allowed to be in there.

We use to move around a lot cause the bills wasn't paying and no one understood why July 2014 is when they asked me to leave I wasn't allow to take my clothes, my shoes or any of my things I had nowhere to go so my sister decided to leave

too she was pregnant at the time with no status too. We started sofa surfing we rented a room from one of our close friends when we got in to an argument and she asked me to leave so I went to stay with a friend that told me it was ok to stay with her till everything was sorted but out of nowhere she got up one morning and told me I couldn't stay there and that's the first ever time I became destitute I had no money, no food, no clothes and had no where to go and that's how I met night stop it wasn't easy at first moving from one host to the next but at least I had a roof over my head at night somewhere to sleep, nice warm bath, breakfast in the morning and dinner in the afternoon. I remember when I usen a to be so angry, angry with everyone, angry with the world but with the support of the positive futures I grew up gain more understanding and experience to see things in a different way I believe that everything happens for a reason and that one day others will understand. If I wasn't in this situation I would've never meant the people I've met today, I wouldn't have gotten so many support as I have today I am truly grateful." [16]

Sarah's letter ends with a reflection on the people she has met and the impact that this has had on her life. In the section below I consider the ways in which a life worth living is created and sustained through connections with others and explore the place of love and community in the young people's lives.

7.2 Love and community

"Love is lifeforce.

I believe that the creative spirit is nothing less than love made manifest.

I see love as the essential nature of all that supports life.

Love is opposed to the death of the dream. Love is opposed to the delimiting of possibilities of experience." (Jordan, 1977: 11)

[16] Sarah wrote two letters in response to the Letter from the Future task. This first letter is followed by a shorter one addressed to 'Dear future me' which is reproduced in section 7.3.3.

In the section below I draw on Jordan's articulation of 'love as lifeforce' to explore the multitude of ways in which love sustains life in the face of the 'delimiting of possibilities of experience.' In a hostile environment, love supports life. In hooks (2001:4) writing about love she cites M. Scott Peck's (1978) definition of love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." She emphasizes Peck's focus on love as a choice "Love is as love does. Love is an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action" (Peck, 1978 cited in hooks, 2001: 4 – 5). Hooks describes love as a mix of ingredients "care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication" (hooks, 2001: 5). Love, as described above, can be seen in multiple aspects of the young people's lives; in significant relationships with family and friends, in faith and religious practice, and with professional 'helpers' and educators (Kohli, 2014; Kaukko *et a*l, 2021).

7.2.1 Love

For some the love they had experienced in the past was held as a precious memory which sustained them in the present.

> "Because I was so close to my dad, sort of my dad became like a friend also at the same time, so I relied on him so much on anything, everything. We'll debate, we'll discuss, six o'clock in the morning, because he used to wake me up. When he's sleeping and I'm awake, I would go and wake him up, say, Dad, come on, come on, even if it's weekend." (Sekou)

Precious and Muhammed also spoke about being woken for school by their grandmother and mother, this small act seemingly representing the love and care that they had experienced in the past. For Precious this memory appeared to help her to organize herself in the present but for Muhammed this absence was particularly hard to bear. When Muhammed described his 'mentality' as a problem I asked if things had been okay in Afghanistan and whether he felt better there, his answer was simple "Yeah, because all family". Some of the young people had formed relationships and were creating new families; Sekou was happily married and Precious had a supportive boyfriend and was pregnant.

Alongside narratives of family, many of the young people told stories about the individuals, largely professionals 'helpers', who supported them. These 'helpers' believed in them and helped them navigate systems, advocating on their behalf, enabling access to finance and resources. Beyond this practical assistance what was most evident was that these relationships helped them to stay alive, providing a love and care more often associated with personal relationships with family and friends.

Rayyan speaks about the importance of the relationships he has with staff at his college and his psychologist in keeping him alive and helping him heal and move on.

> "Look, even though I have been disappointed by a lot of people I certainly have been helped by a lot of people at the same time. There have been occasions where people pushed me forward positively where I just didn't want to. People encouraged me when I really wasn't even into it. It's almost like people forced me into living my life when I just couldn't be bothered…[…] It's down to a few individuals. A few individuals, a tutor, a counsellor, welfare and guidance manager, form tutor, these people have been constantly with me all this time, years and years." (Rayyan)

Precious describes the manager of the home she was in as keeping her going. Helping her by providing practical and emotional support at the worst of times, putting her in contact with other organisations that could help:

> "…it's one woman…she's the one that actually pushed me far…Not pushing me that you have to do this but she's saying that you can do this. If you could do this way, you can get to that place…. Because when the Home Office sent me a letter that said they're going to send me back home, when I start crying and I don't know what to do, I was going crazy, start screaming, I was so stressed, I'm having chest pain, like proper pain. I couldn't sleep….[…]
> She keeps pushing me saying don't worry, everything is alright. Then we do it starting step by step….[,,,] She told me that you don't need to cry, you know what, we're going to find another way. She helped me to find another way. ..I call her my mum, I call her my sister…. For me to be in here today, for me to have a lawyer, for me to have most of the things, even for me to stand as Precious… standing like

that, she's the one, she's the one that kept pushing me every time saying that everything's going to be alright." (Precious)

Sarah spends a lot of time with her sisters who she identifies as a source of support helping her to stay positive. Like Precious she is supported by a network of professionals who offer practical support but also like family and friends, provide emotional support

"…because I've got my sisters, they help me stay positive. Alice and the charity, they help me stay positive, because if it wasn't for them I would be literally on the streets. And Craig... He's amazing. If I need anything and I ask him, he'll give it to me. If I need someone to talk to, he'll talk to me. It's like you have friends, even though they're not really your friends" (Sarah)

"Support has been helpful. Family. Yeah, pretty much support, family. That's been helpful, sustaining me…Having people around you, that kind of support. Where I'm living, that's a really big support, because a stranger took you in and you've been there for - since Christmas. Since Christmas, you met all her friends, practically like family. So that's a big support for me, because when she first - when she was, like, oh, yeah, you can stay here for Christmas dinner, I was, like, is she serious? I stayed and met all her family. They were really nice and friendly. Do you know what she gave me for my birthday? A card and £20. I stayed in that room and I cried all night. That's how emotional I was. It was so emotional. I don't think - I really can't know what I'll do but she's amazing…" (Sarah)

Sekou also identifies professional helpers that have become like family

"Things like when I first got my Endeavour Certificate for Science and Maths at my school, I invited them to come with me. It was so important. My social worker should have been there, but I invited Matthew and Kate to come with me. That was special, I've got somebody, because everybody came with their parents. That certificate doesn't mean much to them to be honest, but being with me means a lot to me, to be honest. Things like that. Like the university places. When people were refusing me, Matthew would come with me and would try to explain my

situation where we are today. But again, even if he didn't have to say anything, the fact that he's there to be with me, I think it means a lot." (Sarah)

7.2.2 Community

Alongside the significance of particular individuals supporting them to stay alive in precarious times, many young people also speak about the importance of being part of a community

> "For me, my childhood and teenage-hood living on the estate, we wasn't the good kids, we wasn't the greatest kids, we got into so much trouble, but I wouldn't change it for the world, because behind that situation what was going on in my life, that's the only thing that made me feel normal, being around all those people, doing all that fun stuff, and just having general friends and friends that are not from school; friends that I live with them, my community." (Tommi)

For Tommi, in the midst of such precarity, the other children in his neighbourhood were like family

> " We're all a family. We all protect each other. If there's any trouble or anything, we look after each other, we go out together, all the fun stuff we did was together and a lot of us went to the same school as well. The ones that are the same age, we went to the same school. It was the greatest feeling ever, your neighbour, your best friends, coming knocking at your door in the morning and you can walk to school. You never have to go to school alone. Do you know what I mean? When you're at a school, you know that you have a family outside of it and that family protected you in school as well, even though when we were in school, we all had friends. But when we came out of school, we were like this is home now, all on our estate."

The importance of community and social networks in contributing to wellbeing is confirmed by an emerging scholarship on relational well-being which centres connection and relationality as core to living a good life (Atkinson, 2013: White, 2015; 2017). White (2015) conceptualises relational well-being as multiple processes across three

dimensions; environmental (material), personal (subjective) and societal (relational). From this perspective wellbeing is understood as "arising from the common life, the shared enterprise of living in community – in whatever sense – with others." (White, 2017: 14). In this context I have used the term 'wellbeing' as a way of thinking about being alive and living a 'good life', whatever that might mean to the individual. That relationships sustain life and relationality is generative (Donati and Archer, 2015 cited in White, 2017: 14) are echoed in Sekou's reminiscence about his wedding day and description of his relationships with people who have become like family

> "…my wedding day… they were full of people who were my groomsmen, people I met in this country. There was only one Guinean person in my wedding. That was my best man… For me, that diversity in my wedding, it was good…I know I have people I can rely on. Those are people that make me wake up every day morning and I want to do things differently, because they are like me. They're just getting on with their lives and doing things..[…] In the UK, I think I have learned from friends. I have met people here I call families. Uncle Matthew is like a family to me. Kate and her family is like a family to me. Omar is like a brother to me.." (Sekou)

hooks (2001: 129 -130) in her meditation on love, reflects on the part communities play in survival

> "To ensure human survival everywhere in the world, females and males organize themselves into communities. Communities sustain life…[…]. We are born into the world of community. Rarely if ever does a child come into the world in isolation, with only one or two onlookers. Children are born into a world surrounded by the possibility of communities. Family, doctors, nurses, midwives, and even admiring strangers comprise this field of connection, some more intimate than others."

Having a place in a community, enabled young people to feel a sense of belonging which had been denied to them as a legal status. For Ahmed this was shown by the support he received when applying for asylum

> "…sometimes you get good people as well. I told them when I had a fresh claim last time, like ten peoples, they was English, they give me papers, their passports to photocopy, to help with me. I have lots of friends like, big relationship with people. I had a lot of friends that say we can help..."

His community includes friends from the gym, the mosque, customers

> "I just chat with them. I don't talk about this stuff. I just talk to them. Oh yes, police is better than back home here. They know how to talk to people…back home it's different. I have a lot of friends. They're like my best friends…they don't know…[…] we get policemen, businessmen, and then we're talking about what you're doing. What you are up to this weekend. We're talking. We get a lot of different people…But I am a good barber. If I was not illegal I'd maybe have my own business. I have a lot of customers that like me because I have been cutting hair for a long time."

Ahmed lives on a knife edge, skilfully negotiating relationships with friends who know of his circumstances and offer support and those unaware of his status, customers, including police officers, for whom he is simply a good barber. In Ahmed's narrative there is a sense that he belongs to both a community of peers and to the local 'barber shop community.' Alongside this his relationship with God and Islamic faith are significant in his life connecting him to a transnational religious community.

7.2.3 Belonging

For many of the young people, connections to their communities of origin are expressed through descriptions of their home lives which sustain them as they navigate their daily lives. For Rayyan, belonging means an unquestioned acceptance of who you are, of Bangladesh he says

> "…firstly, it's your country. It's where you belong. It's your house. It's your family. This is where you belong. You feel like this is it, this is your DNA….[…] You feel like you belong there..[…] It's not questioned. No one can say otherwise. No one can come and say you're Asian or whatever. You don't belong here. How can you be British so and so forth?..." (Rayyan)

Being able to connect to a people and a place where your membership of the group was unconditional was important

> "You certainly don't have issues with where you are, who you are and where you belong and stuff like that because there's a natural sense of belonging, there's a natural state of - it's like a place that you were born, you grew up in and you're just part of the soil and the life and the air" (Rayyan)

In a context where their legal identity was always in question, belonging to a community connected to a past and future self was a means by which the participants claimed life

> "…I'm from Guinea…even if my children are born here, even if I have a British nationality, I will always be a Guinean, I think. You can never erase that…because that's where I grew up. That's what I refer to." (Sekou)

As black and brown bodies, the young people's sense of belonging to a state which for many years had denied their right to citizenship was complex

> "I don't take pride in the fact to call myself British, definitely not. That's not something I would go round and say. When you fill in a form of course you put that you're a British citizen and stuff. But it's not something that I hold close to my heart. I mean if someone asked you where you're from I'd say I was born in Jamaica. That's because I feel like in a sense I don't want to forget that and I don't want to forget where I come from and all the struggles that I had to go through." (Tommi)

Although Tommi reflects from a position of having secured British citizenship, his ambivalence in relation to his newly acquired status is perhaps unsurprising given the struggles he has endured to claim the right to belong. The ambivalence of belonging is explored by Meloni (2019) in relation to undocumented youth in Canada. Meloni (2019: 473) argues that "the social worlds and the relationships of these young people were constantly shaped by constraints that defined, in ambivalent terms, their subjectivity and materiality of belonging." She notes that the capacity to survive in such precarious circumstances lies in the possibility "of creating revocable affects and belonging." For the

young people in Meloni's (2019) study, ambivalence offered undocumented young people a degree of psychic protection from the distress caused by living with the daily risk of deportation from Canada and separation from those they loved.

Conceptualising belonging as ambivalent and fluid, an assemblage of meanings, rather than anchored to a specific place or identity, allows for the possibility of multiple belongings across time and space. In this context many of the participants described their faith in God and religious communities as providing sanctuary and support which sustained them in life. For Rayyan, his relationship with God offered continuity and constancy, his religious identity an expression of his membership of a community beyond the bounds of citizenship

> "As a Muslim you need to understand the British Government still doesn't concern me as a British National so I am forced to find myself an identity. Even if become a British National when that happens I'll still consider myself to be as a Muslim because I consider this to be this is the fundamental aspect of me." (Rayyan)

For Sekou, his faith has been an integral part of his life from a young age

> "My ethnic group, Jakhanke, they're very strong in religion, agriculture…
> My dad is more liberal. My dad actually is a very good believer. He taught me Koran by himself. I know the Koran in and out, because his dad taught him when he was young." (Sekou)

Sekou's wife, Caroline is a Christian; they got married in a church and continue to follow their own faiths.

> "I'll go to church with Caroline, but I'll just sit there quiet, like I don't know anything. But that's fine. If I want to know, I'll question her […]. When I'm doing Ramadan, I don't force her to sit until nine o'clock or 9:30 to eat with me. I'll just eat whenever. When I'm in [Ramadan], I say Caroline, go and eat on your own unless you want to wait. That's your choice. But I don't, because Islam doesn't even recommend for people - I shouldn't stop you living your life. That's just not good especially in holy Ramadan. I don't want to do that."

Precious grew up with both Islam and Christianity as part of her heritage and now in England has found a strong community amongst the congregation at her local African church

> "....in Nigeria I was going to church, but I wasn't going the way I'm going now. I don't put myself through it, I just - I just go when my sisters go... I don't really practice it. But it's only when I get here then I actually practice going to church, and doing all the - like, all these night vigils, all the everything…[…]it's because my step-mum, she said that we have to go to church every Sunday. So the way I'm going, I like it, I start having more interest and I'm in the choir. So I love to sing. So when they bring me song I just sing and I just feel the grace, and then now…I just want to go every time. Even though I'm in the choir I don't know how to sing some song, but still I just want to go and just sing and dance, and just sit there."

Raghallaigh & Gilligan's (2010) research with 32 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Ireland identifies six different coping strategies which contribute to resilience and 'active survival', namely: (1) Maintaining continuity in a changed context, (2) Adjusting by learning and changing, (3) Adopting a positive outlook, (4) Suppressing emotions and seeking distraction, (5) Acting independently, and (6) Distrusting. These strategies for 'active survival' can be seen across the narratives of the young people with no papers and in other studies with this population (Allsopp *et al*, 2015; Kohli & Kaukko, 2017). A notable aspect of Raghallaigh and Gilligan's (2010) study is that for all but one of the young people religious faith was an important part of their lives. Significantly, religious practice alongside a strong belief in God supported young people's use of the various coping strategies (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010: 233). Like those in Raghallaigh & Gilligan's (2010) research, for Ahmed, Rayyan, Sekou and Precious, having grown up in religious societies, their faith provided direction, comfort and a way of coping with their present circumstances.

"Love makes us feel alive" writes bell hooks (hooks, 2001: 191) and so love and belonging go together, connecting the young people to life. With this in mind, the final section of this chapter moves beyond life in the present to consider possible futures articulated by the young people.

7.3 Dreams for the future

> "You took away all the oceans and all the room.
> You gave me my shoe-size in earth with bars around it.
> Where did it get you? Nowhere.
> You left me my lips, and they shape words, even in silence."[17]
>
> Osip Mandelstam (1891 - 1938)

I was reminded of Osip Mandelstam's poem in one of my meetings with Sekou as he spoke about his refusal to be defined by his immigration status. I reflected on the ways in which individuals have claimed their freedom in the harshest of circumstances and the capacity of the human spirit to endure the present by imagining a better future. Just as the young people are able to cast back in time to positive memories and relationships that helped them grow, so imaging and articulating the possibility of a positive future often sustained them in the present.

7.3.1 'Letters from the Future'

A central concern of my research with young people has been to find ways to engage them in articulating their own stories of past, present and future. From this perspective, I discussed the possibility of imagining a positive future with participants at the end of our second meeting and invited them to engage with a 'Letters from the Future' activity (Sools *et a*l, 2015). In this I drew on the work of Sools and Mooren (2012) where they collected 480 'Letters from the Future' (a health promotion instrument) at the web site of the Dutch Life Story Lab at Twente University. Following on from a workshop I attended at the Tavistock and Portman Centre led by Anneke Sools in 2015, I adapted the 'Letters from the Future' task to invite young people to imagine a time in the future when something good had happened to them or they had achieved something important to them. Young people were offered the opportunity to respond by writing a letter from the present to a person in the future, recording an audio or answering the question in the third meeting.

[17] Translated by Clarence Brown and W.S. Merwin available from https://tfl.gov.uk/forms/12393.aspx?ID=130

Precious chose to respond through an interview, Sarah, Rayyan and Sekou wrote letters and Tommi created an audio recording. I have included their responses below

7.3.2 Precious' Letter to the Future

"Oh, a time I think that's going to be good - something that, I don't know - is when I'm having the baby. It's going to be the best experience, because I'm still young but I go through motherhood. Like, I'm actually - once I have it I'm a mother. I'm not in a single-hood, I'm not in not having a baby before, so I'm like oh, I just want to have the baby. I feel desperate, I feel the pain, I feel everything. I feel like, in the future, that I will have a new experience that I never had before, is when I'm having a baby."

7.3.3 Sarah's Letter to the Future

"Dear future me,

I had many dreams and as a child you often dream about being famous but as you get older everything changes you start looking for different dreams realistic dreams so that you can start working towards it but for others they can't. I always saw myself working with children so I did a level two childcare course then when on to study level three childcare I finish my first year but unfortunately the college only did the first year of level three so I was not able to finish my level three and with all the laws I was not able to study anywhere else which was so disappointing but however uplifting because I realised that I wanted to be a social worker so that I can help out disadvantage children and young people I dream to open my own firm of social workers and have a home attach to if for young people who's been abused and that's something that I am working towards often you hear people telling you, you can't do this you can't do that if you listen to them you would never accomplish anything in life so don't let anyone tell you, you can't."

7.3.4 Tommi's Letter to the Future (transcription of audio letter)

"The year is 2021, and the time now, well it's ten-to-five in the morning and I'm just sitting in my flat, in my bed, thinking about life and how amazing this journey's been and yesterday I landed my first major lead role, and I just wanted to send you this message from where I am now and let you know that it is possible and it is going to happen with hard work and if you keep pushing. I mean you will be tested, people will try to break you, you will face so many no's in your career, so many doors will be closed in your face, but I want you to know it will pay off and if you wanna see what I'm seeing right now, the beauty of life, the things that I've experienced, then you have to keep focused, keep your head down and never forget what's yours is yours. With hard work and perseverance you'll get there in time. I know it may not seem easy now because of where you're at in your life. I remember being you at 20, 21, and it definitely wasn't the easiest and it felt like things that I wanted were so far away and so out of reach, but small steps, small steps. That's the answer."

7.3.5 Rayyan's Letter to the Future

Rayyan Mustapha
1 Utopia Road
Fantasy Place
London
N1 9NN
United Kingdom of Slightly Less
Great Britain (as Scotland and Northern Ireland no longer part of the UK)

Rayyan Mustapha
Address line 1
Address line 2
Address line 3
United Kingdom of Great Britain
Sent to back in time 13/07/16

Wednesday 13th of July 2026

Dear my younger self,

I hope you are celebrating being granted status by the Home Office recently. I like to congratulate you for surviving another 10 years of your life. It was not easy but worth it.

Over the last decade you have achieved tremendous things. You are currently married to the most wonderful girl in all the worlds, she is tall, has beautiful long blonde hair, chubby, intelligent, and can never stop smiling. She loves you with all her hearts and souls as if you are the only Oasis in the deserts of Sahara. You too are so deeply in love with her. Your soul aches all ways to be with her, to keep her in front of your eyes. Your marriage is a truly blessed "match made in heaven".

You have two beautiful daughters. The greatest of blessings from Allah. The greatest achievement of your life. You have named them Aysha and Zainab. Aysha is 2 and Zainab is 4. They are the beatings of your heart, the energy of your soul, and the pupil of your eyes. Your world is nothing without them. Your daughters know nothing in the world except you, their love for you transcends all that is in this world and beyond. Your little girls are your ticket to Jannah (paradise). What a truly blessed man you are Rayyan.

Life has been good to you. Long gone are the days of your emotional turbulence, social isolation and psychological traumas. You no longer have to take anti-depressants to suppress your sorrow. The ocean of your sadness that was drowning you has evaporated under the intense heat of your patience.

You are finally reaping the fruits of your resilience and persistence. Allah has opened the heavens for you and, as He has showered His mercy upon you, it brought your dead soul back to life just as a barren land blossoms with vegetation after rain.

You no longer get angry so often. You don't have to shed your tears in secret and curse all the people of all the words for oppressing you (at least you felt it that way). You no longer have to cut yourself with the blade you hid so secretly. You no longer have to watch your own blood drip through your hand and paint the carpet while you look down on yourself, screaming under several layers of silence: "What the Fuck is wrong with me?"

Owe to those days. They truly tested you so terribly.

Alas, you have survived. You decided not to kill yourself even while your despair pressed its weight on you and the world to you became a narrow and a constricted place despite its vastness. You clang to the rope of hope. And Allah bestowed wisdom upon you.

You have climbed through rope until the world revealed its greatness to you. You have realized how insignificant the evil is in proportion to the good. You were finally able to see the light in people and love them for it. You have finally managed to summon the jealousy and hatred infesting the pockets of your heart and bury them deep inside the earth.

Finally springs of forgiveness started to flow through your harsh personality. kindness has replaced your stubbornness. You have no resistance in your conscience for what is good and no sympathy for what is evil. You love the young and respect the old. You humble yourself before the men of virtue. You unquestionably have acquired wisdom!

The creation has opened their treasures for you. You live a materially and a spiritually fulfilling life. You have a 70k job working independently as a solicitor. You just bought a house in one of the most exclusive parts of London. You no longer have to hand out leaflets to the doors of people. No more do you have to tolerate people looking down on you with pity.

Now it is your time to live your life. These are the golden days of your life and hopefully it will only get better and better...

You travel around the world appreciating its beauty and complexity. You have visited the ruins of Mesopotamia and Babylon, the oldest known civilizations of the world. You were humbled by seeing how people lived their life with unimaginable level of organisation and social structure. You have visited the palaces of Petra, the Pyramids of Egypt, you have floated on the dense water of the dead sea and bathed on the water of Blue Nile. You are almost en-route to become a famous traveler perhaps even dwarfing the achievements of Ibn Battuta!

Your life is a truly blessed one. Great things will happen. So remain persistent and steadfast and seek inspiration. From the ashes of your hardship will arise the blossoming flowers of ease and happiness. Be steadfast. Be patient. Be patient...

Yours Truly

Rayyan

Rayyan Mustapha
(none other than your own-self).

7.3.6 Sekou's Letter to the Future

Dear Uncle Matthew,

I am writing this letter in Guinea under a shadow of a mango three next to a beach, whilst Caroline and the kids are swimming. The heat is 23°c, the wind is blowing gently and nature is really beautiful here. I hope I am not making you jealous, of course you are welcome anytime!

It has been 7 years since we last saw you. I hope that you are well as for my family (Caroline, Elise and Khalil) and I are all well. Elise is now 17 and Khalil is 14. Both are doing well in their studies and they are quite settled in Guinea but not for long. Elise has been accepted By Cambridge University to study Mathematics. I guess she is following dad's footsteps. Khalil has just completed his GSCEs with outstanding results. Both my wife and I are very proud of their achievements.

I would like to let you know today that last Monday, I was nominated as the Education Minister in Guinea. A position I am proud to have and my family are very excited for me. I just wanted to thank you very much for all your fantastic support during my time in the UK. Caroline is also running her charity about educating young girls about abuse and how to report abuse incidents without being bullied or feared of being blamed or not to be believed. Her project has taken really off. She has now covered the whole of Guinea in 4 years. It is a real accomplishment. I am really impressed and very happy for her success.

It is really busy for both Caroline and I because of our jobs. As a result of this, we have now decided with the kids that it is best if they go abroad and pursue their studies. Elise has decided that she wants to go to the UK for her universities meanwhile Khalil has decided that he wants to go and stay with his grandma and grandpa in France, where he will complete his A-levels. Though my wife and I are happy with their decision it is a bit sad to let them go. However, growing up in the UK at age of 17, with so little and not having any family around was the best thing that could have ever happen to me and I can therefore only see success for them, as their circumstance of growing up would be vastly different from mine, simply because they have us supporting them and it is their choice two things I did not have.

Elise would like to spend her holidays with you before embarking to her university life in Cambridge. I hope this would be okay with you. She has insisted on spending her holidays with you even though we thought you are tired and she should just visit you from time to time. She is very excited that she is going to grandpa and has even started to describe Walton-on-sea to me as if we were there yesterday. I hope that you have the same energy as her for the beach! She is also interested to know a bit about Cambridge before going there and I could not find anyone better than yourself as you studied there. I hope that you will have much to share with her.

This is our news and we are very much looking forward to hearing from you shortly.

Much love from,

Sekou, Caroline, Elise and Khalil

7.4 Summary

I began this chapter with a note about the limitations of prose. I am mindful that in commenting on the young peoples' letters I am offering a limited interpretation of their texts which does not reflect the full richness of these expressions of hope. Each of the letters are unique to the author and reflect his/her character, preoccupations, struggles and ambitions and deserve more attention than I am able to give here. Each voice is distinct and offers an insight into a life journey at a moment in time. Precious awaits the birth of her child, becoming a mother. Sarah balances dreams of fame and fortune with what she terms 'realistic dreams' and takes the opportunity to remind herself "don't let anyone tell you that you can't." Tommi reflects back on his journey, celebrates his achievements and reminds his younger self that anything may be possible step by step. Rayyan's letter comes from Utopia Road, Fantasy Place as he depicts the golden days of his life after a long time of sorrow and despair. Sekou's letter is full of confidence, the only one addressed to another (rather than a younger self) and offers a bountiful account of family life and professional success. Taken as a whole these letters reflect being and becoming, offering a nuanced perspective on the participants' pasts, presents and futures.

With this in mind, the final chapter offers some concluding thoughts and avenues for further exploration. In closing, I thread together some thoughts from the preceding chapters. I offer some reflections on the possibilities and limitations of research and consider how we might engage helpfully in the lives of young people with 'no papers'.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

"Everything that wrenches our hearts
Like signs written in the sky
With invisible hands
Is an inscription to our times
We should read with wise eyes." (Okri, 2021:14)

8.0 Introduction

Listening to Ahmed, Sekou, Precious, Mohammed, Tommi, Rayyan and Sarah wrenched my heart. It is heart-breaking to sit with the pain of another, to witness the mindless crushing of the human spirit brought about by the life-limiting impact of living with 'no papers.' But as an inscription to our times it is also deeply humbling to realise that despite the oppressiveness of their current circumstances these young people continue to endure and live their lives as fully as possible, and in this there is hope.

In this last chapter I offer some final reflections on the learning from this study, and intimations of possible solidarities across the immigration line. Firstly, I reflect on the participants' accounts of their lives and consider how practitioners in social care, health, education, youth and community work, might help this group of young people to build their everyday lives safely. Secondly, I tie together some threads from preceding chapters in respect of the psychosocial relational ontology informed by Black and women of colour feminisms and decolonial thinking which underpin this thesis. Finally, I consider the strengths and limitations of this study and avenues for further research.

8.1 Everyday lives, life histories, hopes and dreams

In Chapter 1 I outlined my intention to document and try to understand the everyday lives, life histories and hopes and dreams of young people with 'no papers.' In the section below I reflect on the young people's accounts of their lives and the implication of these findings for professional practice.

8.1.1 'For life and death are one'

> "For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one." (Gibran,1991:106)

Gibran's (1991) depiction of how life and death entwine brings to mind the ways in which young people with 'no papers' at times appear to walk a tightrope between life and death. In documenting the ways in which they survive in Chapters 6 and 7, I have illustrated the choices they make when living with 'no papers' and the ways in which their circumstances limit these choices. Elements of the participants' accounts of their everyday lives, life histories, hopes and dreams, echo aspects of the stories told by many young people living with precarious status (Brighter Futures, 2013; Chase & Allsopp, 2020).

Rayyan, Muhammed, Ahmed, Sekou, Precious, Tommi and Sarah's stories are about their struggles but also about their capacity to continue living in the face of great adversity and to hold hope for the future. They are peopled with loved ones both present and absent and those who have been there in moments of need. There are stories of despair, of erasure from public life and anger at the injustices they face every day. Amongst the accounts of determination and the resoluteness to continue living are moments of exhaustion and traces of pain beyond words. This study reveals that young people with 'no papers' live their lives on a continuum of resistance to death and movement towards life; their aliveness or closeness to death impacted by multiple psychological and socio-political factors. In the sections below I explore how practitioners might help young people to live safely and enhance their well-being.

8.1.2 Listening to understand

The narratives contained in this thesis demonstrate that the young people live their lives in and through relationships both past and present, and that their everyday lives are shaped by the socio-political context in which they are embedded. A relational psychosocial perspective (Gergen, 2009; Cooper, 2009) which considers the individual and their social context is therefore helpful both in understanding something of the young people's experiences but also in thinking about how we as practitioners might intervene helpfully in these lives.

As practitioners we often enter young people's lives at a moment in time when they are struggling and engage with them from a particular perspective, for example as a social worker, teacher, psychologist with a particular task. As researchers we come with a specific field of enquiry, our interest usually driven by a particular social concern. While this focused approach is often necessary, the findings of this study suggest that a more fluid and exploratory practice is also needed. In Chapter 5 the portrait poems use the young people's words to speak to lives lived, to the present and to a future yet to come. For each of the young people there were themes in their stories which were individual to them, for example for Sarah her relationship with Jamaica and her Jamaicanness, Sekou's ideas about the care system. These threads seemed significant as they emerged at multiple points in our meetings, a background preoccupation which surfaced when given space. These 'background stories', sometimes hidden beneath layers of the answers to questions, are also important as they offer both an insight into the young person's lived experience and a way into a conversation.

I remember observing a social work student, on placement at the community project I led, undertake an initial assessment with one of the young people called Haroun. At some point Haroun began talking about how he used to make and sell carpets in Iraq. The student acknowledged this briefly and continued to pursue his original line of enquiry remaining focused on the procedural aspects of the assessment task. Later, offering feedback to the student who was frustrated by the limited 'assessment information' he had been able to gather, I suggested that in future he should follow the story of the carpet before pursuing his own questions. Chapter 5, Portrait Poems, is much like the story of the carpets. It is an invitation to the reader to listen unconstrained by the boundaries of role or task, to listen and to try to understand what matters to the storyteller. This more fluid approach which listens for background stories, the 'tales in between', is in my view

critical if we wish to learn and try to understand what the other is thinking and feeling. Indeed, if our aim is to be helpful then surely we must begin with getting to know one another, attending to what the other deems important and responding respectfully with compassion and kindness.

> "Stories are precious to people because they define who they are, where they come from and what they are connected to." (Simmonds, 2007: 3)

In Haroun's story about the carpets, Simmonds (2007) statement resonates. Haroun was sharing something precious of his life and his history. When Ahmed told me a story about how he and a friend had saved money to send £100 to a medical aid charity in Palestine I understood that he was sharing something that was important to him. This story told in passing was nonetheless significant as it gave me a small insight into his values, commitments, personal relationships and sense of himself in the wider world. Likewise, Sarah's musings about her relationship with the Jamaican host she was staying with and the host's daughter reflect her preoccupations with her sense of identity as a young woman who was born in Jamaica but had spent the latter half of her childhood and early adulthood in the UK. Sarah described the differences in the ways she related to the older woman, whom she described as 'Jamaican Jamaican', with whom she shared a love of home-cooked Jamaican food and her relationship with the daughter, her peer with whom she exchanged hair and beauty ideas.

From this perspective Simmonds (2007) concept of stories defining who a person is, is to my mind, potentially problematic as all stories are told in a particular context and their meaning a co-construction between teller and hearer. However, the idea that stories can offer an insight into an individual's world and that which they hold precious is important to hold in mind. Simmonds (2007: 3) further argues that "social workers need to be expert at listening to stories and expert at being storytellers." Certainly, there is a need for practitioners to learn to listen to the 'thick stories' which reflect the wholeness of a person's experience, not just the 'thin stories' required by the state (Kohli, 2007:106). As Tommi states, the most important thing is to listen.

> "To listen - to listen and to listen to what's not being said. That's my biggest thing…Those are the biggest things for me. Understanding, listening and having

> patience. All the speaking and stuff and the work that you do, that's all fine, that can come after. But these things that need to be put in place first. You need to listen and you need to understand what you're listening to..."

The focus on listening, to what is and isn't said, is critical and transformative. Reflecting on his involvement in the research project Tommi notes

> "I think you probably know a lot more about me than so many people do. I think in terms of understanding me as a person. This is the most that I've ever put out there of my character… That's because no one really is going to take the time to understand anybody else. The same way I don't understand a lot of people as human beings and characters. Because I don't have the time to because I'm here trying to figure myself out…it's different to come and speak about it and really open up…. Now I've got a very strong understanding of myself now." (Tommi)

Listening to understand therefore, offers a way into dialogue and the possibility of an equitable relationship based on human dignity to counter the oppressive positioning of powerful state actor (practitioner) and powerless victim/criminal (young person).

Young people with precarious status are constantly reminded that they do not have the required paperwork, citizenship, rights and entitlement to resources. For Precious conversations that are framed in the context of her immigration status are hurtful and harmful

> "Sometimes, I don't feel like seeing my social worker, because whenever I see her, she just keeps repeating '*due to the fact that you don't have a paper*.' I just hate when exactly she keeps saying that. '*Due to the fact'*. Just stop saying that 'due to the fact that you don't have paper.' I don't know how other people feel, but me, I hate when people say that. 'Due to the fact that you don't have a paper.' Don't say that to me. You're just keeping me down."

Similarly Rayyan draws attention to the ways in which professionals speak to and about those with no papers.

> “I think it would be nice if people are considerate of this in their words and their language and their actions. What's going to happen is that you say ‘*oh he doesn't have any right?*’... I had similar things happen to me, instances where a shock goes through you and you all of a sudden feel very withdrawn and you feel like I'm not part of the society... It's not nice.”

The act of listening and ‘bearing witness’ (Blackwell, 1997) without feeling the need to assert one’s own agenda can be a powerful way of enabling young people to make sense of their own experiences and develop a positive narrative about themselves. Simmonds (2007) proposition that social workers must be both expert at listening and also storytelling is relevant here in terms of thinking about how we story the lives of young people living with precarious status. By focusing primarily on the absence of status, we risk creating a dehumanising narrative in which individuals are thought of only in terms of their legal rights to access public resources, rather than as human beings deserving of dignity.

8.1.3 ‘In words and action’

Beyond being in relationship as listening to understand and bearing witness, as practitioners we also have the possibility of ‘doing’, making choices, taking decisions and actions. As this study shows, the decisions made by others, including practitioners in health, social care and education, can significantly impact the lives of young people with ‘no papers.’ As evidenced in the case of Rayyan, the choice made by his counsellor to intervene by standing in the doorway to block his exit when he was actively suicidal, and the subsequent support offered by the college were a lifeline for him. Precious, Sarah and Sekou all spoke at length about the kindness of particular workers they had met through charitable organisations, in education and social care and how this support and attention enabled them to keep going when life was at its most difficult and challenges seemed insurmountable. In contrast Muhammed was barely able to speak about his experience of seeking help from social services. His experience so distressing that he struggled for words to speak

> "…when I was come from Sweden. I don't have money for eat…This happen. No-one that can help me, and I'm stay hungry in the UK. Sorry. …Don't remind me, forget."

His voice breaks as he describes asking social services for food and he becomes tearful, putting his head in his arms as though shielding himself from painful memories of hunger.

If we listen closely to these stories and look beyond the defences of over-stretched organisations and crippling bureaucratic structures, as practitioners we always have the possibility of choice. As Rayyan notes

> "What they can do is they can be considerate in their words and actions."

Just as the young people make intentional choices about how to survive and live in the face of the daily brutalities of life with 'no papers', so we as practitioners are responsible for the choices we make in the face of systemic injustices. While we may not have the authority to make decisions which result in a tangible improvement in the quality of another's life, for example the provision of housing, status, education and employment opportunities, creative resistance to the violence of an unjust system is always possible (Dixon *et al*, 2020). This resistance can take multiple forms; small acts of kindness, advocacy, connecting and collaborating with others working in the field to build networks of safety around individuals and communities.

A key theme in the young peoples' narratives is the way in which their lives are shaped by their immigration status. Although practitioners need to be mindful of only viewing young people through the lens of their immigration status, it is important that they develop and maintain an up-to-date knowledge of UK immigration legislation and policy. This knowledge and awareness are crucial for understanding the implications of policy and legislation on the lives of young people; helping them to negotiate complex systems of care, education and housing and offer practical support, for example facilitating access to good quality legal advice, providing reference letters for appeal hearings.[18] Such

[18] See https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/resources/ for legal and policy updates.

interventions are critical for supporting the well-being of undocumented young people and helping to bring about positive changes in their lives.

The findings of this thesis illustrate that, notwithstanding the limitations of our circumstances, we always have a choice about how to live and the decisions we make. As practitioners we can draw on policy and legislation to safeguard and protect children and young people from harm to support our practice and promote the welfare of children and young people with precarious status rather than joining the chorus of exclusion.

Again, I return to the importance of a relational approach in which core values of respect, kindness and justice guide us in our encounters with young people. In a hostile environment where those of us employed by public bodies and charitable organisations are positioned as border guards (Yuval-Davis *et al,* 2019), it is necessary to actively embody a radical alternative if we wish to help this group of young people to build their everyday lives safely.

8.1.4 Dignity

Recently I read a post on LinkedIn by a friend and former colleague who came to the UK as a refugee child. She reflects on her current work helping some of the Afghan families that were evacuated to the UK.

> "What a precious thing it is to be able to preserve your dignity when going through difficulties. Precious to you and your sense of self. The problem is that when you are going through crisis it is not always within your own power to preserve your dignity. That power can too often lie in the hands of someone else. That is why when you are a person reacting to someone in crisis just as an individual or in the helping professions you must do all you can to help preserve someone's dignity until such time that they can do for themselves." (Alemayehu, 2021)

Article 1 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that

> "All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in the spirit of brotherhood." (United Nations General Assembly, 1948)

Alemayehu (2021) calls those working with others in a crisis to 'do all you can to help preserve someone's dignity.' As evidenced in Chapter 6, the findings of this thesis suggest that professionals acting 'in the spirit of brotherhood' (United Nations General Assembly, 1948: 72) are needed to safeguard the well-being of those with 'no papers'. In 8.1.2 and 8.1.3 I have argued in favour of listening to understand and using a relational approach to support these young people to live their lives safely. Part of listening to understand requires taking a psychosocial relational approach to practice and research; understanding the interconnectedness of emotions and social worlds, lived experience and power relations are crucial prerequisites to taking helpful action.

The findings suggest that for undocumented youth, 'power' is often in the hands of someone else. The implications of this reality for professionals are significant. Firstly, it is necessary to recognise and be aware of our power and potential positioning as 'border guards' in a hostile environment' (Yuval-Davis et al, 2019). Secondly, it is critical that we use this power to help preserve human dignity when working with those in precarious circumstances. As professionals we need to ask ourselves "how, in this particular role, situation or moment, can I use my power to preserve dignity and minimise harm to this particular young person and support them to access services and resources?"

This practice will look different depending on context, the possibilities and limitations of particular professional roles. However, some starting points are suggested below. Where possible try to hold meetings (particularly assessments and interviews) in alternative, non-institutional settings, allowing the young person to choose the location, offering refreshments and activities which facilitate friendly conversation e.g., playing cards. As illustrated in section 8.1.2 look for conversational entry points (Lee, 2018), always explain the purpose of the meeting/ interview, the possible outcomes and limitations. Be prepared to do things differently, for example walk-along meetings/interviews (Muir, 2017). Accept the limitations of professional and 'peer reviewed' knowledge and be willing to listen and learn from the young person. Be mindful of the likeliness that a young person with 'no papers' has experienced multiple traumatic

events, separations and losses that may impact on their responses and relationship with you as a professional. Invest time and energy in establishing trust through regular contact; do not underestimate the importance of brief 'check in' phone calls and texts. Remember that knowledge is power; understand the legal and policy framework that impacts those you are working with and be prepared to challenge ill-informed or poor decision-making. If in doubt seek legal advice; build a network of good quality solicitors and legal advisers.[19] Stay abreast of changes in immigration policy and practice by subscribing to relevant newsletters and engaging in knowledge sharing forums.[20] Build strong working relationships with professionals in local education, health, social care, youth and community services, organisations and individuals with expertise in working with children and young people subject to immigration control and groups campaigning for systemic justice.[21] These professional networks are crucial; to enable young people to access particular services and support, to collaborate with when advocating on behalf of young people, to build solidarity and organise for systemic change.

The hostile environment disconnects people from one another and destroys lives; human connection across differences, disciplines and services makes it possible to develop alternative webs of safety in which young people with 'no papers' can be held. These networks of support are equally necessary for professionals; collaboration and cooperation can help to maintain professional and personal wellbeing and to align practice with principles and actions which sustain human dignity in precarious circumstances.

8.2 Multiple lenses

> "An invisible line connects us all and everything
> Is now linked in tears and pain." (Okri, 2021:23)

[19] The Coram Children's Legal Centre https://www.coram.org.uk/how-we-do-it/coram-childrens-legal-centre-upholding-childrens-rights and Just for Kids Law https://www.justforkidslaw.org/what-we-do/empowering-young-people/legal-support/immigration

[20] Free Movement https://www.freemovement.org.uk and Coram Migrant Children's Project https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/about-us/what-we-do/migrant-childrens-project/ have regular newsletters with the latest news and information relation to immigration and migrant children. Find and follow campaigning organisations on Twitter such as ABC, PRCBC and Right to Remain (links below) to connect with others in the field.

[21] For example, Against Borders for Children https://www.schoolsabc.net Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens https://prcbc.org Right to Remain https://righttoremain.org.uk

Some weeks ago, I listened to an interview with Ben Okri talking about his new book '*A Fire in My Head: Poems for the Dawn*.' The interviewer, Samira Ahmed, started by asking him "what kind of fire is in your head?" to which he responded

> "…it's a fire of life, a fire of rage, a fire of beauty, a fire of myth… in the book there are many fires, fires of truth, fires of poetry, fires, real fires, emotional fires…" (Front Row, 2021)

Listening to Okri talk about his work as a response to the times we are living in, I found myself thinking about my own writing and how it too was born of a fire in my head and a desire to speak in ways which connect with the experiences of others. I begin this next section with some trepidation as I have become increasingly aware of the risks of entering conversations in contested territories while one's own thinking is still in process. Indeed, while practitioners are afforded little room for error or human frailties, academia is equally unforgiving. Key threads running throughout this thesis have been relational, Black and women of colour feminisms and decolonial thinking. As noted in Chapter 2, each of these bodies of thought have their own, contested, epistemic histories, ontological frameworks and praxis. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in an in-depth discussion about the problems and possibilities of these schools of thought. Instead, I want to briefly outline my interpretation of some of the core aspects of these theoretical approaches and illustrate how I have made use of them in the design, process and outcome of this empirical study. This thesis is not a relational/ Black feminist/ decolonial project, nor is it wholly located within any one of these frameworks. Rather I have used these ways of thinking as different lenses with which to focus on particular aspects of lived experience and processes of knowledge production.

8.2.1 A relational approach

Drawing on the work of Gergen (2009), Clandinin et al (2018) and White (2015, 2017) I have interpreted a relational approach as an understanding that life is lived through relationships, that we are constituted through relationships and that meaning is generated through relationships. Moreover, that human existence is embedded in systems, the natural world and social worlds. These layers of connections are located in a historical

moment, rather relationships and events exist and take place at a moment in time, are recalled and recounted, become memories distorted and impacted by time. In my mind these relational layers map onto one another in a three-dimensional, shape-shifting Venn diagram with differing elements of human connection, context and time continually impacting on one another. Relationality, to my mind, is a fluid concept which enables exploration of complexity and stretches the bounds of psychosocial thinking.

In the first instance, decolonial and relational thinking in the context of research with those with precarious citizenship necessitates an examination of positionality with regards to immigration control. Where Okri's invisible line connects us, so the immigration line disturbs and disrupts this relationship, disconnecting human beings from one another. As Back (2007:31) argues

> "The immigration line demarcates those lives that are endowed with the gift of citizenship and those lives that can be cut short with impunity."

I have discussed in section 8.1.3 the necessity of embodying a radical alternative to the border guard in direct work with young migrants. Thinking beyond frontline practice to research, the immigration line often delineates those who are able to speak for others, from those who are spoken about.

With this in mind a central concern of this study has been to create equitable relationships with the young people involved in the project and undertake research grounded in principles of respect, kindness and justice. In working from these core commitments, I have attempted to recast the researcher-participant relationship as reciprocal, with knowledge generated through being in relationship and attending to the relationship as a core component of the work. I have discussed this relational approach and some of the possibilities and challenges in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Overall, the results of this empirical study confirm that a reflexive relational approach in which researcher and participants co-construct knowledge can enable deeper insights into the participants' lived experience.

As I have shown throughout this thesis, the lived experiences of young people with ‘no papers’ need to be considered in the context of their full lives, their present alongside their past and possible futures. A relational approach enables connections to be drawn across time and place so as to examine these lives in context. Likewise, relationality as an iterative process of drawing inter-connections between emotional states, social worlds and the broader socio-political context can support an analysis that transcends binaries in relation to complex phenomena. One example of this is thinking about trauma, as discussed in Chapter 4. Here a relational perspective can stimulate thinking about the inter-connections between experiencing traumatic events such as the loss of a loved one, exile and homelessness and the impact of dehumanising regimes of border control.

Indeed, writing this in lockdown relational thinking seems particularly relevant; I am increasingly preoccupied by how our lives and choices impact and intertwine with those of others and the consequences of our everyday actions and inactions. Okri’s ‘invisible line’ which connects us all resonates for me with Martin Luther King’s (1963) ‘network of mutuality’

> “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

A key thread running through this thesis has been the concept of justice; the daily struggles for justice of those with precarious citizenship, the possibilities for solidarity in these struggles and this thesis as an attempt to do justice to the participants’ accounts of their lives. To my mind a desire for lived and epistemic justice is a thread that connects Black and women of colour feminism and decolonial thought. There are of course distinctive differences, debates and conflicts which exist between and within these approaches. However, my purpose here is not to advance theoretical arguments or even to engage in work concerned with developing Black feminist or decolonial theory. Rather it is to consider the findings of this thesis through the prism of these dual approaches, each of which relates to different aspects of the experience and knowledge production of young people with ’no papers’.

8.2.2 ‘From margin to center’

In the introduction to an edited collection of essays on Black feminism and Afro feminism in Europe, Emejulu and Sobande (2019: 3) describe Black feminism as a “both a theory and a politics of affirmation and liberation” stating;

> “Black feminism names and valorises the knowledge production and lived experiences of different Black women derived from our class, gender identity, legal status and sexuality, for example. This insistence on Black women as human, as agents and as knowers is critical any kind of Black feminist thought.”

Emejulu and Sobande (2019) locate the collection of writing by Black and women of colour scholars, activists and artists within the history of Black feminism and Afro feminism. They explain their position with regards to terminology by stating that they are neither engaging in the politics of ‘political Blackness’ nor using ‘women of colour’ as a synonym for Black women; but rather that the text, and it’s framing as ‘Black feminism’, is an attempt to “demonstrate the possibilities of intersectional solidarity across race, class, gender, legal status and language” (ibid:6). Keeping in mind the importance of attending to difference while recognising the possibilities of solidarity Emejulu and Sobande’s (2019) definition of Black feminism is useful as a framework for naming and valorising the lived experiences and knowledge production of young people with ‘no papers.’ To my mind a key contribution of Black feminist thought is the centring of lived experience of those who have been oppressed, their humanity and contribution to knowledge production denied. In ‘*Feminist Theory; from Margin to Center*’ (hooks, 2000:92) writes

> “Women need to know that they can reject the powerful’s definition of their reality – that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited or trapped in oppressive circumstances. They need to know the exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength. Many poor and exploited women, especially non-white women, would have been unable to develop positive self-concepts if they had not exercised their power to reject the powerful’s definition of their reality.”

Extending hooks' (2000) thinking about 'women' in the quote above to young people with 'no papers' begs the question of who in this context are the 'powerful'. On one level we have the power of legislators and state actors who enact the policies and procedures which through practice or design contribute to their exploitation and oppression. This study demonstrates a multitude of ways in which young people exercise their personal power and these are detailed in Chapters 6 and 7. However, of equal importance to the power to impact the young people's lives directly through practice, is the power to define their reality in words.

An awareness of epistemic power is a thread which runs through this thesis particularly in relation to storytelling, as in Chapter 4 and discussed in Section 8.1.2 above. In thinking about the young people as agentic 'knowers' I have tried to create space within this text for their words in ways which valorise both their lived experiences and their contribution to knowledge production. I have done this by weaving their stories and thinking into the fabric of the thesis through the use of extensive interview data and the creation of poetry which uses their words. Alongside this attempt to centre the young people's lives and knowledge in the text, I have drawn from Black and women of colour feminisms a way of storytelling.

In her brilliant essay '*The Race for Theory'* Barbara Christian (1987:52) reminds us that

> "For people of color have always theorized - but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity?"

Christian's (1987) description of theorising as a dynamic activity which plays with language resonates with my own approach. In writing this thesis I have threaded together participant testimonies, empirical research and theory, with poetry and prose, in an attempt to both represent the lives of young people with 'no papers' and to speak to the

complexity of such an endeavour. In particular, I have drawn on creative narrative forms to engage the reader emotionally in the lives of these young people. By inviting the reader to make connections between familiar and unfamiliar contexts and pay attention to the ways in which the young people's stories resonate across generations and differences, this thesis contributes to thinking about uses and abuses of power. In linking theorising with survival, Christian (1987) segues into decolonial thinking which, like Black and women of colour feminisms, challenges us to look at the world from the perspective of those who are oppressed. In the section below I illustrate some of the ways in which I have made use of decolonial thinking in this project.

8.2.3 Decolonial thinking

'Decolonising' is used in reference to a multiplicity of definitions, interpretations, aims and strategies and remains a contested term encompassing a multitude of perspectives and approaches. In '*Decolonising the University'* Bhambra et al (2018:2) posit two key aspects;

> "First, it is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view. Second, it purports to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis."

As a study concerned with the lives of young people subject to immigration control, this thesis has demonstrated the ways in which colonialism, empire and racism have shaped their lived experiences. This is particularly evident in Chapter 5. *Nameless Death* which discusses the impact of the hostile environment and regimes of border control on their everyday lives and possibilities for the future. As Back (2007:31) notes

> "The immigration line is just as vexed politically, ontologically and practically as the line of colour or race. Indeed, it is deeply implicated in the legacy of racisms past and present and of the foundational principles of citizenship and state formation."

Back's (2003) description of an 'immigration line' implicated in the legacy of racism is a reminder of how immigration status has increasingly become a marker of difference used to categorise human beings in relation to their rights to citizenship and dignity. In a context where the Home Secretary Priti Patel regularly announces proposals to punish those who seek safety in Britain (Grierson, 2021) or deport homeless migrants (Geraghty, 2021) the 'immigration line' separates those deemed 'deserving' of dignity from those who are not. From this perspective decolonial thinking shows us how social exclusion, discrimination and power differences are enacted through border control connected to 'the ongoing legacies of our colonial history' (Bhambra *et al*, 2018:113). As a way of thinking about the world and alternative forms of praxis, decolonial thinking offers a way of delinking from this history, and instead privileges human dignity.

Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of viewpoints defining 'decolonising', a key aspect of this approach is an insistence on positionality and the plurality of perspectives. Decolonial thinking emphasises that ideas are always arrived at from a variety of sources and that there are many 'truths.' Moreover, decolonial approaches demonstrate that representation and knowledge of the world is historically and geographically situated (Bhambra *et al*, 2018:2). Intersectional positionality and a plurality of perspectives have been central to this project in the research design, process of fieldwork and analysis, and writing of this thesis. This reflexive approach is discussed in relation to the overall conception of the research project in Chapter 2, the methodology in Chapter 3, and the storying of the young people's lives in Chapter 4.

8.2.4 The butterfly and the bee

In 1964 Muhammad Ali promised the world that he'd 'float like a butterfly, sting like a bee' in his fight against heavyweight champion Sonny Liston (Brown, 2018). Three years later he risked his freedom and career to uphold his convictions when he refused to serve in the Army and fight in the Vietnam war (ibid). I was reminded of Ali's courage and brave words while reflecting on my attempts to include a multiplicity of perspectives in this research and write with conviction. I've approached scholarly texts much like a butterfly; floating between ideas, taking concepts I've found useful and focusing on elements which have helped me to develop my own thinking and write purposefully. For me the analogy

of the bee suggests the dual possibility of taking what is needed (nectar) as well as the necessity of writing with intent.

In *Living a Feminist Life* Sara Ahmed (2017:15) describes citation as an intentional feminist practice

> "Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because it deviated from the paths we were told to follow."

Describing citations as "the materials through which, from which we create our dwellings" she writes

> "my citations policy has affected the kind of house I have built…And I have felt much more exposed. Perhaps citations are feminist straw: lighter materials, that when put together, still create a shelter but a shelter that leaves you more vulnerable." (Ahmed, 2017: 16)

Like Ahmed (2017), I have appreciated the contributions of those who came before in helping me find my way. A multiplicity of poets, writers and scholars have enabled me to develop my thinking and understanding of the lives of the participants. For me the many voices, much like Ahmed's (2017) feminist straw, enable a lightness of interpretation, suggesting possibilities and potential understandings of experience rather than fixing on a single point of explanation. However, in choosing to take this approach rather than adopting an overarching theoretical or conceptual frame, I too feel more vulnerable. In taking only that which I have found helpful, rather than engaging in the 'controversies and conflicts over interpretations' of the work cited, I am mindful that I have left myself exposed to criticisms about the interpretation or application of a particular theory or concept (Mignolo, 2009: 162). While I recognise the necessity of criticality and theoretical debate, my concern in this project is to draw threads from particular theories to illuminate elements of lived experience and suggest connections across and beyond these ideas and experiences.

In Mignolo's (2009:160) paper, he argues that "epistemic disobedience means to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology." I have interpreted this as a perspective that calls into question the starting point of 'knowledge' and asks instead who and when, where and why is this knowledge being generated and constructed (ibid). This thesis has shown that the '*how*' and '*why'* of knowledge production is inextricable from the '*what'* of knowledge content. It is notable that despite the frequency with which the terms interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary are used; in my experience, both practice and research still divide along broadly disciplinary lines. Likewise, theoretical debates often take place within the broad contours of contested terrains undisturbed by lived realities. Perhaps the drawing of these boundaries is necessary or desirable? Of this I remain uncertain. It is unclear whether the borderlines which demarcate disciplines, divide theory and practice can be transgressed by all or whether, like citizenship, this is a privilege afforded to some. When in doubt it is perhaps wise to proceed with caution and walk within existing lines. To wander across these lines, whether by accident or with intent is to enter unknown territory and thus risk the possibility of being misunderstood or bruised (Lorde, 1984:40). However, like Lorde (ibid) I have come to believe that what is most important must be spoken and so this thesis is an attempt to walk across the lines, despite the risks.

This thesis is not a theoretical exercise, it is an attempt to understand and honour the lives of young people with 'no papers'. By engaging in epistemic de-linking my concern with this thesis is therefore not to fit within a particular analytic or conceptual framework but rather to expose the wood and explore the nature of the trees. Drawing on a diversity of voices unhooked from their moorings has enabled me to focus attention on the nuances of the young people's stories. In the final part of this chapter I reflect on the processes of knowledge generation in this research and consider the strengths and limitations of this study.

8.3 Strengths and limitations of the research

> "…no matter what happened, everything I've learned from this country, they can never take that one away from me and that has been my biggest lesson. I could decide to go anywhere in the world tomorrow. My experience, the knowledge I've

> acquired from this country, the people I've met…[…] they can never take that one away from me…be resilient, and learn, if you can." (Sekou)

By bridging the divide between practice and research this thesis seeks to offer a nuanced account of the lived experiences and 'life projects' (Chase & Allsopp, 2020) of young people with 'no papers.' Beyond the intention to document and honour the participants' stories is a desire to engage practitioners and scholars in dialogue about how our work might support this group of young people to live their lives safely and in ways which are meaningful for them. In our final research meetings, I asked the participants to reflect on their learning from experience, what they would share with other young people and key messages for practitioners. I also asked for their thoughts on the research process and any feedback. Aspects of their reflections are woven into the thesis, their feedback and my own learning from experience inform this final section where I outline the strengths and limitations of the research in relation to issues of research design and sample size. I conclude by offering some suggestions for further empirical studies in this area.

8.3.1 Research design

The research design drew primarily on my experience of working with young refugees and migrants in community settings since the late 1990s. I was mindful of the need to be both pragmatic and flexible in my approach and so the design was based on a series of meetings which would enable me to build relationships over time as well as offer multiple opportunities to address the three elements of the research question; everyday lives, life histories and hopes and dreams for the future. The original design also included two creative methods; young people were invited to take photographs of their everyday lives and also to write/record a 'Letter to the Future' (Sools *et al*, 2015).

Seven young people participated in narrative interviews which used a combination of semi-structured and unstructured interview methods (Charmaz, 2014; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Wengraf, 2001). Five of these young people participated in multiple meetings; I adapted the interview methods depending on individual preferences, with some participants this was apparent from the outset, with others it was a process of negotiation and exploration to find the best way to enable them to speak. For example, in my second meeting with Sarah (originally planned as an unstructured interview following a single question) it became apparent that she was more comfortable with me

asking specific questions and so I took a more active role as an interviewer than with others such as Sekou, Rayyan and Tommi who spoke at length without any prompting or questions.

It is notable that all those who participated in multiple meetings were engaged with charities and/or public sector institutions, relatively 'visible' in their invisibility and to some degree held within safe networks. The two young people who participated in single interviews were both young Afghans who had arrived in the country as separated children and were now subject to removal directions. As young people who were at the 'end of the line/appeals rights exhausted' (Dorling *et al*, 2017:52) they worked hard to remain 'invisible' as they ran the daily risk of deportation. Therefore, for Ahmed and Muhammed, engagement in any non-essential activities which increased their visibility, for example travelling by public transport, was a significant risk. The issue of involvement in research as a risk for Ahmed and Muhammed are discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. The issue of how to ensure that young people who are not connected to public and/or Third Sector organisations have opportunities to engage in research about their lives is one which requires further consideration.

The design of this empirical study was flexible enough to accommodate differences in the young people's availability and context. However, it highlights the issue of *who* is able to participate in research and *how* to enable participation. I decided to use interviews as my primary method of data collection for largely pragmatic reasons. As a working parent with two very young children, I had a limited amount of flexibility in my own schedule. My personal circumstances meant that undertaking ethnographic fieldwork through being embedded in a community organisation wasn't a viable option for me at the time. Although all the interviews generated rich data which has deepened my understanding of the lives of young people with 'no papers' I am mindful of the limitations of a methodology based primarily on interviews.

Firstly, it excludes potential participants who may be reluctant to participate in interviews but would be willing to be involved in research and contribute differently. For example, an ethnographic approach using participant observation (Abu Lughod, 1986) or the Tavistock observation method (Bick, 1964; Rustin, 2009) would make it possible for young people to be involved through their presence in a particular fieldwork site or contribute informally in a community setting. An ethnographic approach, to a large extent,

enables the possibility of 'ordinary' involvement in research giving young people time and space to learn about the research project and determine how they might wish to be involved. A methodology based primarily on interviews requires participants to engage in activities (interviews) which may previously have been experienced as oppressive and dehumanising. Alongside this, young people may be reluctant to engage in activities which revisit painful or distressing experiences. During the recruitment process I spoke to two young people that I knew from my previous community work who initially indicated they would be interested in participating but after a few telephone conversations they told me they did not wish to take part in the research. One of them felt it was 'too personal' and the other who had recently been granted status after a ten-year struggle was simply too exhausted to think about this experience anymore.

Secondly, it is in some respects more difficult to develop and maintain trust in a context where the relationship only exists within the confines of the research activity. I sustained my relationships with the participants throughout the project by maintaining telephone contact, checking in through text messages and undertaking occasional tasks, for example, writing a reference letter or advocacy to support access to university. I've discussed the limitations of trust in Chapter 4 with respect to my meeting with Muhammed.

Thirdly, there is the issue of the limits of language. By this I mean both that the interviews were conducted in English and the limits of words as a means of articulating experience. This to my mind was the most significant limitation in terms of defining *who* could take part and *how* they were able to contribute to the study. The decision to undertake interviews in English was primarily based on resources, the cost and logistics of engaging interpreters. An in-depth discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of working with interpreters or possibilities of engaging peer-researchers with relevant language skills is beyond the scope of this chapter. I have discussed the limits of word-based research methods in Chapter 4 and suggest this needs to be a consideration in any further research with young people with 'no papers.'

In terms of the creative aspects of the design the outcome varied. I'd originally intended to give participants a digital camera at our first meeting with the view that they would take photographs of their everyday lives. As it happened this initial activity did not appeal to participants and seemingly felt like a task rather than something I had intended as a way

of generating dialogue. *The Letters from the Future* activity was much more meaningful and all those who took part in multiple meetings participated in some way. My experience from practice is that creative activities developed with young people can be very valuable ways of enabling contributions and documenting experiences (Deveci & Shakerifar, 2009). As research methods, they offer possibilities but like all methods, need to be designed to incorporate flexibility and an awareness that participants are likely to respond in a multitude of ways. Some will embrace such methods as an opportunity for self-expression while others may feel that they are more vulnerable and exposed by these activities.

8.3.2 Sample group

A further limitation of the research which merits consideration is the size and nature of the sample group and subsequent implications for generalisability and analysis.
In Cooper's (2009) article on 'practice-near research' he makes the case for an approach which focuses on 'studying specific cases or a small range of particulars' arguing

> "The closer one comes to a single case, the more its uniqueness and particularity demands to be understood; but equally the more its value for the illumination of all other cases with which there is a family resemblance becomes evident." (Cooper, 2009: 433)

Cooper (2009) posits that an in-depth examination of the details of a small number of peoples' stories enables us to discover the 'complex particulars' of experience and thus offers depth over breadth. Working with a small number of participants in this project made it possible for me to develop a relationship-based approach to the research and tailor the methodology to fit the circumstances and preferences of the individuals concerned. Moreover, focusing attention on trying to understand each and every situation or context as unique and particular (Cooper, 2009: 440), enabled me to attend to the complexity of individual stories as a means of shedding light on the whole; the experience of living with 'no papers.'

Notwithstanding the strengths of practice-near research, the limited size of the sample necessitates caution with respect to generalising findings. However, a more significant

issue in my view, is that a small sample group largely precludes the possibility of an intersectional analysis along the axes of gender, class, ethnicity, race, (dis)ability for example. A larger sample group offers greater opportunities to reflect on similarities and differences within the group by use of a tool such as the Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS (SG).[22] An intersectional lens for analysis of research data would enable a deeper exploration of how structural power, access to resources, social inclusion and exclusion, might have a differential impact on young people with 'no papers' depending on their social positioning.

8.3.3 Further research

Overall the findings of this study confirm that undocumented youth survive on a continuum of life and death impacted by multiple psychological and socio-political factors. This thesis illustrates that individual lives cannot be understood through attending only to that which is spoken and speakable. Moreover, that a sensitivity to the emotional content of communication and a willingness to embrace embodied ways of knowing and learning can offer deeper insights into the lives of others. Black feminist and decolonial thought draw attention to processes of knowledge production in terms of *who* (research participants and researcher positionality) *how (*methodology and approach) and *what* (topic, questions) of empirical research. In the section below I draw on this learning to outline some suggestions for further research in this field.

This study demonstrates that there is a need for further research with undocumented youth designed in accordance with the principles of relational, participatory and peer research (Chase & Allsopp, 2020; Back et al, 2018; Focus on Labour Exploitation, 2021) and informed by Black feminist thought and decolonial critiques. To my mind such an approach necessitates meaningful engagement with questions of positionality, issues of inclusion and exclusion in research (*who* can 'speak' and '*how*'), a commitment to reflexive practice and centring of the lived experiences and knowledge production of those the research claims as its subject.

[22] "Social GRRAAACCEEESSS stands for gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, ethnicity, education, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation, spirituality" (Burham 2012 cited in Totsuka, 2014: 86 - 87)

Data from this study alongside findings in recent research with young migrants (Chase & Allsopp, 2020; Meloni, 2019; Sirriyeh, 2020) suggest a number of avenues for further exploration;

- *The impact of immigration status on personal relationships and family life*

Tommi and Sarah both spoke about how their immigration status at various times impacted on their relationships with family members. Ahmed and Precious raise this in relation to forming friendships and intimate partnerships and likewise Sekou spoke about this in relation to his marriage to an EU citizen.

- *Young people's sense of identity, self and belonging*

Although the young people rarely used the language of identity, self or belonging their accounts often included reflections about themselves in relation to their countries of birth, faith, religious communities, sense of home and homeland, Britishness, sexuality and peer relationships.

- *Young people's community and political activism*

Several of the young people spoke about the ways in which they were active in their communities including Sekou's involvement in care leavers advocacy, Tommi's engagement with NGOs working with undocumented youth and Ahmed's support for peers involved in the asylum process and fundraising for medical aid in Palestine.

These topics come to mind as subjects which appeared to be important to the participants in this study. However, in keeping with a decolonial approach a starting place would be research to engage young people with 'non papers' in a conversation about what, in their view, might be a subject worth exploring through further study.

8.4 End notes

"'Hope' is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all – " (Dickinson, 1861)

For Ahmed, Rayyan, Sarah, Precious, Sekou, Tommi and Muhammed, hope resides in the possibility of securing legal status and dreams of a better future. The young peoples' accounts of their everyday lives show both the difficulty and necessity of holding hope when faced with the brutal inhumanity of the UK immigration regime. Their stories of personal triumph over adversity are inspiring but also a sobering reminder of our repeated failures to care for children subject to immigration control. In this context, this study brings to light the importance of engaged praxis; "ethical, self-aware, responsive and accountable action" across the immigration line (White, 2007: 226). This thesis hopes to make a small contribution to such "knowing, doing and being" (Ibid).

Finally, in tracing threads across time to evoke possible solidarities for the present and future, I want to conclude with some advice from Sarah about waiting for papers. Her words, a call to "stay humble" intended as a message for other young people, seem to me good guidance for us all.

> "My sister always says to me, 'relax, it's going to come. Stay humble.' That's what she always says to me…. Stay humble…And never give up on your dreams. That's a big one…the faith and the hope and the reaching for your dreams, it still helps you to get by in everyday life."

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Appendices

Participant Information Sheet

'No Papers' Research Project

Researcher: Yesim Deveci

Things you need to know before agreeing to take part

The Project

I am a student and this research project is part of my university degree (Professional Doctorate in Social Care & Emotional Wellbeing).

I want to find out more about what it's like for young people to live in the UK with irregular immigration status 'no papers'.

I want to talk to people between the ages of 16 and 25 to find out about their hopes and dreams, their everyday lives and their life histories.

The kinds of things I am interested in are:

- What are your hopes and dreams? How do you see your future?
- What is your life like now?
- What was your life like before you came to the UK?

If you agree to take part in the project then we will meet 4 times over 9 months.

Each meeting will probably take one or two hours. It depends on how long you want to talk for and how much you want to talk about. I will record the meetings and they will be typed up.

In addition to the meetings I will lend you a camera and ask you to take some photographs of your daily life, for example, you might take photos of foods you eat, places you like to go. It depends what you want to show me about your life.

I will also lend you an audio (voice) recorder and ask you to speak into it and record your thoughts and feelings about the future. You do not have to take photographs or record your thoughts/feelings if you do not want to.

Between 6 and 8 young people will take part in the project and at the end I will bring together all the records from all the meetings, the photographs and voice recordings and use these to help me write about the lives of young people with 'no papers'.

During and after the project I will give talks and presentations about what I am learning at universities, charities and other organisations that are interested in young people, refugees and migration.

I will not share information about you

The records of our meetings will be kept in a locked place and only I and the person who types it up will listen to the recordings.

I will keep all information in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.

I will take care to make sure that you cannot be recognised - I will change your name and not provide any information about the area you live in, organisations you are contact with etc.

I will keep what you tell me private UNLESS you say something that shows that you or other people are at risk of immediate harm. Wherever possible I will talk to you first before sharing any information.

You do not have to take part in this project and you can stop at any time.

You do not have to take part in this project. You can stop, and take your stuff out of the project, at any time. If you want to stop you can do so and you do not have to give any reasons. You just need to speak to me or tell your project worker.

If you say "Yes" to taking part now, you can change your mind. If you change your mind you can phone or email me,

Yesim Deveci 020 8223 3342 y.deveci@uel.ac.uk

This research project has been checked by the University of East London to see it is being carried out fairly.

If you have any concerns about how this research is being carried out, you can contact someone independent at the University:

Catherine Fieulleteau | Research Integrity and Ethics Manager | Graduate School
UEL University of East London, Docklands Campus, London, E16 2RD
Phone +44 (0)20 8223 6683 Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk

Consent Form

‘No Papers’ Research Project

Researcher: Yesim Deveci

I have read the information about the ‘No Papers’ Research Project, which I’ve been invited to take part in. I have been given a copy to keep.

I understand why the research is being done. Yesim has talked it though with me and I have been able to ask questions. I know that I don’t have to take part unless I want to.

I understand what the meetings will be about and that they will be recorded. I know that the records will be kept safe.

I understand that the fact I took part in this project, and information about me, will not be given to anyone. Only Yesim and the person typing up the recordings will see and hear what I have said in full.

I understand that information about the research might be published but that personal stuff about me will be changed so that people cannot recognise me.

I know that Yesim might have to speak to someone if I say anything that shows I or other people are at risk of immediate harm.

I understand that I have the right to stop, or to take out any material at any time. I don’t have to give any reasons.

I know how to contact Yesim if I want more information about the research and how to contact the university if I want to make a complaint.

I agree to take part in the project.

Name and date…….

Signature ……..

Researcher name and date……

Signature…….

Topic Guide

'No Papers' Research Project

Researcher: Yesim Deveci

If you agree to take part in the 'No Paper's project this is what will happen:

A) <u>INTRODUCTION:</u>

Our first meeting will be an introduction meeting. I will meet with you and if you like an interpreter and/or your key worker.

In this meeting I will tell you about the project and you will have a chance to ask questions.

If you decide to take part I will ask you to sign a 'consent form.'

If you are happy to take photographs of your everyday life then I will lend you a camera.

At this meeting we will arrange a time to meet in a few weeks.

OPTION: Take photographs of your everyday life.

B) <u>RESEARCH MEETING 1: Everyday life (now)</u>

At this meeting we will talk about your life now.

If you have taken photographs then I will put them onto my tablet and we will look at them together and talk about them. If you want I can delete the photos after we have talked about them.

I will ask you this question

"Please can you tell me about a day in your life this week?'

At this meeting I will ask you to return the camera to me and I will give you an audio recorder.

We will arrange a time to meet in about six weeks.

OPTION: Keep an audio journal. Record your thoughts and feelings about the future. What are your hopes and dreams? Try to do this once a week (or more often if you like). You can do this in English or your own language.

C) RESEARCH MEETING 2: Life history (past)

At this meeting we will talk about your life until now.

I will ask you this question:

"Please tell me the story of your life until today? All those experiences that were important for you personally."

At this meeting I will ask you to return the audio recorder.

We will arrange a time to meet in about six weeks.

D) RESEARCH MEETING 3: Hopes and dreams (future)

At this meeting we will talk about your hopes and dreams for the future.

We will talk about the thoughts and feelings that you recorded in the audio journal.

I will ask you this question:

"Please imagine a time in the future when something good has happened or you achieved something you wanted. Describe this situation to me. Tell me about your life in the future."

This will be our last research meeting.

Instruction for ‘Letters from the Future’

Imagine a time in the future when something good has happened to you or you have achieved something important to you.

It can be as far in the future as you like…hours, days, weeks or years in the future.

Try to picture yourself in this good place. Where are you? What are you doing? Are you on your own or with other people? Who are you with?

Think about someone you know now and write them a letter from the future telling them about this positive situation and how you got there. Try to include as much detail and description as possible.

UREC approval letter

University of East London

07th June 2021

Dear Yesim,

Project Title:	**'Will to survive': the lives of young people with 'no papers' in the UK**
Researcher:	**Yesim Deveci**
Principal Investigator	**Professor Andrew Cooper**
Amendment reference number:	**AMD 2021 04**
Original approved application reference number:	**UREC 1516 40**

I am writing to confirm that the application for an amendment to the aforementioned research study has now received ethical approval on behalf of the University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES).

Should you wish to make any further changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to URES. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents: https://uelac.sharepoint.com/sites/GraduateSchool/SitePages/Researc.aspx

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site:

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
Locations to be agreed with participants	Professor Andrew Cooper

University of East London

Pioneering Futures Since 1898

Summary of Amendments
Change of title from: 'No papers': the hopes and dreams, everyday lives and life histories of young people living in the UK with irregular immigration status. To: 'Will to survive': the lives of young people with 'no papers' in the UK

Ethical approval for the original study was granted on 09th February 2016.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES) has taken the decision that all face-to-face projects that include participant interactions should cease to use this method of data collection. For example, in person participant interviews or focus groups. The University supports Microsoft Teams for remote work. New research projects must not recruit participants using face-to-face interactions and all data collection should occur remotely. These regulations should be followed until further notice by URES.

Approval is given on the understanding that the University's Code of Practice for Research and Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to:
https://uelac.sharepoint.com/sites/GraduateSchool/SitePages/Researc.aspx

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Please ensure you retain this letter, as in the future you may be asked to provide evidence of ethical approval for the changes made to your study.

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Silva

Fernanda Silva
Administrative Officer for Research Governance
University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (URES)
Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk