Narratives of Extreme Adversity and Strength amongst Eritrean Refugee People.

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"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed"

Isaiah 1:17

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter"

Martin Luther King Jr.

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ABSTRACT

Eritrea is currently one of the top ten countries from which individuals seek asylum; with the number of Eritrean refugee people tripling in the United Kingdom (UK) since 2014. Eritreans have fled their homeland for many different reasons, including the 1961-1993 Eritrean-Ethiopian independence war, the 1998 - 2000 border conflict and more recently, human rights violations. Extreme adversity is not an uncommon human experience, however, discourses surrounding "psychological trauma" have dominated the way in which refugee people's experiences are understood. This often means that professionals are limited to working with refugee people within rigid Western frameworks for understanding adversity and resilience. Such ways of working enforce the dominant medical narrative, de-politicises adversity and silences more subjugated ways of understanding extreme adversity and resilience. The ethnographic narrative analysis was used to explore how Eritrean refugee people made sense of their experiences, as well as the multifaceted and contextual ways they have narrated these experiences. The study revealed that participants did not make sense of or respond to their experiences within the trauma framework. Rather, participants made sense of their experiences within the socio-political, economic and historical context in which they existed, and told stories of acceptance, hope, survival and justice. Furthermore, strength was not understood as an internal quality or ability, but as a process embedded within the social and cultural contexts that existed. Recommendations for the theory and practice of clinical psychology and policy will be explored, alongside suggestions for future research.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Adversity and suffering are common elements of human experience (Spoont, Sayer, Friedemann-Sanchez, Parker, Murdoch et al., 2009). However, terms like 'trauma' have become central to how we talk about suffering and adversity (Summerfield, 1999). Whilst being developed and given meaning in the Western world, the culture-bound narrative of 'psychological trauma' has been dominant when exploring experiences pertaining to the 'refugee experience'. This research will seek to explore how extreme adversity is understood amongst one of the largest groups of refugee people currently entering the UK, namely those from Eritrea.

This chapter begins with my personal relationship with this topic. I will then move on to contextualise the language used throughout this research. I will critically explore literature concerning the experiences of refugee people and how the 'psychological trauma' discourse is applied, before specifically exploring research gaps pertaining to Eritrean refugee people.

1.1. About Me

It is important to explain who I am, so the reader can understand the influences on my approach to human suffering, adversity and strength. Afuape (2011) states that we cannot be objective narrators of fact, nor is it possible to write without trying to convey (implicitly or explicitly) a particular viewpoint. In explaining my own narrative and those which have shaped who I am and how I see the world, I hope to make clear why this research is important and what led me to carry it out.

I am a British-born Eritrean, Christian woman and I am driven by a profound sense of equality and justice for all. I grew up in a household which was deeply rooted in a sense of community, culture and connectedness to one's homeland (Eritrea); not in a physical sense, but a connectedness that is made via the heart. Growing up as a child, I was surrounded by a large Eritrean community and was made to attend cultural events, demonstrations and marches for peace in Eritrea. Whilst earlier in my life this was often just an opportunity to play with other

children, I later came to appreciate the reasons behind why this had been so important to my parents and the values this had instilled in me.

My parents came to the UK during the Eritrean independence war and encountered many losses along their journey. In addition to this, they were faced with the uncertainty of the safety of those left behind and the struggles of trying to adjust to a new country which was prejudice and racist towards those who were not white. Despite this, I did not grow up with a narrative of vulnerability. Rather, I grew up with narratives of overcoming, justice and power through stories of my parent's experiences as refugee people and their coming together with others to endure, provide support, resist and take a stand against the injustices they had fled. This has led me to see war, suffering and extreme adversity via the lens of social and political injustices, and distress as a response to abuses of power and oppression and not as an individual pathology. More so it has led me to see healing as being found in community ties, social connectedness, and in fighting for justice, rather than being found in Western medicines and 'professionals'.

Emotions play an active role in the creation of 'knowledge' and in the shaping of research (Brannan, 2014). I strongly feel that writing in a disconnected academic language will only serve to perpetuate a false sense of separation between the subjective and objective. Personal language can be used to enrich the relationship with the reader, reminding them of the researcher's influence on the narratives being told (Gergen, 2007). Due to my immediate relationship with the subject being discussed, I have decided to write in the first person. In doing so, I hope to challenge artificial boundaries between the personal, professional and the political.

1.2. Contextualising Terminology

Given the use of language as a vehicle for meaning (Taylor, 2003) I have been mindful of the language throughout this study. The language I have decided to use has been chosen in an attempt to highlight and step away from problematic discourses that surround refugee people. This section will be used to contextualise the terminology used in the title as well as throughout this study.

1.2.1. 'Narrative'

I have used the term 'narrative' to refer to the framework through which individuals organise the events and experiences of their lives to make sense of them and participate in creating the things we make sense of, including ourselves (Anderson, 1997). However, my use of the term 'narrative' is not static through this research and can often be operationalised differently, in different applications. This concept can be seen as sitting on a continuum; on one end we have the application of narratives which refer to social linguistics, used to refer to particular discourses, and on the other end we have narratives used to refer to complex social histories and anthropology, in which narratives can have a robust life beyond the individual (Riessman, 2008).

1.2.2. 'Refugee People'

The United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR,2016) defines 'refugees' as a group of people fleeing conflict, violence or persecution and are unable or afraid to return home. An 'asylum seeker' is someone who has fled their own country and is seeking sanctuary in another country, applying for asylum to be recognized as a 'refugee' and receive legal protection and material assistance (UNHCR, 2016). These individuals will have lodged an application for protection on the basis of the Refugee convention or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Refugee Council, 2016).

The above terms refer to a legal status given to individuals and can be differentiated from the 'refugee' label, which is often used more broadly to include *de facto* 'refugees' who may not be officially classified as 'refugees' (Ludwig, 2013). Patel (2003a) argues that the term 'refugee' is problematic on the grounds that it is a legal definition which compartmentalises people who have been displaced and dehumanises them. The term 'refugee people' can be used in an attempt to restore attention to the people (Patel, 2002), when referring to individuals who have fled their homeland due to potential or actual harm or persecution and who have or have not been granted asylum in the UK. Refugee people can be seen as representing a variety of nations globally, in which the

estimated number of refugee and displaced peoples worldwide ranges from 23 million to 50 million (Tribe, 2002).

1.2.3. 'Extreme Adversity'

Refugee people have often had to leave their homes abruptly, leaving behind families, communities and belongings. They may often flee their homes for reasons including war, torture, arbitrary detention and persecution by their own government (Tribe, 2002). Many have subsequently suffered extreme adversity in their countries of origin. However, adversity is not limited to refugee people's countries of origin. Many experience hardships in transit, including degrading and inhumane treatment, rape, loss, starvation and violence. Having survived this, refugee people continue to experience a number of hardships in the UK due to the immigration system, language difficulties and racial, social and economic inequalities (Papadopoulos, Lees, Lay, Gebrehiwot, 2004).

1.3. Literature Search Strategy

An electronic literature review was conducted in order to look into how 'trauma'[1] is understood and applied to the experiences of refugee people, and more specifically Eritrean refugee people. Literature was synthesised from various database searches including: PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, Science Direct, EBSCO and PsychARTICLES; the terms and parameters used to search these databases have been listed in Appendix A. Additionally, 'grey' literature and references from published literature were further isolated to identify that which may not have otherwise been captured. The second phase of the search included looking at information gathered from newspapers, government legislation and publications from non-government organisations (NGO).

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[1] The terminology 'trauma' and 'psychological trauma' is widely used within clinical psychology theory and practice when referring to extreme adversity. It was used as a search term to illicit research from the field of psychology.

1.3.1. Inclusion Criteria

Qualitative and quantitative peer reviewed literature ranging from 1980 - January 2017 with relevance to the research topic were incorporated. International and UK research was included but searches were restricted to those written in English. Studies investigating an understanding of Eritrean refugee people's experiences were prioritised in the search. A detailed search strategy can be found in Appendix B. A narrative account of the literature identified will be presented in this chapter.

1.4. The Tale of 'Psychological Trauma'

In this section, I will explore literature surrounding 'psychological trauma' before exploring psychological models and 'treatments' built upon this concept and its challenges.

1.4.1. The Medicalisation of Extreme Adversity

During the 19th century, 'trauma' generally referred to an open wound or rupture and carried no psychological connotations (Jones & Wessley, 2007). Whilst there is no universal response to extreme adversity, over time, 'psychological trauma' has increasingly become central to how stressful events are understood and, consequently, there has been a huge rise in its usage (Furedi, 2004). Additionally, there is often a conflation of 'trauma' as a psychological consequence of adversity and 'trauma' as an event, in which 'psychological trauma' has remained poorly defined and obscure in theory and practice (Weathers & Keane, 2007).

'Trauma' within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychological Association, 2013) is defined by:

> *"stressful events that present extraordinary challenges to coping and adaptations"*

The way in which 'trauma' is used as a concept will often vary according to the purpose and setting in which it is employed. However, 'psychological trauma' is often given meaning within a biomedical framework, in which underlying biological changes become centralised in making sense of extreme adversity (Wilson & Keane, 2004), often suggesting the occurrence of a lasting impairment (Herman, 1992). It has increasingly been looked upon as having an objective existence in the world, whether discovered or not, existing independently of psychiatric gaze (Summerfield, 2001a). Such narratives have guided and informed Western understandings of symptomology, presentations and recovery benchmarks amongst individuals who have experienced adverse life events.

1.4.2. The History of PTSD

'Psychological trauma' has formed the foundations of the diagnostic category of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which has emerged as a flagship of the medicalised trauma discourse (Summerfield, 1999); being looked upon as a psychological and neurobiological distinct disorder (Brewin, 2011). A diagnosis of PTSD is characterised by a pattern of 'symptoms'[2] developed after a traumatic event (Roth & Fonagy, 2005).

The construct of PTSD arose largely due to the experiences of American Vietnamese war veterans (Kienzler, 2008). After the American-Vietnam war, veterans came home to find they were being blamed for the war, and difficulties adjusting often led to diagnoses such as schizophrenia or personality disorder (Summerfield, 2001a). Connected genealogically to earlier diagnoses such as "shell - shock" (Young, 1995), the construct of PTSD was designed to fill the gap created by the loss of 'gross stress reaction', which had been removed as a diagnosis from the DSM – II (APA, 1966) (Jones & Wessely, 2007). Originally termed "Post-Vietnam syndrome" or "delayed stress syndrome" in the DSM – III (APA, 1980), PTSD was useful to anti-war campaigners in demonstrating that the toll of war went beyond the battlefield (Figley, 2002). Thus, shifting attention from veterans' backgrounds to the traumatic nature of war, PTSD subsequently

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[2] I have used inverted commas where notions and terminology can be contested or may hold multiple meanings.

legitimised war veterans' "victimhood", gave them moral exoneration, and granted them disability pensions (Summerfield, 2001a). The PTSD diagnosis was hence useful as an anti-establishment device, entering the psychiatric sphere as a result of politically motivated lobbying (Jones & Wessely, 2006).

The Falklands War was the first war following the consolidation of PTSD as a diagnostic measurement for the traumatic nature of combat (Robinson, 2012). The experiences and accounts of Falklands Veterans were key to the popularisation of the PTSD model in the UK, as well as campaigns for treatment and rehabilitation of ex-combatants (ibid). Since its formal recognition in the 1980's, PTSD has become a high profile, globally used and politically sensitive psychiatric construct (Jones & Wessely, 2007).

PTSD is currently defined in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) by criteria including having witnessed or experienced a 'traumatic event', re-experiencing the event, and avoidance of stimuli associated with the event. The construct of PTSD has become an increasingly popular clinical and lay framework for understanding emotional and physical reactions to extreme adversity in a variety of contexts, including personal assaults, life-threatening illnesses, serious accidents, and combat (Royal College of Psychiatry, 2013).

1.4.3. Psychological Models of 'Trauma'

Models of 'psychological trauma' predate the introduction of PTSD as a diagnostic category (Young, 1995). Earlier understandings are exemplified by Freud (Figley, 2002) and Breuer's (1893) concept of 'traumatic neurosis'. However, the introduction of the PTSD construct marked a change in the practices and technologies through which researchers and clinicians encountered 'psychological trauma', transforming and extending the old ideas about traumatic memory (Young, 1995).

There has been a wealth of research proposed providing a theoretical underpinning for PTSD and its 'treatment' (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Carr, 2011). Popular theoretical models underpinning 'psychological trauma' today have

included emotional processing theory (Foa & Riggs, 1993), dual representation theory (Brewin, 2001) and cognitive theory (Ehler and Clark, 2000). Such models are built on the idea of 'psychological trauma' as an internal deficit which disrupts normal cognitive, emotional and physical functioning. Psychological theories that have had the most influence have often looked at disturbances in the processing of 'trauma memories' as being fundamental to understanding PTSD and its 'symptomology' (Brewin, 2011). Cognitive models put forward that individuals may develop PTSD as a consequence of negative appraisals of the trauma, and due to a disturbance of autobiographical memory characterised by poor elaboration and contextualization (Ehler & Clark, 2000).

Psychological models of trauma have subsequently led to ideas that 'psychological trauma' can be worked through and 'resolved', and the belief that clinicians can 'treat' human responses to extreme adversity (Herman, 1992). This belief is reflected in current UK guidelines for treatment with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) (2005) guidelines, which recommend individualised Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (TF-CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR).

Therapists working within TF-CBT aim to support individuals diagnosed with PTSD aiming to put the 'trauma in the past' by focusing on psycho-education, cognitive restructuring, reliving and in-vivo exposure work (Ehlers & Clark, 2000). A great deal of research has often been published to demonstrate the 'usefulness' of TF-CBT for working with all kinds of adversity (for example, Foa, Zoellner & Feeny, 2006; Knaevelsrud & Maercker, 2007).

1.4.4. Critiquing the Trauma Narrative

The constructs of PTSD and 'psychological trauma' have been the subject of much debate and controversy, many questioning the core assumptions underlying these constructs (Rosen, 2004). A body of research has been written challenging the central role of 'trauma' exposure as the presumptive primary etiological factor for the construct of PTSD (Davidson & Foa, 1991; March 1993). The basis of these debates are predicated on the difficulties regarding whether

'trauma' can be broadly or narrowly defined, and reliably and validly measured. Literature has further criticised the way most 'psychological trauma' and PTSD writings are from the viewpoint of Western researchers and clinicians who work on PTSD and are convinced of its timelessness (Trimble, 1985; Herman 1992) despite its lack of historical and theoretical continuity (Young, 1995). Consequently, Young (1995) argues that PTSD does not present intrinsic unity, rather it is held together by the practices, technologies and narratives which are used to diagnose, study and treat; represented by the various interests, institutions and moral arguments that mobilise these efforts and resources.

PTSD can then be looked upon as a 'category fallacy' (Kleinman, 1987) - having been *made* real - in which beliefs around psychological trauma and PTSD can be seen to shape the self-knowledge of individuals, researchers and clinicians (Young, 1995). Whilst there may be many descriptions of the world, Western psychiatry has naturalised its own cultural distinctions, objectified them through empirical data and reified them as universal categories (Summerfield, 2005).

1.5. Refugee People and the 'Trauma' Discourse

Discourses in the media, politics and public attention have often focused on the economic strain refugee people cause, and the moral obligations to protect and provide safety to individuals who have experienced 'trauma' (Patel, 2003a; Connor, 2010). Where the majority of psychiatrists and psychologists assume that extreme adversity leads to 'traumatic memories', psychology has often focused on the effects of 'trauma' and ways of improving psychological well-being (Patel & Tribe, 2007).

The concept of 'psychological trauma' has increasingly formed the basis of study concerning the needs of refugee people (Ingleby, 2005). Ingleby (2005) notes that before 1977, literature concerning refugee people made no mention of 'trauma', whilst psychological literature published between 2000 and 2005 saw 40% of published work discuss refugee people in the context of 'trauma'. Over time, the concept of 'psychological trauma' has come to be looked upon as a scientific fact and certainty, demonstrated by Western professional's increasing

humanitarian operations based on the premise that there are psychological consequences to extreme adversity (Summerfield, 1999). Consequently, the 'trauma' discourse has become a self-perpetuating and closed system (Ingleby, 2005). This can be seen in the majority of published studies on the mental health of refugee people, which have relied on measures and psychiatric categories developed within Western populations, as a template for the suffering of individuals living in a broken social world (Hollifield, Warner, Lian, Krakow, Jenkins et al., 2002).

Psychiatric and psychological literature has often promoted the gathering of 'trauma histories' and 'trauma symptoms' in the primary care management of refugee people (i.e., Crosby, 2013). In addition, quantitative studies have often discussed the prevalence of 'PTSD symptomology' in refugee people living in Western societies (i.e., Hollifield et al., 2002), as well as post-conflict societies (i.e., Carlson, Rosser-Hogan, 1994; Mollica, Donelan, Tor, Lavelle, Elias et al., 1993). Other literature has highlighted the importance of adapting measures of 'symptomology' for 'psychological trauma', arguing for more culturally appropriate and valid use amongst individuals from non-Western and Western countries (i.e., Hollifield et al., 2013; Hussain and Bhushan, 2009). However, this continues to perpetuate the underlying narratives of 'psychological trauma', as well as the assumptions of its universality, even where manifestations of 'trauma' differ as a function of language, culture and setting (Friedman & Marsella, 1996).

Globally, this has led to constructs like 'psychological trauma' and PTSD being applied to non-Western populations. Worldwide organisations such as WHO, UNICEF and the European Community Humanitarian Office portray atrocities, such as war as a 'mental health emergency', with extensive claims about PTSD as a hidden epidemic (Summerfield 1997). Thus, carrying with it the assumption that professional skills are needed to correctly notice and label the impact of extreme adversity (Herman, 1992). The 'global mental health' movement has often taken this approach focusing on the 'treatment gaps' of 'mental health problems' in non-Western countries (e.g., Patel & Prince, 2010), claiming early intervention can prevent mental disorders, criminalisation, domestic violence etc. (e.g., Aggar, Vuk & Mimica, 1995). Consequently, non-Western populations are

often referred to as having limited knowledge of mental health disorders and as needing to be 'taught' about severe mental health (Summerfield, 2008). Whilst the importance of equality for healthcare and material provision across the globe is clear, the global mental health agenda is problematic because it perpetuates the grand narrative of categorisation of 'mental disorders' as valid and appropriate across different cultures.

1.5.1. Psychological Therapies with Refugee People

Given all the above, refugee people are often looked upon as needing 'treatment' for their reactions to extreme adversity, in which the 'right treatment' is that which has been developed within an individualised Western framework (Pupavac 2001). Models of working with refugee people often involve ideas around having to understand and work with, or around, the 'trauma' experienced, which may usually involve psychological therapies. Studies have been published supporting the use of talking therapies with refugee people (e.g., Crumlish & O'Rourke, 2010; Lambert & Alhassoon, 2015). This has been promoted by the belief that refugee people will do better if they talk or 'work through' what happened, in a systematic way, with a professional (Summerfield, 1999). NICE guidelines (2005) and other guidelines (Mind, 2009) have further reinforced this by stating that mental health services should provide psycho-education on 'mental health disorders' for refugee people and support access to psychological treatment.

Within the UK, this has led to limited ways of working with refugee people in the National Health Service (NHS) and within the third sector, with a focus on setting up specialist trauma and PTSD services specifically to offer clinical interventions to refugee people (Patel, 2003a). Examples include the Helen Bamber Foundation (TF-CBT led) and NEFSIYAT (provides talking therapies via therapists who speak the individual's first language). Whilst adaptations within these services may be seen as making therapy more culturally accessible, it continues to put psychological therapies at the epicentre of working with refugee people and distress.

Similar to diagnostic measures for PTSD, much literature has questioned the

usefulness and validity of Western psychological models in working with refugee people (Bracken & Petty, 1998; Nickerson, Bryant & Steel, 2011; Summerfield, 2001). Much of the criticism has centred on the ways in which cultural, social, political and economic factors have been ignored (Watters, 2001). Literature published on the development of revised therapeutic models suitable for use with refugee people who have experienced adversity have focused on strategies to establish a therapeutic and collaborative dialogue, minimise power differences, and on how models can be adapted to work with multiple traumatic events, social and cultural differences (Haene, Rober, Adriaenssens & Verschueren, 2012; Grey & Young, 2008; Guregård and Seikkula, 2013).

Whilst such literature acknowledges cultural variation, again the grand narrative of 'psychological trauma' persists. Thus, perpetuating the assumption that psychological intervention is necessary amongst refugee populations, regardless of their religious, cultural, ideological and political backgrounds.

1.5.1.1.　*Critiquing psychological therapies with Refugee People*
Psychological therapies and psycho-trauma programmes assume individuals affected by war and human right violations will see their 'mental health' as a priority to be addressed separately (Summerfield, 1997). Such Western concepts and ideas of the need for psychiatric involvement only serve to suspend the discourse of refugee people being different and vulnerable (Patel, 2003a) and jeopardises local coping strategies (Pupavac, 2001) whilst aggrandising Western agencies and their 'expertise' (Summerfield, 1999).

This silences other possible narratives that may be more culturally relevant for understanding an individual's experiences. In addition, it ignores culturally relevant others, that may be involved or beneficial to the healing process, such as community elders, family members, religious leaders/communities, instead of psychiatrists and psychologists. Literature has discussed how refugee community organisations may play a vital role in healing and building individual and community strength (e.g., Tribe, 2002, Muir & Gannon, 2015). Despite this, they often go with little funding (Tribe, 2002). In my current work with refugee people, I have found that the 'risk' of involving external agencies has often overshadowed

the benefits of working alongside and learning from culturally acceptable grassroots and community initiatives.

1.5.2. What is wrong with the Refugee Trauma Narrative?

Where literature regarding refugee people has been dominated by the different ways in which individuals express their distress in comparison to Western populations, the circumstances which have led them to seek safety in another country have largely been neglected (Patel, 2003a). Hence, trauma discourses and the psychological state of refugee people can be seen as displacing the political contexts of war, human right violations and pathologising non-Western societies (Pupavac, 2001). Bracken and Petty (1998) argue that the emphasis on psychological trauma diverts public attention away from issues of social recovery, such as the provision of security in a post-war society and a functioning economy, that may be costlier and without which psychological recovery may be hindered. Thus raising ethical questions around the application of the trauma discourse and the ways in which psychologists and other practitioners have worked with this discourse.

Furthermore, the reification and application of the 'trauma' and PTSD constructs (Summerfield, 2001; Young, 1995) to refugee people, for whom such constructs may hold very little meaning, can have oppressive consequences. Such difficulties include eligibility for services, impacts on asylum applications, invalidation of adversity for those who do not meet PTSD criteria and denial of a culturally sanctioned understanding of distress for those that do. Bodies of literature have demonstrated the ways in which trauma discourses have often led to the political and socioeconomic contexts, in which refugee people currently exist, being ignored (Patel, 2003a; Papadopoulos, 2005; Summerfield, 2000; Muir & Gannon, 2015). Consequently, opportunities to look at the specific socio-economic needs of refugee people, who may already be isolated and socially excluded are lost.

It is interesting to note that whilst most refugee people are from non-Western countries, the psychological concepts and trauma discourses applied to them

have been developed in the West, in which privilege is given to a scientific and mechanistic world view, and a dualist concept of self (Furedi, 2004; Pupavac, 2001). Non-Western countries may often hold more socio-centric and interdependent views of the self and the world, in which the globalisation of Western psychological concepts, practices and trauma discourse risk perpetuating a colonial status of the non-Western mind (Summerfield, 1999). Hence, the objectification of extreme adversity as a technical problem with a technical solution is questionable (Summerfield, 1997). Furthermore, attempts to enhance a person's well-being after extreme adversity and labelling it as 'treatment', may describe a therapeutic power akin to what Jermone Frank (1973) called a 'healing myth'; based on the authority of science and refugee people as passive recipients to adversity.

1.6. Subjugated Narratives of Extreme Adversity

Within this section, I will examine literature which has attempted to step away from dominant narratives of trauma, which can be seen as eroding more helpful and non-pathological frameworks for understanding extreme adversity. It is not possible to discuss every narrative through which extreme adversity may be understood because of the myriad of stories that will differ across socio-political and cultural domains. I have chosen to highlight the following based on what was brought to the forefront more repeatedly in the literature search.

1.6.1. Resilience

Resilience has often been used as a term to refer to an individual's strength, ability to cope, and positively adapt during adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). Bodies of literature have highlighted and demonstrated how refugee people show strength and resilience in the face of adversity and without professional involvement (Babatunde-Sowole, Power, Jackson, Davidson & DiGiacomo, 2016; Pieloch, Marks & McCullough, 2016). Further, studies have used the concept of 'Post-Traumatic Growth' (PTG) to emphasise the positive change that can occur following adversity faced by refugee people (Barrington & Shakespeare-Finch, 2013; Laufer & Solomon, 2006). Narratives of PTG and

resilience step away from discourses of pathology and vulnerability and move towards stories of endurance and strength. However, constructs of PTG and resilience are often conceptualised as either being mutually exclusive or predicated on the trauma concept, in which resilience is the absence of PTSD or 'symptom-free' functioning following traumatic events (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli & Vlahov, 2006). As such, an individual's resilience or ability to change or grow in positive ways after adversity may still become subject to a clinical gaze.

Further challenges to these constructs arise as they are often conceptualised as individual, measurable psychological attributes. Studies have explored what enables individuals to be resilient in the face of adversity, stating that PTG and resilience are associated with a cluster of personality traits, affect regulation and ego defences (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Similar to critiques of the trauma narrative, the construct of PTG, whilst taking a strength-based approach, can be seen as decontextualizing human responses to adversity (Patel, 2003a) and resting on assumptions of universality and dualism.

Western ideas of resilience often ignore community resilience and processes within the sociocultural context that may underpin resilience (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012). Almedom and Glandon (2007) argue that resilience is best understood as a multifaceted construct with economic, historical, political and sociocultural dimensions, all of which can be seen as determining comprehensibility and meaningfulness of adversity. Thus, resilience is not something individuals have, but a complex process that is not so easily defined or measured, and variable in how it is understood and expressed (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012). Literature which has moved away from individualised notions has identified various factors contributing to the resilience of refugee people including family, community, communal selves, spirituality, school, etc. (Goodman, 2004; Lee, 2010; Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber & Mooren, 2016); thus, promoting a more ecological framework for resilience and extreme adversity (Harvey, 2009).

1.6.2. Narratives of Self Beyond Being a 'Refugee'

Labels such as 'refugee' serve a political role in affording individuals a number of legal rights, including status to remain in the country in which they have sought safety. However, the concept of 'refugeehood' and attached 'trauma' discourses within resettlement contexts have often become a master status defining a person based on the adversity experienced, beyond any other form of identity[3] (Marlow, 2010). Studies have demonstrated that individuals who have had this label forced upon them may not view themselves as 'refugees', associated with wars, flights and refugee camps, but as people with agency who seized the opportunity to move forward with their lives in another country (Ludwig, 2013). This highlights the importance of separating the legal refugee label from the individual. Research by Muir and Gannon (2015) looked at the experiences of young refugee people in the UK and highlighted that adversity and distress were not always spoken about in the context of past 'traumatic' experiences, but in the context of having "their identities flattened" and framed through "negative one dimensional labels" (p.4). Further, Marlow's (2010) study of Sudanese men who resettled in Australia demonstrated how they drew on political and sociocultural histories and personal values in defining their identities, which were not built solely on hardships experienced or the 'refugee' label.

It is important to note that refugee people are not passive recipients of the labels given to them when they enter a new country. Indeed, whilst the West may not look beyond dominant narratives of trauma attached to the refugee label, individuals' own narratives, which are used as a framework to define ideas of self and identity, go far beyond the reaches of trauma discourse.

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[3] I will be using this concept to describe a person's sense of self. It can refer to a collective, individual or social identity, shaped by our social GGRRAAACCEESSS (Burnham, 2008) and may be fluid and multidimensional.

1.6.3. Injustice, Human Rights[4] and Survival

Refugee people face a number of injustices, not only in the country from which they have fled but in their host country, where they face discrimination, exploitation and oppression. Despite this, there has been a paucity of literature which addresses and acknowledges the human rights violations in the experiences of refugee people (Patel, 2007; 2008a). By not examining the socio-political context in which individuals have their human rights violated, and instead emphasising individually embodied suffering, psychology has perpetuated oppressive narratives, psychologized gross human right violations and sanitised human suffering (Patel, 2008a; Patel, 2011a).

Patel (2008a) argues for a human rights framework for understanding extreme adversity. A human rights narrative can be seen as moving extreme adversity into a framework which politicises distress, enabling a transformative vision of equality (Elson, 2006). Furthermore, it allows for the examination of related psychological and social processes and for distress to be formulated in the context of resistance to subordination and persecution, hence promoting redress and reparation (Patel, 2011b; Kinderman, 2005).

Qualitative studies exploring understandings of extreme adversity have been useful in identifying these subjugated narratives. Kagan (2004) explored how South African torture survivors understood their experiences. He demonstrated that individuals' ill-health and distress was often located and understood in the context of economic marginalisation, the political dispensation in South Africa, human right violations and injustices. Kagan (2004) explained that where distress was socially defined, political activism was often the corresponding response and that individuals saw their suffering as a sacrifice for communal and political purposes.

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[4] The arguments regarding human right violations will also be applicable to individuals who have experienced extreme adversity as a result of inequality, injustice and marginalisation.

Ethnographic studies have further been useful in highlighting how narratives of extreme adversity are understood amongst different cultures. Zarowsky (2000) drew on ethnographic material from Ethiopia and found that adversity such as violence and death was not given meaning in a medical framework aimed at individual or even collective healing. Rather, it was given meaning in the societies' domain of politics and morals, and was understood as being embedded in social relations, where group members should have equal rights. Zarowsky (2000) highlighted how events, like war, were experienced as an attack on webs of relationships, through which they have access to material and sociopolitical resources which allow survival. Ethnographic research of Somali narratives similarly showed that emotional distress was understood as social rupture and injustice and not just private suffering (Zarowsky, 2004). Zarowsky (2004) stated that in these communities' rhetoric of emotions were political survival strategies. Similarly, Somasundaram's (1996) study with Sri Lankan communities reported that individuals did not consider themselves psychiatrically ill when experiencing distress after adversity, but rather socio-economically affected by the war.

1.6.4 Belonging

Literature has further highlighted the importance of the space and place refugee people inhabit in their host countries and the impact of this on their psychological experiences (Moran, Mohamed & Lovel, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2005; Sampson & Gifford, 2010). Extreme adversity may then be understood through a spatial, material and relational framework, in which narratives of loss of home and displacement from the space and place that would have usually connected individuals to their place of origin, identity and power are central (Papadopoulos, 2005; Tucker, 2010a). Tucker (2010a) highlighted that this would move us beyond bio-cognitive frameworks for understanding extreme adversity, and towards the very reality of 'being' in the world. Muir and Gannon's (2015) research demonstrated how the physical space refugee people occupy may provide an alternative psychological framework for understanding adversity. They described how distress was caused by hostility in spaces, but also how local spaces, such as community centres, provided individuals with a sense of belonging, well-being, resistance, and safety (Muir & Gannon, 2015). Moran et

al., (2011) emphasised how Somali refugee people in the UK saw a physical collective space for their community as the cornerstone from which problems (emotional and physical) could be addressed, a culture developed, and social isolation tackled. Within this context, adversity and distress were again not located in the medicalisation of distress but in a wider narrative of place, space and belonging.

1.7.   Eritrean Refugee People and Extreme Adversity

Whilst research has demonstrated the importance of understanding extreme adversity in the wider socio-economic and political context in which individuals exist, theories and practices surrounding the experiences of refugee people continue to be dominated by the trauma narrative. Furthermore, research continues to be written from a Western, individualistic view-point, which prioritises evidence-based practice[5], over learning directly from those who we are trying to understand and practice-based evidence[6] (Harper, Mulvey & Robinson, 2003). Thus, qualitative research seeking to understand refugee people's experiences in their context has been limited when exploring the experiences of Eritrean refugee people.

1.7.1   Why Explore Eritrean Refugee People?

Since 2014, the number of Eritreans seeking asylum has nearly tripled in the UK, many of whom are unaccompanied minors and young adults (UNHCR, 2014). Despite this, very little is known about them as a community, with Eritrea being classed amongst the most closed and censored countries in the world (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2015).

In addition to this, a literature review revealed sparse literature exploring the experiences of Eritrean refugee people in the UK. Many Eritreans have fled

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[5] Based on a scientific-practitioner discourse in psychology, it is defined as being the integration of the 'best' available research with clinical expertise, in which evidence derived from systematic reviews and randomised control trials (RCTs) with reasonable effect sizes, clinical and statistical significance, is considered the best evidence on which practice should be based (Marston & Watts, 2003).

[6] Based on notions of a reflective practitioner who draws on research but combines it with past experiences and other knowledge.

Eritrea following post-war conflicts and continue to flee Eritrea following human rights abuses. The next section will explore in more detail the socio-political context in which Eritreans leave their homeland.

1.7.2 Eritrea's Socio-Political Context

The current political, socio-economic state of Eritrea can be seen as rooted in the history of its geographical location, as well as its long colonial history (Almedom, Tesfamichael, Saeed, Mohammed, Mascie-Taylor, Alemu, 2007). Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952 after colonisation. The war for independence started after Ethiopia annexed Eritrea as one of its provinces in 1961 and after a 30-year war, Eritrea became an independent nation governed by President Isaias Afewerki. His People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) remains the sole political party. In 1997, a new constitution was ratified but never implemented. No national elections have been held since.

The border conflict with Ethiopia restarted in 1998, killing thousands; it escalated until a peace agreement was signed in 2000. Despite this agreement, tensions remained with the constant threat of war, leading to the prevailing 'no-war, no-peace' situation (BBC, 2016). In 2015, the UN published the Commission of Inquiry (Human Rights Council, 2016), accusing the Eritrean government of crimes against humanity. The Eritrean government dismissed this as being politically motivated (HRW, 2015), thus perpetuating political tensions between the West and Eritrea.

1.7.2.1 Human rights in Eritrea

Eritrea currently conscripts men and unmarried women into 'national service' at the age of 17 years. However, children as young as 15 may also be sent for military training. They are legally required to attend for 18 months, in which individuals need to achieve above an educational threshold set by the government in order to gain access to higher education and better-paying jobs. However, many may not meet this threshold, resulting in conscription and forced labour within civilian jobs ranging from agricultural work to work in government ministries (HRW, 2015).

Perceived infractions within the population have resulted in incarceration, prolonged detention and physical abuse. This can amount to torture in which military commanders and jailers have the discretion to determine the length of incarceration (Nicholls, 2016). The Commission of Inquiry for Human Rights in Eritrea collected evidence of rape committed in military training centres, in the army, and in detention by military officials, as well as in the society by soldiers (Human Rights Council, 2016). Arbitrary arrests are reported to be commonplace, in which citizens may be arrested and incarcerated without charge, trial or access to family (ibid). No mechanisms of redress exist and protest may result in more severe punishment (HRW, 2015).

1.7.2.2 *Freedom of expression*

Freedom of speech is controlled and all telephone and internet communications are monitored (HRW, 2015). Additionally, the government have maintained control of all TV and media, with local press outlets closing in 2001 (ibid). Eritrea was placed last, behind North Korea, in the World Press Freedom Index in 2015 (Nicholls, 2016).

The government currently operates a shoot to kill policy on those caught trying to leave the country (Home Office, 2016). Despite this, many Eritreans continue to risk their lives trying to flee.

1.7.3 The Context of Seeking Asylum in the UK

Eritrean refugee people face further discrimination and stigma in the UK. An individual seeking asylum will have to apply to the UK Home Office, recite every aspect of their story and be scrutinised over detail and 'truthfulness', in order to assess 'credibility' of their identity and story. Whilst asylum claims are being processed, refugee people are often detained or required to adhere to strict regulations for maintaining contact with a UK Home Office representative (UNHCR, 2017). Until they have been granted asylum, refugee people must live on £39.95 per week and are not eligible for housing provisions, other state benefits, and are not allowed to work (ibid). Consequently, many individuals

seeking asylum are living below the poverty line (Refugee Council, 2015).

Individuals may be granted 'leave to remain', humanitarian protection or 'discretionary leave to remain'; the latter being temporary and only allowing individuals to stay in the UK for five years (Migration Observatory, 2016). During the asylum process, individuals will often stay in the UK for long periods of time awaiting a decision; the procedure has often been labelled as unjust, distressing and 'traumatising' (Bracken & Gorst-Unsworth, 1991; Robjant, Hassan & Katona 2009).

Amongst the few that are granted leave to remain in the UK, many continue to face difficulties regarding inadequate access to resources, housing, education, healthcare and employment (Refugee Council, 2015). Additionally, the political backdrop of austerity may further confound difficulties faced. Funding cuts to services have largely affected statutory and non-statutory provisions for refugee people, thus, impacting refugee community organisations (Refugee Council, 2010a).

McPherson (2010) highlights the political discourses surrounding integration, which is seen as fostering conformance from 'outsiders' to a normative and static national citizen and promoting social cohesion. The concept of 'integration' has been used to replace multiculturalism, following accusations of the latter nurturing cultural separatism and terrorism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). This has served to 'other' refugee people, putting the onus on them to 'integrate' into the host society and neglects the intricacies of cultural identity and the value of difference (McPherson, 2010). Linked to these ideas, it can be argued that the 2016 vote to leave the European Union, was largely driven by nationalism and fear of immigration (O'Toole, 2016), which further acted as a platform to legitimise racist attitudes and expressions towards refugee people. Discrimination and fear of refugee people has further been fuelled by tragedies like the July 2016 suicide bombing in Germany, which was said to have been carried out by a Syrian asylum seeker, and the media which had pushed dominant discourse of refugee people 'stealing jobs', 'breaking the NHS' and being potential terrorists.

Mirroring societal hostility towards refugee people, immigration law has increasingly focused on how best to stem the flow of asylum seekers into the UK, rather than how to protect the human rights of individuals fleeing violence (Thielemann & Hobolth, 2016). Most recently, a Home Office disclosure revealed efforts to reduce the number of Eritrean nationals granted asylum (Public Law Project (PLP), 2017). The Home Office was reported to have sought more favourable descriptions of human right conditions in Eritrea, issuing new guidance in 2015 stating that the Human Rights situation in Eritrea was "not as bad as previously thought" (Taylor, 2017). This resulted in many unaccompanied children being excluded from admission into the UK under the 'Dubs' amendment policy and a large reduction in the number of favourable asylum grants (PLP, 2017).

Within the next section, I will explore current literature discussing the experiences of Eritrean refugee people as they navigate the socio-political realities of seeking asylum.

1.7.4   Previous Research

A literature search revealed a number of studies involving Eritrean refugee people. Studies often grouped Eritrean refugee people with other refugee people from Ethiopia (e.g., McSpadden & Moussa, 1993; Kibreab, 1996) or from countries in the Horn of Africa (HoA), including Sudan and Somalia (Fozdar, 2009; Pittaway, Muli & Shteir, 2009; Nakash, Nagar, Shoshani & Lurie, 2015; Tilbury, 2007). The vast majority of these studies explored the experiences of Eritrean refugee people living in countries such as Sudan, Israel and Ethiopia; due to the high concentration of Eritrean refugees in these countries.

Some of these studies have utilised a medicalised framework to make sense of Eritrean refugee people's experiences of adversity, subsequently making references to psychiatric disorders and mental health 'symptoms' of PTSD (i.e Chernet, Pfeiffer, Probst-Hensch & Labhardt, 2016; Nakash et al., 2015). Chernet et al., (2016) looked at the mental health of Eritrean refugees in Switzerland, arguing that the 'trauma' experienced in Eritrea and on the journey to Europe left

Eritrean refugee people predisposed to 'mental health disorders', including PTSD. Nakash et al., (2015) looked specifically at Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel and argued that acculturation and lack of support in the host nation were predictive of 'depressive symptoms'. Both studies adopted a quantitative methodology and utilised standardised questionnaires (i.e. Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, Patient Health Questionnaire) to assess 'symptoms of PTSD' and other 'psychiatric disorders'. Translation and cultural differences were not explored, in which studies made the assumption that measures and specific constructs within measures, will translate, map on to, or be understood in the same way across cultures. Hence, studies further assumed that questions would be understood in the same way that the researchers understood them. In addition, studies can be criticised for reducing participants' experiences to numerical data and ignoring the subjective ways people may make sense of their experiences. Thus perpetuating 'trauma' discourses discussed earlier in this chapter.

Some studies have attempted to step away from the 'trauma' discourse by exploring experiences of Eritrean refugee people using qualitative methods of analysis. Fozdar (2009), Tilbury, (2007) and Pittaway et al., (2009) used semi-structured interviews to look at Eritrean refugee people alongside others from the HoA. The studies highlighted difficulties faced post-exile, including discrimination, racism, lower social status, lack of adequate on-arrival information and support, and lack of access to adequate housing, education and employment. Studies viewed refugee people from the HoA as having the capacity, capability and strength to integrate and overcome difficulties, and highlighted how adversity is better understood within a sociocultural and economic context.

Fozdar (2009) and Tilbury (2007) looked more specifically at cultural understandings of mental distress and well-being. Both studies reported that there was an absence of equivalent words like 'depression' and participants often saw their problems as material and social rather than psychological. Fodzar (2009) concluded that post-migration experiences may be more important in undermining well-being than pre-migration physical and psychological 'trauma'. However, this study often focused more specifically on resettlement concerns

and understandings of 'mental health'. The researcher did not provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their pre-exile experiences of adversity or how they had understood these experiences. In doing so, it meant the pre-exile experiences of refugee people were not adequately represented within this study. In contrast, Pittaway et al., (2009) argued that both pre-exile and pre-arrival experiences (i.e torture) were important factors contributing to participants' resettlement and well-being.

All three studies often assumed applicability of an individualistic and innate model of distress and mental health narrative, introducing and using concepts like 'depression', 'trauma', and 'mental distress', which may have further influenced the narratives and stories participants told. For example, Tilbury (2007, p.439), highlighted that researchers often made reference to "trauma", "stress" or "anxiety", which may have given participants less opportunity to construct alternative narratives.

All studies further grouped refugee people from the HoA together as a homogenous group. Whilst acknowledging that there may be cultural variations in the experiences of refugee people, studies continue to obscure the diverse cultures, politics, history and linguistic frameworks which shape understandings. In doing so, it neglects the political realities in which refugee people have fled their homelands. Refugee people are viewed as having a collective 'refugee experience', which only serves to further politically sanitize adversity, making it harder to address specific injustices and atrocities behind why individuals are seeking asylum in the first place.

It is interesting to note that these studies have been carried out by Western researchers, who bring with them particular Eurocentric ways of viewing distress and extreme adversity, which tends to be situated in an individualistic, scientific and acontextual framework of understanding. Perhaps contributing to the lack of culturally appropriate adaptations that have been made in these studies. This is in contrast to studies carried out by 'local' Eritrean researchers (a few of which will be discussed below), who may carry with them more contextually based

understandings of Eritrean people and their cultural, historical and political understandings.

Some studies have specifically explored Eritreans' understanding of extreme adversity in Eritrea. Almedom (2004) highlighted that war and post-war adversity was understood as having a wider impact on an individual's general health (beyond emotional wellbeing), as well as their power in the world. The studies highlighted that individuals' culture, context and access to resources determined their ability to find purpose in life and to manage adversity. Almedom (2007) stated that Eritreans made sense of the Eritrean war for independence as a 50-year struggle for identity, unity and territorial integrity, which produced a sense of social cohesion and collective resilience in the face of socio-political adversity. Further, Almedom (2007) described how Eritreans viewed themselves as demonstrating a collective resistance against more 'powerful Western nations', which they viewed as having abandoned them in the 1998-2000 war.

Farwell (2001) revealed that young Eritrean refugee people, returning home post-independence, understood adversity through a narrative of collective injustice, in which they felt determination and anger in the face of adversity. Additionally, individuals stated that they were strengthened by visions of an independent Eritrea and galvanised by sacrifices of their martyred brothers and sisters. Farwell (2003) further examined 'trauma experiences' of Eritreans living in Eritrea after the war. Farwell's (2003) study stated that 'war trauma' amongst the Eritreans was largely psychosocial in nature and contextualised in the communities' socio-economic and political realities of conflict, in which the PTSD framework was too narrow for conceptualising 'war trauma'. Thus bringing to the forefront the importance of contextually appropriate psychosocial support, which is not apolitical to the violence individuals have experienced (Wessells, 2009; Seifert, 1992).

Whilst highlighting the political and social context of how the war was understood amongst Eritreans, Farwell (2003) often referred to participants' experiences as 'war trauma' and referred to cognitive and affective responses as 'psychological symptoms'. This can be seen as imposing a Western linguistic and medical

framework, which carries with it assumptions of underlying pathology. The employment of Western 'trauma' constructs within war-affected populations, may further serve to infringe on local understandings and reify psychological and biological processes (Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1995). Thus drawing attention away from the issues of socio-economic recovery and provisions, which research could be used to explore.

All studies had a mixed gender sample and failed to draw attention to variations in how extreme adversity may be understood across different genders; thus neglecting a gendered approach to research. As such, violence against women and many forms of gender-based violence were rendered invisible and were not adequately acknowledged, represented and addressed. Understandings which may be more specific to women's experiences of extreme adversity and strength may have been silenced.

Some specific studies have explored experiences of Eritrean refugee people, drawing particular attention to Eritrean refugee women (i.e., Almedom, Tesfamichael, Mohammed, Mascie-Taylor, Muller & Alemu, 2005; Kibreab, 1995), focusing their research specifically on their understandings. Ghebrezghiabher and Motzafi-Haller (2015) explored the experiences of Eritrean refugee women who were survivors of gender-based violence in Israel. Results highlighted that women did not view themselves as passive victims of trauma but active agents and survivors. They highlighted the importance of a political understanding within a critical feminist analytical framework that documents the shifting political and historical contexts and forces. Kibreab (1995) built on surrounding literature to highlight a narrative of Eritrean refugee women as resourceful, resilient and showing a remarkable ability to cope with adversity.

The political and socio-economic status of Eritrea has changed greatly since many of these studies were published. Eritrea has now been independent for 26 years, and although many of the refugee people currently fleeing Eritrea may not have experienced the reality of the war, they may have grown up in its aftermath. Hence, they may leave for different reasons and there may be intergenerational differences in how adversity is conceptualised. No existing studies address the

current human right violations experienced by Eritrean refugee people or adequately provide an opportunity to explore the ways in which Eritrean refugee people in the UK understand and respond to extreme adversity, and what they consider helpful in their healing, within their sociocultural, political and historical context.

1.8. AIMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

With the growing numbers of Eritreans seeking asylum in the UK, as well as the neglect of this population in previous research, an exploration of Eritrean refugee people is pertinent. This study will aim to explore how Eritrean refugee people in the UK talk about and make sense of extreme adversity. In doing so, I hope to investigate how they may understand their experiences in the context of their shifting socio-cultural and political contexts, which may be useful in addressing pre-existing assumptions of how people are affected by, and make sense of, extreme adversity. This may have implications for the provisions of statutory and non-statutory psychology services.

1.8.1. Research Questions

1. How do Eritrean refugee people make sense of experiences of extreme adversity?
2. Does this differ from Western narratives of psychological trauma, if so, in which ways?
3. What contributes to the process and ecology of resilience for Eritrean refugee people?

2. METHODS

Within this chapter, I will outline the methodology and study design used to address the research questions. I will start by outlining and explaining my epistemological position within this study, following which I will discuss my chosen methodology. I will include reflections on my epistemological position and on my role as the researcher within this study. Finally, I will describe the study design and how the results were analysed.

2.1. Philosophical Assumptions: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology and epistemology play extremely relevant roles when considering the research questions and methodology. Ontology refers to the belief of the nature of the social world and what can be 'known' about it (Ritch & Lewis, 2003). Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, and the validity and reliability of claims to knowledge, asking questions regarding how we 'know' about *reality* and what the basis of our knowledge is (Willig, 2013). These positions can be seen as laying on a philosophical continuum of extreme relativism to naïve realism (Harper, 2011), in which epistemological views can be seen as taking a position on this continuum.

In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), I am conscious of how I, as the researcher, played an active role in shaping the epistemological positioning of this study, influencing how the research was approached and the data analysed. Therefore, I have reflected on my ontological, political and ethical commitments throughout the process (Willig, 2013).

2.1.1. Critical Realist

A critical realist epistemology can be seen as making ontological realist claims about reality, viewing it as something that exists independently of one's perceptions, whilst also drawing on social constructionist ideas, which suggests that knowledge is a social reality dependant on interpretation, in turn, influenced by the context (Harper, 2011). A critical realist approach will not deem reality to

be socially constructed but rather our theories of reality; acknowledging that whilst an objective reality exists, we cannot achieve direct contact with it (Willig, 2013).

I decided to adopt a critical realist epistemology, largely due to my developing ideas about the nature of knowledge as well as the position I have assumed in relation to this research topic. Namely that there is a reality to events such as rape, torture and war, which have 'real' effects on the material world and on 'real' physical bodies. Whilst acknowledging this reality, I believe that how individuals interact with, make sense of and story these events will be constructed in social interaction, through language, within a broader socio-political context.

I have chosen not to focus solely on language and discourse, as I believe that a critique of constructs, such as PTSD, which is devoid of a political critique of the power relationships and material structures that maintain such concepts is a fruitless exercise and at worst oppressive (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Social constructionism's emphasis on the role of language has often been criticised for failing to take into consideration other elements of human life which are outside the realm of language (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007), such as:

> *Embodiment*: This includes the actual effects of extreme adversity on the physical body (for example, missing limbs due to war or broken bones from torture), as well as personal-social histories.

> *Materiality*: This refers to the material dimension of the world such as the material organisation of space and place which bestows structures, limits and potentials on our discursive constructions of the world (Sims-Schouten, et al., 2007).

> *Power*: The effects of structural inequalities and the power of governments/nations to, for example, control access to resources (food, water, work, money) or deport individuals back to countries that they had originally fled seeking safety.

Such elements may be seen as interacting with discourses but not reducible to them. Consequently, I felt it was important to look beyond individual's interpretations of extreme adversity and place them in their wider historical and socio-political context. I consider the contextualising of individual experiences of extreme adversity an ethical stance, as analysing participants' talk without considering their embodied and material realities may not do justice to their lived experiences (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007; Flaskas, 1997). For example, considering a young Eritrean refugee person's justification to leave their homeland for the hope of a better life as largely rhetoric may be deemed inappropriate to this young person who had previously been imprisoned and tortured. Reclaiming the notion of *reality* within a realist ontology, therefore allowed me to operate on grounds of personal and social justice (Donovan, 2003), whilst holding onto social constructionist ideas, which questions taken for granted assumptions and the role of language in shaping individuals social world.

2.2.   Qualitative Methodology

Marshall (1996) highlights that qualitative methodologies are useful for providing illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial and humanistic issues. A qualitative methodology was chosen, as it allowed for the exploration of Eritrean refugee peoples' social and personal experiences, rather than reducing their experiences to numeric data in quantitative research (Smith, 2015). Additionally, a qualitative approach allowed for the development of richer understandings of Eritrean refugee peoples' perspectives and realities (Snape & Spencer, 2003), as well as the production of extensive data that is contextually situated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

I adopted a qualitative methodology given my theoretical ideas regarding the role of language, the importance of reflexivity and the epistemological positioning of this study. Adopting this approach allowed me to further explore the complexity of the relationship between refugee people and extreme adversity and how understandings are applied in global mental health, as well as clinical practice.

2.3. Reflexivity

Reflexivity requires the researcher to explore the ways in which their involvement with the study influences, acts upon and informs research (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). In order to attend to my position as a researcher, I consciously brought myself into all aspects of the study as part of an ongoing reflective process. In highlighting my own personal context, I hoped to bring myself into the dialogue with the reader and take accountability for the co-construction of the analysis, as well as make transparent my justifications of how the findings have been read and interpreted (Gill, 1995).

2.4. Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis refers to a family of qualitative methods which can be seen as "grounded in the particular, paying particular attention to sequences of action, particular actors, in particular social places, at particular times" (Reissman, 2008, p.11). Where narratives can be seen as pervading everyday life, narrative analysis will be concerned with how humans make sense of an ever-changing world, construct realities and bring meaning to something that is obscure/unusual (Murray, 2015). The analyst will hence be interested in how a speaker assembles and sequences events and uses language to communicate meaning (Reissman, 2008). Narrative analysis will not regard data as representative of a wider population, but as demonstrating the complexities of how individuals and communities construct accounts of their lives and the world. Narratives can hence be looked upon as enabling us to define ourselves and our experiences (Frank, 2002).

Within this study, narratives are not being looked upon as an ontological form (Murray, 2005), or a transparent rendition of truth (Eastmond, 2007). Ricoeur (1987) emphasised that we become narrators of our lives without completely becoming the author of our lives. As such, while we can tell life stories, the actual pattern our life takes and the structure of the stories we tell are shaped by multiple forces (Murray, 2015). Narratives can hence be seen as reflecting the

dynamic interplay between life, experiences and story, which when placed in the wider context provide insight into how individuals make sense of the world.

2.4.1. Why not Discourse Analysis?

Whilst being situated in a realist ontology, the study aims to explore the experiences of Eritrean refugee people within a social constructionist framework, which emphasises the role of language and discourse in constructing realities. My critique of dominant Western discourses of trauma in previous sections may lead to assumptions that discourse analysis may be the most appropriate for exploring how experiences are constructed in social environments. However, as previously discussed, focusing purely on linguistics would move us towards how language is used in constructing experiences and neglect why particular stories have been told, and the broader historical and cultural stories utilised in the construction of experiences. Additionally, discourse analysis often sits within a relativist ontology (Willig, 2013), which does not fit with the philosophical positioning of this study.

2.4.2. Why not Thematic Analysis?

Mishler (1986) argues for the importance of narrative methods over others, such as thematic analysis, highlighting that enthusiasm to identify themes within data may often interrupt the story-telling nature of interviews or lead to the narrative quality of transcribed interviews being ignored (Murray, 2015). I feel that reducing individual's experiences to patterns and themes decontextualizes understandings of extreme adversity and does not allow us to make claims about the use of language and its connection with what is being told, which is especially pertinent when exploring cultural understandings. Furthermore, a thematic analysis does not allow you to retain a sense of continuity and contradiction through individual accounts, where this may be revealing (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.4.3. Why not Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)?

IPA attempts to explore how individuals make sense of their world, looking specifically at the meaning that particular experiences, events and states hold for participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015). However, IPA could be critiqued for focusing solely on the individual and what is 'inside', meaning that it may lose sight of how what is 'inside' is dependent on what is 'outside' the individual, neglecting the broader context in which experience is given meaning and the ways in which people's experiences may be defined by the history of a collective.

2.4.4. The Benefits of Narrative Analysis

2.4.4.1. Challenging hegemonic notions of the "refugee experience"

Given the nature of narratives, as constructed and dependent on cultural conventions and language usage, narratives reflect the dominant theories about "possible lives" (Bruner, 2004, p.649) in one's culture. Eventually, the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the telling of the narrative achieves the power to structure perceptual experiences, in which we become the narratives we tell about our lives (ibid). Narratives can hence be used to reproduce existing forms of oppression, for example, where narratives simply regurgitate hegemonic tales, or to challenge taken for granted hegemony by making visible subjugated stories (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Narratives of socially positioned actors may then be useful in promoting a greater appreciation of the diversity of experiences involved in seeking asylum and against stereotypical assumptions of what it means to be a 'refugee' (Eastmond, 2007).

2.4.4.2. Privileging the silenced

In using narrative analysis, we also give a voice to refugee people who have often been silenced or ignored; allowing them to speak of their experiences without externally imposed constraints, for example, the Home Office or hospitals (Wang & Geale, 2015) and providing a space for individuals to be fully heard and listened to (Clandinin, 2006). Furthermore, narratives can be seen as "revealing truths about the social world that have been flattened or silenced by more traditional forms" of legal and scientific methods (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p.199).

2.4.4.3.   Deconstructing power

In moving away from hegemonic assumptions and providing a space for silenced voices to be heard, narrative analysis can also be seen as challenging the role of power and inequality. Psychology has often dealt with humans as the topic of study, in which its claims to knowledge have acted as excretions of power and claims to an objective world, to sustain inequality (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Emerson and Frosh (2004) highlight that the ability of narrative analysis to pay close attention to the social constructions of subjectivity in relation to dominant discourses, make it adept for social change. Additionally, it demonstrates more validity, as it places 'knowledge' in its socio-political and historical context, showing that knowledge is not neutral but ideological and that the social construction of meaning is closely aligned with power (ibid). Where power is discursive (Foucault, 1980) narratives can be used to resist power and can highlight ways people have done so in the past (Afuape, 2011). This seems fitting for Eritrean refugee people who have experienced political oppression and human rights violations.

2.5.   Ethnographic Narrative Analysis

Ethnographic narrative analysis views narratives as following a larger pattern of social and cultural story-telling, in which social roles are performed in the narratives (Cook & Craig, 1995). The analysis would be interested in the social patterns and functioning of stories in which narratives have been produced between the listener and the speaker, who are "political and cultural actors" (Squire, 2008, p.55). Therefore, narratives can be seen to build on collective identities, which can become frames for structuring experiences (Bruner, 2004).

Within ethnographic research, power is viewed as inescapably bound up with the production of knowledge, hence, the production of ethnographic knowledge is considered an inherent political act (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ethnography moves away from ideas of the researcher being detached from the research process, emphasising the ways in which ethnographic knowledge is constructed out of an intersubjective research process which is saturated with relations of

knowledge and power (Cook & Craig, 1995). Thus, researchers have a powerful effect and are complicit in the narratives constructed (Sandelowski, 1991). Reflective awareness of the researchers own narrative is bought into the ethnographic analysis, which is seen in how the narratives are contextualised and in how multiple narratives explored (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Just as the researcher is embedded in multiple contexts, so is the participant. Ethnographic research will view participants as acting on the world at multiple points in time, place and contexts, and view stories strung together throughout our/their life-course, in which experiences cannot be understood without understanding histories and interactions with other contexts (Cook & Craig, 1995). To isolate the individual and their narrative from their context would reduce its meaning (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Consequently, ethnographic analysis was useful in emphasising the importance of drawing on the broader context in which the narrative was being told. As part of the analysis, I re-engaged with the narratives told and worked to trace stories to their broader contexts, in order to enhance understandings of how adversity is understood. This was especially important to do since refugee people, as already discussed, are often decontextualized and homogenised.

In telling life stories, individuals will recast the past and omit elements, whilst stressing others, and refer constantly to events outside the frame of the research encounter (Cook and Craig, 1995). As the interviewer, this meant that it was important for me to pay attention to what had not been given voice to, or silenced in the dialogue, with an appreciation that this too added quality and depth to an individual's story.

I drew on Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of *polyphony* and *heteroglossia* to add another level of analysis to the study. Polyphony emphasises how the speaker's voice will be resonant with other voices of who the speaker represents, in which the story-tellers' story is their own, but is never entirely "anyone's own", as stories are seen as fragments of previous stories, artfully rearranged and never original (Frank, 2012, p.35). Heteroglossia highlights that every story is assembled from multiple

codes of language usage, in which individual's dialogues are representative of a speech community (Frank, 2012).

Bakhtin's (1981) concepts emphasise a social language in communities, which attends to styles of speaking within a social group, for example, the jargon of psychologists or a teenage group (Skinner, Valsiner & Holland, 2001). These ideas were used to analyse Eritrean refugee people's narratives and explore social languages which may be framing narratives of adversity and strength amongst Eritrean refugee people. This connects to ideas of a *narrative unconscious* in which dialogues of countries' events, can resonate through history, influencing how members of particular cultures conceptualise themselves, as well as how dominant stories within cultures determine personal experience (Raskin, 2002). Since narratives are co-constructed in dialogue, I felt it was important to bring myself into the analysis in a reflective manner, drawing on my own life narratives and stories, which have shaped my understandings. In doing so, I could be seen as privileging positionality and subjectivity (Reissman, 2003).

To summarise, I attended to three key areas within the data:

1. <u>The personal level:</u> This involved contextualising the individual narrative (larger autobiographical story), events and episodes and exploring the wider context in which extreme adversity had been experienced and given meaning. It also involved paying attention to 'small stories', which were "narratives-in-interaction" and "part of every day encounters" (Phoenix, 2009, p64); paying attention to the context in which these narratives were produced.

2. <u>The collective level:</u> Looking across personal narratives to the collective and societal narratives of extreme adversity and strength; exploring commonalties and 'community life stories' (Riessman, 1993), which Eritrean refugee people may collectively tell about themselves and their histories, sufferings, strengths and aspirations, as well as the larger

themes that may have arisen which distinguishes them from other collectives (Murray, 2015).

3. <u>The interpersonal level:</u> Acknowledging my own narrative and role in the co-construction of the narratives and reflectively engaging with the narratives being told.

2.6. Methods

2.6.1. Recruitment

Participants were recruited through two London-based Eritrean community groups based in London. Having volunteered with the organisations in the past, I had a working relationship with the managers of these groups and provided them with information on the research. Potential participants were first approached by the volunteers of the organisation, who briefly explained the study and invited them to participate. If participants were willing, I contacted them by telephone to provide further information. Conversations were held in both Tigrinya and English.

Once participants were happy to continue, I arranged a time and place to meet for the interview. Interviews were carried out in mutually agreed locations. Participants chose where to have the interviews based on convenience and locality; three of the interviews were carried out in the private offices of the Eritrean community centre and two were carried out in privately booked rooms in the University of East London premises. I did not offer reimbursement of travel expenses to and from the interview location, but all participants received a £20 Amazon voucher to thank them for their participation.

2.6.1.1. Interview Procedure
All participants were offered a choice as to the language in which they would like to have the interview conducted. If participants wanted the interview in a language other than English, a known and trusted interpreter was booked through the Eritrean community organisation. Before the interviews began, I

confirmed that participants had understood all the information provided in the information sheet (Appendix C) and that they were happy to continue. Informed consent was obtained and all participants signed a consent form (Appendix D). I reminded participants that they could withdraw from the study at any point, without giving a reason and invited them to speak as openly as they wished.

Participants were made aware of the potential for distress through the discussion and reminded that they did not have to discuss or describe the specific details of particular experiences. Participants were further made aware that they had control over how much or little they shared, that they could decline to answer questions, take a break or terminate the interview at any time. I thought about how participants may let me know if they were becoming upset and drew on my previous experiences and knowledge to remain open and empathetic to participants' distress.

2.6.1.2.   Data Collection

I used semi-structured interviews to explore individuals' narratives of extreme adversity and strength. These interviews had minimal questions, aimed at gathering information about experiences without the ridged frame of a structured interview; questions were added, altered or removed accordingly as the interview dialogue developed. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. Two interviews were conducted in both Tigrinya and in English (See Table 1). One interview involved the interpreter translating my questions alone from English to Tigrinya. The interviewee replied in Tigrinya but this was not translated back into English. The second interview involved me asking questions in English to which the interviewee responded in Tigrinya. The interpreter was not used; however, they were present throughout the interview in case they were needed for linguistic support. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2.6.1.3.   Interview Schedule

Elliott (2005) emphasises that straightforward questions are the most effective in eliciting responses in a narrative form. As an Eritrean who is bilingual in Tigrinya and English I attempted to make the questions clear, applicable and relevant. I was also mindful not to use psychological terminology or English words that did

not map on to Tigrinya, reducing the chances that the meaning/intention behind a question would get lost in translation. I was also able to discuss the wording of questions with the Eritrean community manager, who spoke Arabic and other Eritrean dialects. This was useful in generating feedback to finalise the interview guide (Appendix E). After each interview, I made notes on my impressions and any other details which would not be captured on the audio recording. Where interviews were conducted with an interpreter, I took time to discuss their views on the issues discussed, allowing me to highlight differences in understandings of words, concepts and worldviews across languages (Temple & Young, 2004).

2.6.2. Participants

2.6.2.1.   Inclusion criteria

- Participants who were born in Eritrea, who were now living in the UK and had sought or were seeking asylum in the UK
- English and non-English speaking
- Over the age of 17 years and assessed as Gillick Competent (Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority,1986)
- No criteria set for length of time in the UK

I interviewed five participants for this research, their demographics and interview language is referenced in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Length of time in UK	Language of the interview	Interpreter used?
Aman	18	Male	2 years	Arabic	Yes – Full interpretation
Hennock	35	Male	20 years	English	No
Osmond	18	Male	1.5 years	Tigrinya	Yes – only translated interviewer questions
Samson	24	Male	9 years	English	No
Nadia	25	Female	11 months	Tigrinya & English	No – but was present for support with words or phrases.

2.6.3. Language

Much research 'on' refugee people or minority communities in the UK has been written with little reference to whether the interviewees were fluent English speakers, as if language was irrelevant (Temple & Young, 2004). Research has also highlighted the extent to which non-English speakers are excluded from research to manage "cross-language barriers" (Esposito, 2001, p.569). Where individuals cannot give voice on their needs, individuals become dependent on others who speak the relevant language to speak for them (Temple and Young, 2004). I felt it was important to open the research to non-English speakers, owing to the lack of diversity in research (Lopez, Figueroa, Connor & Maliski, 2008). Additionally, not doing so would have rendered silent non-English speaking refugee people, further "silencing the silenced" and compromising refugee people's political and personal power (Patel, 2002, p.1).

Even where individuals speak English, denying them the opportunity to express themselves within a linguistic framework that is more familiar to them would have restricted cultural and linguistic nuances, their range of expressions, confidence in how they expressed themselves and their personhood, and the linguistic sphere in which words are developed and used in a particular context. The ability to speak Tigrinya and English put me in a position in which I could carry out interviews in either language. I noted that even where participants chose to speak in English, they would often use cultural metaphors and idioms and say these in Tigrinya. This highlighted that certain things were easier to say and carried more weight when said within the cultural linguistic framework in which they originated and were given meaning. The benefits of being able to understand both languages were that it reduced the loss of information and meaning that arose from the use of interpreters and reduced the dependence of both researcher and participant on interpreters.

2.6.3.1.   Working with interpreters

As English is my first and preferred language, I ensured an interpreter was present for support with words/phrases I could not directly translate into Tigrinya. Where an interpreter's role involves transferring meaning from a source language

to a target language, they play a vital role in conceptualising the meaning and using vocabulary and the grammatical structure appropriate to reconstruct the meaning of a statement, in a new cultural context, such as English (Esposito, 2001). Hence, narratives were co-productions of a dialogue between the three of us. I was mindful that the choice of structure for one participant's translated words where produced by the interpreter and their context, and could not be said to directly reflect 'actual meaning' (Temple and Young, 2004), limiting formal examination of aspects of language.

The same interpreter was used throughout and also acted as a cultural consultant. Therefore, it is important to include the socio-cultural context of the interpreter as this would have influenced the interpreting process. The interpreter was a married woman in her late 40's, who classed herself as being Eritrean and as having a refugee background.

2.6.4. Transcription

Transcription allowed the spoken material to be transformed into written material, which played an important part in the interpretive process (Willig, 2013). Interviews were transcribed verbatim with specific notes on laughter, pauses, utterances or emphasised words, as these provided context essential to interpretation (Riessman, 1993). The transcription conventions (Appendix F) were taken from Frosh and Emerson (2005). All personal details of participants were removed and/or anonymised. When transcribing was complete, I checked all transcripts against the recordings to ensure accuracy. Hand-written notes were also helpful in the process of creating meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Where interviews had been conducted in Tigrinya, recordings were translated and transcribed into English. Any words that did not map on directly to the English language were highlighted and the interpreter and another Tigrinya speaker (male, refugee background, mid - 60's) were consulted about these to validate translation and best fit. The rationale for this was to reduce translation error, which may have led to differences in meaning and improve the meaningfulness of the data (Lopez, Figueroa, Connor & Maliski, 2008).

Furthermore, transcripts were back-translated by an independent translator (male, refugee background, mid - 40's). This process was essential to ensure validity and meaningful cultural and conceptual representation of narratives (Esposito, 2001).

2.6.5. Ethical Issues

2.6.5.1. *Ethical approval*

Ethical approval was sought and granted by UEL Ethics Committee before the commencement of this research (Appendix G). Neither of the Eritrean community organisations had a formal ethics protocol, however, a detailed introduction to the study was provided to both organisations.

2.6.5.2. *Informed consent*

Not all participants spoke English fluently but reported having a good enough understanding of English to be able to read the information sheet provided. Before the start of the interviews, I recapped the main points on the information sheet and verbally translated (where participants were being interviewed in Tigrinya or Arabic) the information on the consent sheets. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time from the research, and given several opportunities to ask questions at the start and end of the research.

2.6.5.3. *Confidentiality*

Anonymity was ensured by assigning codes and pseudonyms to all participants. Details of codes were kept on a password-protected laptop and I alone transcribed the data. All consent sheets were stored separately from the research data. It was explained to the participants that only the Director of Studies, back-translator, examiners and I would have access to the transcripts. Audio-recordings and electronic copies of transcripts were kept separately on a password protected laptop. Upon completion, audio recordings will be deleted.

2.6.5.4.   Debriefing

Debriefing followed all interviews and participants were given a space to discuss anything that had been particularly distressing. All participants were given information on further support and information on how to contact me or my supervisor if needed (Appendix H).

2.6.6. Data Analysis

Mishler (1990) notes that the way in which we arrange and rearrange the interview text, is a process of testing, clarifying and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse. I treated all data collected, including cultural idioms, metaphors and interruptions in the interview, as part of the narrative, as this added depth and meaning to descriptions of life stories, as well as adding detail to what sense they had made of it. Thus elevating the narrator's voice instead of imposing preconceived ideas about what is and is not warranted in the analysis.

Each transcript was analysed separately, using questions listed in Appendix I and subsequent discussions with my supervisor. These questions were generated from Cook and Crang (1995), who explore ethnographic research more specifically and Weatherhead (2011), who explores narrative research more generally. Questions were adapted to pay particular attention to the three key areas outlined in section 2.5 (the personal, collective and interpersonal level) which characterise my 'approach' to ethnographic narrative analysis.

Once individual transcripts were analysed, identifiable narratives within transcripts were noted down using a spider diagram (Appendix K). Following this, I looked across transcripts and spider diagrams, to explore if there were any commonalities or broader narratives which participants may be telling. These were highlighted and then noted down using a second spider diagram (Appendix L), following which transcripts were re-read and reviewed to check that wider stories were reflective of participants' stories.

3.   ANALYSIS

This chapter details the ethnographic narrative analysis carried out on the transcripts. Appendix J contains a sample of the analytic process applied to each transcript. Each section will begin with a brief introduction to the participant's narrative.

3.1.   AMAN: The Hope for Freedom.

I was introduced to Aman by a charity volunteer. We agreed to meet in a café with an interpreter, where I introduced myself and the study, and arranged a time to conduct the interview. Aman was an hour late to our first meeting. He said had been at the mosque praying, which he attended regularly. Religion played an important role in Aman's life and was a constant theme throughout our interview. Stories of perseverance, survival, hope and faith in God weaved their way in and out of different socio-economic and political contexts within his narrative.

I started by asking Aman about his early life:

> [49-51]…you live with your family, your relatives, your friends speaking the language that you know all this makes you happy […] you wake up you got to Halewan…which is a Koran religious school

Aman depicts his days being filled with structured activities based on relational bonds and his Islamic faith. Religion appeared to be central not only to the language spoken, but to how Aman understood life, shaping his way of being in the world. Aman placed happiness in the context of a shared language. Whilst he may be referring to being able to speak and communicate within the same linguistic framework, he may also be referring to the role of language as part of a collective identity.

Aman described turning fifteen-years of age and becoming more aware of "other difficulties" [87] in Eritrea. Aman placed these difficulties within the

intersectionality of politics and economic poverty that widened the gap between his life "in poverty" and his hopes, which educational attainment became key to:

> [94-99] The education is…you can't dream to carry on learning or go university. Maybe in some part of Eritrea it may be possible, but when you are from the worst, when you are in poverty, it's very difficult because of the government. As well that…you are expected to get into certain level.

> [135-139] Interviewer: How do you manage that as a young person then…growing up…?
> Aman: It's the same for everybody so you kind of accept it.

Aman seemed to draw on issues of governmental power which obstructed him from building his desired future. Whilst my question placed these difficulties within an individualised context, Aman reminded me that this was a collective problem. Aman painted a picture of an active acceptance where he and the community were making choices and decisions about life, based on their available choices at the time. Possibly demonstrating a performance of power, in which they are not helpless recipients:

> [181-190] You always have to think about leaving the country to avoid all these problems and especially the military service. You start to search for other options. Leave the country, support your family, support your brothers […] You have to take these difficult decisions otherwise you will be in the military service for unlimited period of time.

Aman positioned himself as responsible for his family, which may shape aspects of his identity as a provider. Leaving Eritrea may become a way of creating options and "a better future" [219], for himself and his family.

Aman drew on the importance of language in coping and connecting him to a shared experience. When describing what a better future would like for him, Aman may be communicating what had been made impossible in Eritrea. Freedom was placed within the systems that granted power to build and shape

your own future. Freedom and hope become key narratives in Aman's narrative, helping him to persevere:

> [294-309] Being with other people who speak your language who are travelling and are taking the same risks…that helped […] the thought of thinking that you are going to a country where you can work as you want, Freedom, where you can study, where you can. Freedom, you know having freedom, all this makes you be hopeful, then you persevere whatever experience you have.

Aman described a number of extreme difficulties faced on his journey. For Aman these experiences were similar to life in in Eritrea, where death can be physical but perhaps also have a metaphorical sense. Given the compulsory and indefinite nature of military service in Eritrea, this may mean the death of hope and a future. Stripping him of freedom and control over his own life:

> [432-439] For example you leave Eritrea because you fear to die in military service. They can send you to war where you will die or you may just live for a long time and then you would. Its death there, death there, so that's why you just…you kind of persevere, because death, you left death and this is death so maybe this is better, maybe this one has a bit of hope for the future.

Aman demonstrates resistance, deciding to leave Eritrea. Perhaps for Aman, hope is perceived as the possibility to build a future, rather than the expectation of a future. Aman told me that his journey was "about survival, so for example for food…it was a matter of life" [405-406]. In doing so, Aman placed extreme adversity not in a personalised trauma discourse, but in a narrative where he faced death and survived.

It appeared that Aman's understanding of extreme adversity was not as an experience which is uncommon, unique or something to be avoided, but rather as a part of life, interwoven into the human experience. Aman made sense of this within his framework of faith, which shaped his sense of self and the meaning he

gave to life. This suggests that the idea of adversity as unique, may not be a meaningful concept for Aman, as life was defined in the context of hardship:

[459-461] It helped because you have this faith belief that human being is born to experience a lot of difficulties, so you persevere and then perseverance is part of faith.

I asked Aman to tell me about life in the UK. I was curious to see what Aman made of his experiences, but also aware of my own pre-conceived ideas, from conversations with other Eritreans who had been disappointed by life in the UK:

[466–486] It was very difficult. You come to a new country, culture, language. In this life you have nobody here, no relatives, no family, its tough […] how I grew up…your environment this changed. Religion that you grew up with, all this is different.

Aman's narrative of loss and difference may be referring to loss of connection to relationships, and the contexts and physical space which had shaped his sense of self. Aman's commitment to go to the mosque and pray, may be a way of reconnecting and maintain important aspects of his life and personhood. Possibly explaining why, he prioritised going to the mosque, over being on time to our meeting.

Aman described life in the UK as affording him his basic needs (i.e. food) and freedoms for which he had left Eritrea, but stated:

[491-499] The language is difficult and the people don't accept you, the way they treat you and relate to you, it's difficult to integrate you know. When you come here, people don't even know where you are from, they think Africa is one country and treat you like you are stupid and are only coming here to work. I just let them and do what I need to. When you first come, at the beginning when you claim asylum, the case is not been decided. You worry a lot!

For Aman, integration did not seem to mean letting go of his identity or culture and adopting another, but rather finding a way to exist within a culture that felt so different to his own. Aman described experiences of discrimination that acted as a barrier to integration. Perhaps amplified by the discourse surrounding being black, Muslim and a refugee person, in today's post-Brexit society.

Aman continued with his story on the asylum process, where he described a lack of sleep, a loss of appetite, and living in fear and uncertainty. In a Western context this may often be associated with medical narratives of 'trauma' or 'depression'. Aman made sense of these in the context of the asylum process, which can be seen as an extension of an oppressive system which did not allow Aman to find his place in UK. Physically limiting what he can do and possibly reminding him that he does not belong. Whilst describing these difficulties, Aman took his story back to his life in Eritrea, seemingly reconnecting with his roots. He described his dreams as being guided by the advice and dreams of his parents which gave him strength to persevere.

I asked Aman if there was anything else he would like to tell me and he stated:

> [690-696] My experience will remain with me all my life, you always think about that. It's part of you […] sometimes it may help you, make you strong to carry on.

Aman was informing me that the past was intrinsically tied to the shaping of his stronger future self, which was moving forward. Aman went on to connect his story to other Eritrean refugee people. Telling a collective narrative of thriving in hardship:

> [747-752] Sometimes…especially the ones that became successful…after going through all of this. You look up to them. It gives you hope and they become a role model. That's what I try to become, you persevere and you just look up to them to be successful like them.

Aman also named older Eritrean friends who had experienced hardships in Eritrea and done the journey to the UK. He enthusiastically described listening to "stories of success" [763] which kept him going.

3.2. HENNOCK: "A New Normal" and Political Activism

Hennock was a charity volunteer and his name was put forward by another volunteer. He was open to participation and gave a detailed narrative of his life, which he divided into two chapters: life in Eritrea and life in the UK. Hennock contextualised his narrative within historical and political frameworks, which guided the meaning he attached to particular experiences.

Hennock told me that he was born in Asmara and marked a turning point in his "normal childhood" [13] when the war broke out:

> [16-22] we use to have a daily barrage of rockets flying over our heads for about a year and that's because they were hitting the airport to stop resupply and that presumed to affect the moral of the Ethiopian soldiers stationed in Asmara…and obviously there was a shortage of, you know of pretty much everything.

Hennock vividly depicted the Eritrean war, decentring himself within the narrative. He spoke about the events of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war in a factual manner, placing it in a socio-historical context rather than discussing his personal response to war. In doing so, he placed his early life as being incorporated within a wider political narrative. Hennock went on to describe:

> [94-97] education went downhill…there was a shortage of electricity […] there was even a shortage of books.

Hennock expanded on the effects of war beyond the individual, into the very fabric of society. The emphasis on education may highlight the impact of war on the ability to gain knowledge and subsequently power. When Hennock described the experiences of war he often used collective pronouns, emphasising a shared

narrative amongst the Eritrean people. Hence, a personalised emotional reaction to adversity may not have fit:

> [111-122] We were like getting daily barges of bombs…it was really petrifying initially because you could hear the rockets whistling and when it whistled it's scary because you don't know where it's going to land…it gets louder and louder and it caused panic initially…but after a while...people just got used to it and you would have like…women especially greeting each other in the streets and you have these rockets flying overhead and people just adapt right and it becomes the new normal […] something which was extreme or…out of the ordinary, suddenly becomes a new normal.

Hennock depicted the Eritrean society as a system regulating itself continuously to a new environment to transcend adversity, in which events were no longer seen as being out of the ordinary or having the ability to distress and disrupt lives. Hennock maintained a narrative of collective strength and adaptation to "a new normal":

> [168-173] Eritreans seem to have a super resilience for absorbing hardship

> [192-195]…but when you are going through the process you are just too busy trying to survive and you don't think too much about needing to be resilient. You just get through it…it's just the human spirit

Hennock emphasised the resilience of Eritreans, but then moved to dismiss the idea of resilience as something only some have, develop or obtain, instead giving value to resilience being a part of being human. This served to position all humans as tough. The ability to get through hardship is perhaps made possible due to the power gained in collective narratives of adversity.

Hennock made a distinction between the severity of hardship experienced by those who would have been born pre-and post-independence.

[173-178]…apparently what they are going through now is even worse […] I mean we had the poverty, we had the, you know, then kind of hardship, but on top of that now days they have…an authoritarian police state.

Hennock placed this new hardship in the political structures which oppressed Eritreans, which to him was worse than the effects of war, possibly because of the impress of power and control.

Whilst independence may have been a reason to stay in Eritrea, Hennock explained leaving two/three months after:

[238-239] My dad is also quite sceptical about the whole new government, he said 'only the direction of the wind changes in Africa and nothing else'.

This proverb prompted a level of acceptance and at the same time called for action, shaping Hennocks narrative of political action further along in his story. Hennocks father's voice may be seen as echoing through his political narrative. Hennock talked about his father who did not view the end of the war as bringing peace, connecting to a narrative of distrust of the Eritrean government, which is present today in the wider political divide within the Eritrean community. This connects to a wider narrative, of how Eritrean diaspora activism groups were dismantled, at the request of President Isaias, post-independence, with the belief that "peace was descending" [233]. This may have impacted on the power held by the Eritrean diaspora community to take action when independence did not bring about the desired outcomes in Eritrea.

Hennock went on to discuss seeking asylum in the UK as a child. He discussed his experiences of being placed in a children's home, being caught in a "tug of war" [300] between local authorities, discrimination at school etc. Hennock described these difficulties as shuttering his perceptions of what Europe was like. Perhaps a reflection that it was not his past experiences that caused him distress, but the larger social systems in which he now existed. Hennock told a narrative of

loss of family and community, within which he had made sense of the world. Possibly explaining his more personalised narrative, in comparison to his earlier narrative of life in Eritrea:

> [374-381] I suppose although it was much more difficult, it's a different type of challenge, it's not about the basic necessities and trying to survive through hardship. It's more just…it's different types of challenges, you know, assimilating…there is an element of loneliness as well, like being away from family, away from your friends, like back home, you know, you could play in the streets, like I said the whole neighbourhood is…is your community and your extended family.

Perhaps Hennock is communicating that challenges are harder to overcome outside the web of physical and relation connections, which had formed a system of support. Furthermore, Hennock described not being able to talk to his family about the difficulties of adjusting, further cutting him off from these webs of support:

> [720-722]…from the age of 16 whenever I had knocks it was you know that is just life basically and again on my mantra of you know, there are always people who have it 100 times worse than you which is true...so who am I to complain.

Hennock drew on the discourse around life in Europe being one where there is no hardship. This discourse may serve to silence and belittle the difficulties faced in the UK. Perhaps explaining why in his telling of his own hardships in the UK, Hennock often did so whilst comparing it to the hardships experienced by his siblings or "the new comers" who had/have it worse. Hennock continued with his narrative, discussing cultural differences in the understanding of wellbeing in the UK:

> [422-427]…you only get sympathy if you are physically injured and you got something physical that is wrong with you, all this emotional stuff […] is not something you would discuss.

Discussing emotions is uncommon within the Eritrean community, contrary to the West where emotions and 'feeling good' about yourself is prioritised, in which talking therapies may be an unhelpful concept:

> [466-471]...I don't know what happened but he quit…or he was made redundant and he went to college and he started going through financial difficulties […] whatever you know different bills chasing him and so on…and he, unknown to us, unknown to him, he started to have a mental breakdown.

Hennock used Western terminology to describe what happened to his brother, but emphasises the "environment as depressing" [530-531], rather than his brother. Hennock described the unhelpfulness of medication, which was at odds with how he and his siblings made sense of the "mental breakdown". Hennock instead viewed the best intervention as being in Eritrea:

> [510-512] back with the family, being in a supportive loving environment and also just away from the situation.

This may have allowed his brother to reconnect to an environment that enabled healing and restoring a sense of belonging and safety, which may have been restricted in the UK. Similarly, Hennock pointed out the difficulties faced by newcomers and placed these in the wider context:

> [594–602]…they reflect on all the bullshit they went through…and that's when it starts to sink in…their new life in Europe, where they are not welcome, you know, they are living in some isolated community…they are trying to survive on…peanuts, inadequate housing and so on, it kind of amplifies their sense of, maybe not resentment but maybe anger or frustration and it's a different set of challenges, fighting, destitution, isolation being homesick…and so on…and that's when they have to sort of…mental illness.

Hennock described working in the community with newcomers perhaps providing for them what he did not have when he came to the UK. He spoke about setting up CV workshops and offering guidance on their rights; reflecting the practical support needed, possibly more so than emotional support:

> [775-783] It was about cultural events and giving them a sense of community and extended family and also playing that mentoring big brother role […] that's something I wish I had growing up…like a close family that you can go to for wisdom, guidance and experience…that would have played a transformational role.

Hennock highlighted the importance of intergenerational relationships, and the importance of creating an Eritrean community, perhaps similar to what he would have had in Eritrea. Thus, supporting the newcomers may be a way of reconnecting with the Eritrean community, where he had otherwise been disconnected.

The narrative thread of reconnecting with Eritrea was seen through the latter part of Hennocks story, when he reconnected physically - going back to visit Eritrea for the first time since his departure - and politically. Hennock described the awakening of his political activism as being triggered by a series of socio-political events including, the arresting of the G15 (political members who were pushing for the implementation of a constitution in Eritrea) and the drowning of Eritreans in Lampedusa and the dismissal of it by Eritrean government.

Hennock spoke about his awareness of injustices in Eritrea and not speaking out due to the desire to see his family in Eritrea again. This reflects a wider collective silencing within the Eritrean diaspora, who place adversity within a framework of injustice but fear speaking out, as doing so may mean losing connection to their homeland. Hennock became politically active after visiting Eritrea and positioned himself resisting creatively:

> [1072-1082] I suggested illustration online…like there was a fence, there is a kid on one side and a mother knocking on the fence and saying "SAWA[7] separating children from their mothers" and there was another one…a sign with the mouth plastered and it says "welcome to Eritrea".

Hennock depicts the systematic silencing of and impress of power on the Eritrean nation. In doing so, Hennock constructs his view of the world as largely shaped by a sense of injustice, in which the power for change is found in the collective:

> [1246–1272] When you see people's sort of fundamental God given rights taken away, especially for our people who have been through so much…as you know, sacrificed so much for their independence, then to end up with a system which is so cruel and… you feel that sense of injustice and you feel like they shouldn't get away with it […] it's (national service) taken away their ability to have a say in their lives […] this is slavery.

Hennock emphasised the importance of "changing the language" [1277] in which military service was spoken about. Pushing for a change in the narrative of how Eritrean refugee people's struggles were understood. Political activism becomes a responsibility for everyone - perhaps staying silent may have meant for Hennock to side with the oppressor and stand by injustice. Hennock used "you know" throughout his narrative, perhaps recognising me as having insider knowledge.

Hennock placed the struggle for human rights in Eritrea alongside the struggle for independence, connecting injustice to a wider cultural history and sacrifice. The narrative of an Eritrean struggle stretches across generations, which may create a sense of unity when pursuing an independent state and a free nation. Hennock seemed to be pleading for justice and unity, emphasised by his desire to engage the "silent majority" [971] and fragmented opposition groups in a "single cause of advocacy" [1097].

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[7] SAWA is a defence training centre and military academy where conscripts are sent.

[1308-1313] It's a kind of long game, you know, you don't have the big knockout blow, it's more small victories whether it's the civil rights movement or, you know, or the suffragettes…you kind of have to be persistent and I feel like we […] bought the goal post closer by doing our part on the human rights front.

Hennock moved on to reflect on his stop-slavery campaign. He ended by placing this campaign as part of the struggle for human rights in Eritrea; and that struggle as being a part of a wider struggle for human rights for human beings; in which he had "played his part" [1299], perhaps transcending his own morality, in which the work he had started will continue to have an impact, even after he had passed.

3.3. SAMSOM: "plan ahead instead of thinking about the past…that will drain you"

Samsom was a charity volunteer and was put forward by another volunteer. When I approached Samsom about participation in this study, he expressed that he had been under the impression that the study was for 'refugees only', indicating that he did not consider himself a 'refugee'. Samsom agreed to take part, once I had explained the study rational in more detail.

A narrative of collective determination was present throughout Samsom's narrative. He did not go into detail about his life in Eritrea and much of his narrative was about his journey to and life in, the UK. He constructed his narrative as an ongoing journey. He had sought asylum, established stability and moved forward in his life, in which his identity was more than that of being a refugee person. Hence, I was mindful of what it may have meant for Samsom to partake in a study that positioned him as a refugee person, which may not fit with his identity construction.

Samson started his narrative from when he came to the UK, detailing all he had accomplished academically. This may have been a demonstration of power, in

which he positioned himself as someone who had established his life in UK, constructing his identity as a hardworking and accomplished individual:

> [3-8] Yeah so I'll start from when I came here…I came to the UK the usual route from Eritrea to Sudan to Libya and went to Malta and then to the UK…I came to the UK in 2008, been studying since then until 2015. I did GCSE, A-levels and then I went to university and finished university in 2015 and since then I've been working.

I asked Samsom if he could tell me about growing up in Eritrea. In doing so, I unintentionally and forcibly positioned him in the past and as a child growing up in a "basic" [12] herding village. Providing a different starting point to the narrative he may have wished to tell. Samsom highlighted that life became difficult at the age of fifteen. Echoing other narratives, Samsom spoke about the situation in Eritrea as a collective difficulty; military service stripping them of control over their futures, relationships and shrinking the population size of a generation-perhaps a visible reminder that there is "no future" [38] in Eritrea:

> [56-62]…so imagine like you're studying and the person who sits next to you, your friends…and all of a sudden I'm not with you and you think, oh what happened? But actually you know what happened, the fact that you know but then and after a year or two, maybe you will join the military and you may not have, you may not have the opportunity to study or to do whatever you want to do with your life.

In that moment, Samsom forced me to step into his position imagining what life was like for him. In doing so, he drew attention to the difference between us and the freedom I had to study and have "a future" [74] simply through being born in the UK. Leaving Eritrea may have become a way of creating his desired future.

Samsom proceeded with his journey out of Eritrea and detailed a number of adversities faced. Samsom occasionally laughed when describing adversities and I wondered if humour was a way of managing the difficult emotions that may have been aroused by his retelling.

Samsom discussed his experiences of being imprisoned in Khartoum:

> [91-103]…there were a lot of people that got caught in the same situation and you become friends with them yeah…in a way it's okay…but it's not like you are locked in your own room, you have the opportunity to socialise so that makes it a little easier [...] I think it's just determination […] not even just me, other people, it's their determination to reach where they are thinking to go, that gives you a little bit of, you know…and whatever happens…you say 'ok it's going to pass'.

Whilst prison limited Samsom's physical freedom, it did not limit his capacity to build relationships, which perhaps helped him "find strength" [137] in a collective narrative of determination. He may also be suggesting that adversity is fleeting and part of the journey. Interestingly, he tells a different narrative when describing his experiences in a detention centre in Malta, where he was waiting to process his immigration status:

> [148-150] you have time to reflect on a lot of people that you left in Libya, maybe some people died in the sea. Then it was quite difficult.

Perhaps the uncertainty of his 'status' and waiting meant Samsom was then forced to 'stand still' and was no longer able to move forward. Reflecting may have conjured a narrative of loss perhaps threatening his narrative of determination.

Conscious of the change in Samsom narrative, I asked what kept him going and if there was anything that he "holds on to from Eritrea" [163]. In doing so, I may have steered Samsom away from a narrative of 'trauma', and silenced a narrative which may have been may have been more individualised and centred on death and loss.

Samsom went on to describe being "more Eritrean" than British. Maybe he felt he still did not belong in the UK. Samsom highlighted differences he had observed

whilst living in the UK, maintaining the importance of remaining connected to what it meant for him to be 'an Eritrean'. Samsom narrated his early life as being rooted in helping family, a value he has stayed connected to in the UK:

[177-182]…so it's like I come here and a lot of people in this country say okay 'what can I do for myself'…me and a lot of people that come with me from Eritrea, will be like more 'what can I do for my family? […] they have sacrificed lots of stuff so we have to sacrifice a lot of our time to help other people.

Samsom's talk on sacrifice perhaps taps into a wider community sacrifice, in which many have sacrificed their lives, in the war for independence and to support him. Thus creating a sense of obligation to continue sacrificing.

I went on to ask if Samsom's ways of managing difficulties had changed:

[231-235]…while you are still with your family you hardly see any difficulties […] this (UK) is a completely different environment, so it's hard to compare, so I didn't know if the way I managed mental difficulties were the same back home because it was more nature difficulties.

Samsom emphasised that there are no "mental difficulties" in Eritrea, which then allowed him to frame difficulties existing outside of the individual and in a context of agricultural and socio-economic hardships. Whilst Western culture may privilege individualistic ways of managing adversity, in Eritrea, you manage hardships within a collective, which may act as a buffer. This may explain why Samsom placed an emphasis on helping others, perhaps recreating a sense of community. Samsom framed difficulties in the UK as "mental difficulties", perhaps due to internalised Western medical discourse and language, which does not fit Eritreans' understanding and management of distress.

Samsom storied disappointment at arriving in the UK only to be faced with little support, whilst having to "learn skills" [216] to adapt to "a different environment" [219]. These ideas reflect Eritrean understandings of hardship, placing difficulties

in the wider context. Samson's volunteering and mentoring may also demonstrate how he connected to his values of helping others, in which making a difference granted him a sense of "satisfaction" [279], possibly fulfilling his sense of obligation:

> [257-262]…it's not straightforward, you think okay, I've come to the UK, that's it, but it's not actually…there are a lots of difficulties from here, from getting your papers sorted or finding the right education, it can be about finding a job…whatever, it could just be about having a friend so…I know those difficulties still exist so it's just trying to help other people address these issues.

When I asked Samsom what helped when he first came to this country, he reconnected to his narrative of determination, which helped him resist against an educational system that did not support non-English speakers to access the same opportunities as English speakers. He described building a web of connections and support around him:

> [364-369] I was constantly improving […] improving my knowledge about how I wanted to do what I wanted to do, and asking people, usually asking people who are my seniors.

Samsom echoed other narratives in the importance of drawing on the wisdom of those who had come before him. Education may have acted as a key, not only to knowledge and a better social standing in life, but may tangibly represent his desire to always be moving forward towards something.

When I asked Samsom what helped him to keep moving forward, he placed the first year in the UK within a narrative of survival, drawing attention to the degree of difficulties faced. This followed a similar narrative of survival which he had described on the journey to the UK. This may be due to the process of asylum which posed the threat of deportation, creating an inability to generate future perspectives and invoking feelings of powerlessness. Survival, forgetting and

moving forward was facilitated within a network of relationships, made more possible with time:

> [390–391]…because you start developing other friends…you remember things from here, so your memory moves away from the other things. The first year is critical, if you survive then I think it gets better.

> [408-414] If I was to think about what happened in Libya or whatever, constantly thinking about that I might get mad, you know, but instead I can just try to forget it […] try to think forward.

Samsom ended by reminding me that his story of migration to the UK, is not just his story, but the same for everyone; thus emphasising a collective story of Eritrean refugee people. He emphasised the importance of acceptance and not getting "stuck" [471], perhaps freeing him to move forward.

3.4. NADIA: "All the things young women dream, I dreamt"

Nadia was introduced to me by a charity volunteer. We initially spoke over the telephone, so I could explain the study and arrange a time to meet. Nadia spoke poetically about her life and placed adversity in the socio-political context, linked to issues of power, voice and resistance. I saw her participation as an act of resistance; telling her story, as a way of speaking out and giving voice to what had otherwise been silenced in the UK.

I started by asking Nadia about where she grew up:

> [5-10] I grew up in Eritrea [P] It was ok…like…I was born in Asmara 1991…my father and mother were soldiers…when I was 11 years old my mother was laid to rest. After that when I was 16-years old I was sent outside of Eritrea.

Nadia was born in the year of Eritrea's independence, which painted a picture of what her world may have looked like growing up. Nadia may have grown up with stories, movies and music, similar perhaps to myself, of struggle and overcoming

within a national context. This may have shaped the way Nadia constructed her sense of self. Nadia could be seen as highlighting the key events that have shaped her life in Eritrea.

Nadia narrated hardship whilst growing up in Eritrea, particularly after her mother died. The government took their land, she lost two younger siblings, and she left school at 14-years of age to work, seemingly taking on her mother's role.

Nadia was arrested for not being in school and forced to join the army. Nadia escaped the army and left Eritrea. She narrated suffering as a young girl, who was "maturing" [60], shaping her sense of self as a woman in the world. She described her experiences as a "wound that won't go away" [65-66], moving away from ideas of having to heal after adversity and depicting something still impacting her life. The language used by Nadia, may reflect the influence of the military or stories of war, in which even when wounded, you must still return to battle. I asked how she managed this:

[69-74] I don't have a choice…that's my life […] I always look to my younger siblings, how my mother gave her life for the country, gave birth to me through it and brought me this far, remembering my parents, this encourages me and I had to be encouraged because I didn't have a choice.

[118-119]…it's not just something we were dealing with alone, it's all Eritrean people.

Nadia emphasised a national struggle, positioning her as never alone in her suffering, and perhaps giving her a sense of belonging. Nadia seemed to root her story in her mother's, which she weaved in and out of. In remembering her mother's sacrifice, Nadia connected to a larger narrative of Eritrean women soldiers, who fought side by side with men, equal to them. A narrative I was often told growing up, highlighting the power of women, with women soldiers as instrumental in gaining independence. Connection to a larger female struggle may link to why she had "no choice", desiring to bring her younger siblings further

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along (in life) like her mother had brought her. This might also explain the importance of being encouraged and persevering in the face of challenges.

I asked Nadia how "the Eritrean people" [79] managed, creating distance between myself and the Eritrean nation of which Nadia spoke. On reflection, I felt I could not claim to completely belong to the Eritrean nation, as this would be to suggest a similar struggle, which for me felt disingenuous:

> [85-86] For the people it's arduous, but in Eritrea no one can speak out-loud…If you speak-out…then you know what will happen to you.

Nadia storied a systematically silenced nation. Arrests of those who had spoken out against the government have rendered many silent. To take away someone's voice is to strip them of the power to make a change in their world. This may explain why even "the person who is considered to have achieved the most […] is secretly waiting to escape" [90-93].

I asked Nadia about what was important to her when she was in Eritrea, which moved her narrative in another direction. Perhaps, unintentionally, silencing her narrative on being voiceless and powerless, moving her towards narrating something that could be considered more hopeful. In reflection, Nadia was of a similar age and gender and her stories connected to those I had grown up. This would have invariably influenced which openings I attended to and which where then closed down. Connecting to my own sense of helplessness in Nadia's narrative may have further led me to follow a different line of questioning in this instance. Nadia told me that "love of family" [100] was important but, perhaps in a demonstration of power, moved to speak about the things that were important to her but could not be achieved. Placing these in an account of what all young people dream: "to be educated" [102], "to grow up with a mother and father" [105]. In doing so, she reminds me that her dreams are not out of the ordinary or disproportionate. I asked Nadia, how she had made sense of this at the time:

> [149-164] I was always asking myself, why, when my mother was a soldier, that now she's passed away I am suffering this way?...Why am I struggling to

find something to eat?...Why can't I go to school? Why haven't the government done anything for us?...I thought about these things but didn't get any answers because in Eritrea they always told us Eritrea was the best country in the world on the news, on Eri TV […] Women that used to be soldiers would come on Eri TV, saying we fought like this and died like this and did this, I would see them all dressed well and speaking…but I would ask myself why? My mother is just like them so why am I living this way.

Nadia placed adversity in the socio-political and economic context, suggesting that her mother's sacrifices had been forgotten. Nadia described the media portraying a discourse that did not reflect her reality. Perhaps this is why she could not find answers to her suffering. This also connects to a societal dissonance, of Eritreans who have bought into this discourse and those who instead see Eritrean politics as infringing on individuals' human rights:

[167-173]…when I saw the different types of lifestyles I understand by how much I was suffering…from what I understood before and above I understood even more how my nation was suffering…it became clearer [3] Really, what I lived through, in order for my children and my younger siblings to not experience that, I began to get ready to fight.

Perhaps in leaving Eritrea, did she find "answers" [154] to her suffering, which she depicted as an awakening to injustice. Nadia positioned herself as being an agent of change in the world, where power can be found. Her figurative talk on fighting demonstrated a move towards a narrative of resistance against political injustice and towards her dreams:

[179-184]...a country that has democracy, a country where you can meet with people…where you can have your children, find them a good school…where you can speak out, a country where you can speak your heart's desires and be proud.

Nadia looked beyond herself, to a better Eritrea for the generations to come. In describing a better future, she inadvertently highlights how she understands

adversity in Eritrea. Nadia placed power in being able to speak out, emulating the voices of many Eritrean diaspora opposition groups. Nadia's use of 'you' as a pronoun, made her speech quite direct and served to bring me into this vision and share it with her. Nadia described joining demonstrations, acting "the struggles of our nation" [189-190] and going to embassies to speak out against the "wrongs taking place in Eritrea" [195]. Nadia continued her narrative of fighting, positioning herself as a strong, creative and powerful woman.

Nadia went on to describe hardship whilst living in Israel:

> [249-250]…we are used to it…it's in our blood

> [265-278] Think about, it from when I was little […] the stress that started with me, even when I have come here at this age to continue with it…the heaviness…the problems have grown up with us.
> Interviewer: How do you not let that overpower you?
> Nadia: Do you mean how did it not crush me? ... It crushes me…it crushes me. Like it crushes you, really, even it's obvious that it crushes you. So sometimes you see English or Israeli girl the same age as you and compare our bodies, you see a massive difference. One English girl my age will be thinking about her college or makeup, whereas I am thinking about my siblings and how they're going to pay the rent this month and buy food, what my son is going to wear.

Echoing other participants, Nadia described collective adversity as being a part of her very being and perhaps identity. The personification of hardships as growing up with her, may be a reflection that extreme adversity is not something that can be avoided, explaining her narrative of living a "hard life". Perhaps placing hardship within a collective may help her carry hardships in life.

My question assumed that hardships had not crushed her, reflective of discourses that guided my thinking. Nadia instead depicted the embodied reality of hardship on her body and her material reality. Nadia described having to think like a "girl of 40/50 years of age" [302], where "youth has [had] already gone"

[304]. She put this in the context of her responsibilities, in which she could no longer "freely do what you [she] want[ed]" [310]; reflecting her maturing priorities.

Nadia went on to describe her journey to Israel from Eritrea, stating that she had to "bear with it otherwise you [she] will [would] die" [394-395]. Thus telling a narrative, of her and her family's survival, as she envisioned "what may become of them" [432] if she was no longer around.

Nadia storied what it meant to be an Eritrean woman living in Israel, placing adversity in gender inequality and discourses which oppressed:

> [525-528] The guidance of the community is a lot of pressure. Like its ok for a boy to go wrong, it's normal. But if any girl asks for a divorce that's it…like I am trouble or something […] I said I can handle this life…I tried it and I was successful.

Nadia draws on her narrative of resistance, but this time within the Eritrean community (which can be both helpful and restrictive) and against socio-cultural discourses, holding on to her sense of self as a woman who has and can succeed in life. Nadia's construction of self may be built on stories of her mother's strength, which she grew up with. This may also link to a world-view of life as hard, but where "nothing is impossible" [569-570].

In response to my curiosity about Nadia's experiences in the UK, she told me:

> [596-609] Israel didn't believe me. I've come to the UK and until now they haven't believed that I am a refugee […] I am just waiting…so you feel…even as a citizen in your own nation you couldn't live as one and outside they won't accept you as a refugee…so you can't understand what kind of world you're in…like sometimes...I am not a refugee and I am...I don't have a country or nation anymore. From my country I've been…So you think what am I?...I am nothing.

For Nadia, gaining a refugee status seemed to be a political act which would provide her with a legitimate status in society and validate her exile from Eritrea. This may also help to give her a sense of who she is in the context of a new society and a sense of belonging, where she can live within the boundaries of citizenship. For Nadia refusal of a refugee status may imply society does not care. That she is not valued enough as a human for any country to accept her and suggesting that there is no place for her in the world. Thus damaging her sense of self-worth and imposing on the identity she had constructed for herself.

The asylum process can be seen as instilling "fear" [752] and stripping her of the ability to live and work, which she placed value on and supported her preferred construction of self:

> [786-801] When I was in Israel I divorced, started working, I rented a small house…now I would wake up early, five or something, I would go to work and come home late…I would get tired but in the morning when I would wake up but when I am at the bottom, I would find new strength…why? At the bottom of my house is where homeless people would sleep, drug addicts and stuff…they, children of the country, they have full citizenship, but the problems that they have faced in their life or whatever they landed on drugs and stuff…they sleep on the streets, and then I remember myself, I am a girl, I left Eritrea underage…in Sinai I was kidnapped by Bedouin[8] people, all these problems I passed…I married, divorced, holding my child I am putting him to sleep in a warm house that I worked and payed for with my sweat.

Nadia looked back at events that she had survived, seemingly making comparisons to her former self to develop a dominant notion of herself as a 'strong woman'. She holds on to the stories of those who have what she does not, citizenship, but are worse off; perhaps also a reminder of the things she has achieved. Not being able to work in the UK, seemed at odds with the identity she had constructed for herself, rooted in survival and self-sufficiency. She is now

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[8] A local tribe in Sinai

dependent on the state, who will neither accept her nor allow her to be self-sufficient.

Nadia stories isolation and frustration at being "locked in a house" [641-642]. I wondered to what extent this obstructed the strength Nadia had once found within the Eritrean community. Nadia described not being able to continue with her activism in the UK. The UK may be seen as eroding the platform needed to creatively resist. Perhaps even more so when coming against dominant discourses in the UK and difficult living conditions:

> [852-858] Now they smoke drugs, they bring men in…at night you just hold your urine, you get scared to go to the bathroom…anything you put in the fridge they take it. Those few £35 they give you…you buy something, put it in the fridge and they take it. So now there's loneliness, fear and on the other hand you miss your kids […] I didn't sleep for two/three days.

Nadia explained talking to her GP about this and then being placed on medication. Nadia placed her lack of sleep in the context of her environment, contrary to medical intervention, which placed her difficulties in the context of being neuro-chemically imbalanced.

Nadia ended her narrative stating that she was enjoying college, as "they teach like they care" [894]. Perhaps a reflection on a world which leaves people feeling unwanted, but finding some hope in education.

3.5. Osmond: "if one of us would get angry or frustrated…the other would help us keep hope"

One of the charity volunteers introduced me to Osmond. We spoke on the telephone and arranged a time to meet. The interview was conducted on local community premises. Osmond grounded his narrative in the physical/geographical location in which the narrative was taking place and often used Eritrean proverbs to demonstrate his understanding of the world. Osmond often weaved in and out of the stories of other individuals and created a narrative

that was deeply intertwined with multiple narratives; perhaps demonstrating the value he placed on being part of a collective. His narrative often felt like it was made up of mini-stories, connected by narrative threads of hope, humour and luck.

Osmond told me he was born in Mineh[9] and described where it was located, alongside the challenges experienced whilst growing up there:

> [7-20]…it was okay but we never got to finish childhood […] up until 5th grade I was studying well, but when you get to 6th grade, it gets more fearful, there were round-ups[10]…they use to come through the towns.

Similar to other participants, Osmond described a loss of childhood, connected to how his life was increasingly constrained as he got older. Osmond described the impact of governmental control of movement within Eritrea, which created an environment of fear, intensified because he lived near the Ethiopian border, which became a route of exit for many Eritreans trying to leave the country. Governmental distrust, social control and power became key narratives in shaping Osmond's understanding of hardship in Eritrea.

For Osmond, strength may be located in the physical and geographical community and relations, which reinforced his sense of home, becoming more than just a place to live but a site of identity and belonging:

> [84-87]…yes there is fear, but it's your land and you're proud of your land and you know it…you trust your people even when they catch you at the checkpoints you talk to them…you talk to them normally. You have to have confidence because Minah is your home.

It struck me that whilst Osmond spoke about governmental distrust of the people, he maintained his trust in his nation. Osmond went on to demonstrate this trust

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[9] Osmond often refers to the town he grew up in, I have hence given this village a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Mineh is a town in the southern parts of Eritrea, close to the Ethiopian borders.
[10] Round-ups refer to the systematic gathering of young people and forced conscription into the military.

by telling me a story about when he was last stopped at a checkpoint and accused of trying to "escape" [145] from Eritrea. He described having to walk for 12-hours in the heat and being forced to do part of the journey barefoot. Osmond's experiences were told within a narrative not of suffering, but of luck and others who supported, trusted and encouraged him:

> [145-148]…the man came and asks if we had planned to escape and we told him we hadn't […] and he becomes our guarantor[11].

Strength for Osmond did not appear to represent an internal quality or ability, but rather continual support and provision within community relations, thus, representing a relational concept:

> [129-132]…and another man sees us and we finished talking to him and the priest sees us and says 'what's going on' and we tell him what happened and he tells us to be strong and that we told the truth and the truth is the truth…he really encouraged us.

Words like "escape" were used throughout Osmond narrative and are commonly used amongst Eritreans. It highlights the way in which language used may perpetuate different discourses regarding what leaving Eritrea represents. For some, it implies, a narrative of a deserter or defector, those who have abandoned their national duties, thus upholding structural oppression. For others, and perhaps Osmond, it reflects breaking free from government oppression and control, thus giving power to individuals.

Osmond described seeing his friends leave Eritrea and his brother arrested and imprisoned for eleven-months, without his family being allowed to visit him, after he left school to work. Osmond stated he too left school early. If indefinite military service or imprisonment was what lay ahead, perhaps education could no longer be seen as providing access to his desired future:

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[11] Guarantors are individuals who will vouch that you will not be leaving the country and take liability if you do.

[232-242]…so when I should have been going into seven grade, the round up reached Minah […] my mother was constantly telling me to hide, you have ID[12] but it didn't matter if you had no eyes or no teeth they would just round you up [...] once they have you they never bring you back, they take people and after years do they return…think about it, for your family to miss you…it's a problem.

Osmond's fear seemed to be embedded in what military service represented; loss of your town, separation from your family and uncertainty of when you may return. Osmond used an Eritrean proverb to describe why he would not "sit[ting] and wait[ing] until they take you, [and had] to get away quickly" [271]:

[272-273] *instead of becoming ill and going to the doctors, you can look after yourself and have good health'* [laughs].

This proverb may also illustrate how Osmond strengthened his sense of agency, enabling him to respond to oppression and not be a passive recipient. Perhaps he may as well "escape" and be separated from his family, if he will only end up being separated from his family due to military service. Choosing to be pre-emptive in his own life, instead of giving control to those who society placed in a position of power.

I asked Osmond what it was like leaving Eritrea:

[314-318] the journey is very difficult, you don't ever think it's going to be that hard, you will never wish it upon your brother or anyone […] if I told my brother he wouldn't believe me, he will think I'm only saying this because I've made it.

Ideas around having "made it" to Europe may represent having survived the journey, but also highlight the manifestation of the global asymmetry of power and privilege; having to "escape" to the West, seeking the human rights that have

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[12] Young people in school are given yearly student ID's to prove they are still attending school.

been refused elsewhere. Additionally, it draws on a discourse of life in Europe being 'better', silencing narratives of difficulty in exile.

Osmond went on to separate his journey into narratives divided by location. In grounding his journey in the context of countries and people, as opposed to adversity alone, he was able to tell multiple stories of his experiences. He described crossing the border on foot to Ethiopia, in a group of twenty-people and walking for hours across uninhabited land without food. He narrated several occasions where Ethiopians fed them and welcomed them into their homes, telling narratives of kindness and hospitality. Perhaps emphasising preferred responses from the world when in distress.

Osmond went on to describe crossing into Sudan, where he worked with his uncle for two-months. He placed adversity here in the context of religious, racial and gender violence and inequality:

> [380-385]…especially if you're a girl, whether she is a Christian girl, whether she's Muslim she has to wear hijab. There was one girl, where I use to work […] people came and told them to get out and they started hitting the girl.

> [394-397] If they hate you they will even pick up stones and hit you. I had a friend that got hit with a stone as he was walking. The Sudanese life is heavy…you also need money. They constantly ask us for ID and they think if you are Eritrean you have money and ask you for money.

Many Eritrean refugee people settle or travel through Sudan. This route has become well known for traffickers and the Sudanese government. Osmond drew on how this situation is used to exploit Eritrean refuge people for money, who will often look to diaspora family to support them financially on the journey. In many ways, this re-enacts an abuse of power and control they had fled in Eritrea. As Osmond finished telling me about his time in Sudan, he asks:

> [402-421] Do you want me to tell you about Libya?

I wondered how much of Osmond's story was guided by the title of this study and explanation of it. I questioned whether Osmond would be going into the details of his journey to the UK, had I not asked, and the power relations which were reproduced between us, as the researcher and the researched. I reiterated that he could speak as little or as much as he felt comfortable doing. Osmond chose to speak about his journey through Libya, but I remained mindful of my role in the dialogue between us.

Osmond vividly described being trafficked to the Libyan coast. He detailed some of his more difficult experiences whilst traveling through Libya. Similar to other participants, Osmond never spoke about these experiences in first person but within a context of 'we', denoting a collective experience, distancing and possibly avoiding the personal, in a very descriptive account. This is contrary to more traditional forms of retelling in the UK, where individuals may be encouraged to tell 'trauma stories' in first person. Osmond spent over a month waiting by the Libyan coast to get to Italy. I asked Osmond what helped him manage:

> [511-523] It's luck too […] there is nothing we can do about it. When I was in Libya, you say it becomes *zero time*, you can't do anything. You just pray, that's all you can do and the people that are with you, you just support each other […] It's because we prayed we reached this far and if we had decided to give up…to stress…we would just end up hurting ourselves…you need to also have people with you. If I lost hope, the other was praying with me, this would help me.

"Zero time", a phrase commonly used on the battlefield during the war for independence, represents events that have happened and cannot be changed, perhaps pointing to a narrative unconscious. This may also represent acceptance in adversity, which allowed him to maintain his belief in "luck", within the framework of his faith. The associated rituals within Islam may have acted as a source of continuity and relational connection (i.e. praying together) and helped him sustain a site of identity within his faith and God. Osmond described how he and his friend, encouraged each other and would help each other "keep hope" [529], and how his friend once physically saved his life, highlighting that adversity

is never survived alone and suggesting that hope is something that was actively done, praying and supporting one another, as opposed to felt.

Osmond described traveling by sea for eight hours to Lampedusa, one of their two boats sinking and being stranded at sea. Lampedusa has become well known due to the 2013 tragedy where a boat full of Eritreans died at sea. Subsequently, I expected a narrative of loss and fear. However, Osmond told a narrative of survival, social sustenance and humour, talking in great detail about an Eritrean actor who was on the boat with him:

> [570-575]…there was this one actor from Minah with us, named Gotom[13], you may know him, he is in actor, he was good, he was making us laugh, in Libya he was really funny […] you know it renews your mind.

Osmond positioned Gotom as having a restorative role in his narrative. He described the use of laughter and poetry written by Gotom, which brought everyone together and supported them, placing value on creative ways of managing adversity. This reminded me of the wealth of literature, music and drama that was created post-independence, which enhanced a social cohesiveness and cultural identity and reshaped private pain into social dignity. Osmond's detailed narrative of Gotom, represents a way of reconnecting to these values, in the wider telling of his journey.

Osmond paused after this and asks where he can charge his phone. On his return, he quoted:

> [636-637] *they call it exile, without your family you suffer endless, and when tired without resting, problems come upon you'*.

Osmond explained that the saying represented how problems will often come upon you without you asking for them, but you must continue in the face of them. Suffering here is not a consequence of adversity but of having to face adversity

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[13] Pseudonym name

without your family. This may be why Osmond drew so heavily on stories of others who became a surrogate family for him.

Osmond went on to detail his journey through Italy to France. He spent a month in Calais and had different support offered:

> [726-729]…we would even have education but we don't care too much about this at the time, our minds were just focused on getting across to here so they could give us papers.

Osmond can be seen as highlighting the importance of getting his basic needs met first. Getting "papers" may represent the importance of having a stable foundation, before being able to focus on building your life.

Osmond viewed language, communication and money as key in allowing him to build a meaningful life. Money may also represent the means to obtain power and shape his and his family's future:

> [824-828] (If) you don't know the language, how can you…you can't start work…and what you need is money, how can you sort out your future life…how can you guide your future.

> [901 - 913]…without work you can't live, because for you to just sit…what is it that to just sit, and especially because you migrated over…when you migrate over no one will feed you…you have to be able to sweat so you have to be able to work […] you can't just sit there and say they are giving benefits and then sit and be fed that way…your benefits are only £57, with £57 you can't do anything with that for your future…there are problems, your family back home are dependent on you. '*You don't do what your mother sent you to do, but how you find the market'.*

Osmond placed value on being able to work hard and be self-sufficient. He seemed frustrated by a political system that acted as a barrier to him being able to build his future and provide for his family. It may further represent a state of

idleness, at odds with the narrative of perseverance and stripping him of his sense of agency. The proverb used by Osmond, emphased the importance of being able to adapt to your environment by focusing on the future. Perhaps for Osmond, adjustment takes place in the nexus of his culture and resources available within the socio-economic environment.

Osmond focused on what is to come, instead of what has passed, fitting better with ideas of forgetting:

> [934-936]…what's to come is far longer than what has past […] go forward in good faith.

I wondered if this may also explain why Osmond told his narrative of the past in a context of what had helped him keep hope, survive and persevere. Demonstrating the framework which allows him to strive towards his goals.

I asked Osmond if his ways of managing adversity had changed since coming to the UK:

> [978-980] My character/nature hasn't changed…how I interact with people is the same. In Eritrea I use to enjoy making people laugh…I enjoy doing that here to.

> [995-997]…the whole family is the same…people vary sometimes but the past generations in our household, we are like that.

Osmond rooted his sense of self in his family blood line, demonstrating he was still connected to his family and allowing him to find a sense of belonging and identity which transcended geography. Osmond used humour throughout his narrative, and I wondered to what extent his story was also a performance of his character, wanting to make me laugh even in the telling of something that may have been difficult to hear. Osmond ended by laughingly telling me that we should make a film, ending perhaps how he wanted to continue his narrative, with humour and creativity.

4. DISCUSSION

Within this chapter, I will discuss the results in light of existing literature and reflectively discuss the challenges and limitations posed by the research. I will end by exploring the implications for clinical psychology, research and policy.

4.1. Research Finding and Existing Research

This section will explore the findings and related literature. I will aim to address the research questions proposed at the start of this study by suggesting some broad commonalities and wider narratives which link participants' stories:

1. *How do Eritrean refugee people make sense of experiences of extreme adversity?*
2. *Does this differ from Western narratives of psychological trauma, if so, in which ways?*
3. *What contributes to the process and ecology of resilience for Eritrean refugee people?*

4.1.1. Military Service versus Freedom

Most participants identified compulsory and indefinite military service as a key reason for leaving Eritrea. As such, stories of socio-political domination and authority prevailed in narratives of adversity. Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002) describe power as referring to the capacity and opportunity to fulfil or obstruct personal, relational and collective need in which power can oppress. In keeping with such definitions, military service in Eritrea was understood as a political power that oppressed the nation. Participants did not make sense of this as affecting their internal world, but rather their external world, separating them from their families and stripping them of their freedom to study, work, build a future and provide. Hence moving beyond understandings of psychological trauma toward adversity as damaging the social world of individuals (Summerfield, 1997).

The role of indefinite military service as a political and oppressive power, shaping understandings of extreme adversity amongst Eritrean refugee people had not been explored in prior studies, thus providing a nuanced perspective on how extreme adversity was understood. Such understandings of extreme adversity would fit better within a human rights framework (Patel, 2008), allowing us to further explore issues of power and social control, which were prominent in participants' narratives.

In a society where there was no say in your own future, the personal became the political amongst Eritrean refugee people and collective narratives of freedom and justice dominated understandings of extreme adversity. This is contrary to Western understandings of 'trauma' which have often artificially separated the personal and the political (Ingleby, 2005). Departing from dominant Western, individual-centred and biomedical views, participants rarely spoke about adversity within an individual framework and often viewed suffering through a collective lens and within a wider socio-political context, which has largely been ignored in the literature (Watters, 2001).

4.1.2. Acceptance as Survival

A recurring narrative throughout participants' stories was acceptance. Participants often narrated having no "choice" or "control" over adversity; their lives characterised by it. Consequently, participants did not construct their experiences within a framework of trauma which needed to be 'worked through', or view their 'mental health' as a priority to be addressed separately, as is often the case in psychological models (Nickerson, Bryant & Steel, 2011).

Acceptance was not spoken about in a submissive sense which caused them to give up, but in an active sense that kept them surviving in the "struggle". This may be linked to Eritrea's social history, including the 30-year struggle for independence and now the struggle for freedom from a political dictatorship. Whilst the struggles have been fought across different generations, a national Eritrean identity forged within a cultural frame of prolonged hardship and struggle remained. This highlights aspects of Eritrean history which may play an important

role in shaping how extreme adversity is currently understood across generations of Eritrean people currently seeking asylum.

Reclaiming historical memory (Martin-Baro, 1997) may hence be important in making sense of adversity amongst Eritrean refugee people. Recovering historical memory, where the roots of one's identity lie, may be useful in discovering "those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defences of the interests of the exploited classes and which may be applied to the present struggles" (Fals Borda, 1988, p.95).

Survival for many meant perseverance and striving towards goals, accomplishments and economic, material and social resource, rather than emotional well-being (Zarowsky, 2004). Participants also spoke strongly against focusing on past events and chose to focus on the future, perhaps more in line with 'active forgetting' (Summerfiled,1999) and at odds with 'psychological trauma' narratives that position them in the past and as vulnerable. This is in line with research that has questioned trauma discourses and the subsequent use of psychological models (Pupavac, 2001; Summerfield, 1999).

A narrative of acceptance created a space to engage in, resist and respond to the socio-political and economic context in which hardship was understood; whilst for some this involved leaving Eritrea, for others, it meant resisting creatively against oppression (Wade, 1997; Afuape, 2011). This may further link onto narratives of an Eritrean struggle identified in the analysis, in which Eritrean people may be seen as resisting against oppression across history.

4.1.3.   Life in the UK

Participants often narrated life in the UK as having brought a new set of challenges. Their ability to manage was eroded by systems such as state support and restrictive policies, like those which did not allow them to work. Thus reproducing power structures and social control that they had fled in Eritrea, limiting their freedom as they navigated a system of injustice, outside of the social milieu that strength was usually found in.

A narrative of loss of connection and community in the UK was prominent, in which participants often storied isolation and loneliness. Adversity was often described as a loss of relationships, language and connection to their culture and communities. Eisenbruch (1991) emphasises the significance of 'cultural bereavement' referring to the loss of social structures, communities and relationships which may have given life meaning, connected people to their history, identity and lived values. This construct may be more significant when trying to understand adversity amongst Eritrean refugee people. Similarly, Bhugra and Becker (2005) found that loss of cultural norms, social support systems and adjustment to a new culture may impact identity and individual's concept of self, impacting their well-being.

4.1.4.   Ecology of Resilience: Conceptualising Strength

Shotter (1989) highlights that language provides various mechanisms for situating individuals in discourse, which fits with how language was used by participants to position themselves as survivors rather than victims. Whilst participants occasionally spoke about internal qualities, strength was often embedded in the social context and the person-environment interactions (Harvey, 2009). As such, resilience was not something individuals had, but a process promoted within the social and cultural contexts (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012).

Tribe (2002) spoke about the importance of communities in providing opportunities for support in a culturally familiar manner. This was especially relevant for participants, who storied the significance of their community and culture. Being with others within a community could be seen as underpinning resilience by allowing for:
- collective narratives of adversity and strength
- sharing of stories which would encourage and empower
- intergenerational relationships that would guide
- cultural and historical wisdom

- connection to Eritrean rituals and values that acted as opportunities for continuity of culture and identity

These processes may be seen as facilitating physical and emotional adjustment and healing of loss over various dimensions of home, providing a place of rest beyond conflict (Papadopoulos, 2005).

Religion was relevant in the process of resilience, as it could be seen as providing guidance on how to live life, a source of continuity (faith and associated rituals) and a sense of control over their life. Hence, belief systems may function as coping strategies and help to provide meaning and resistance in suffering (Brune, Haasen, Krausz, Yagdiran, Bustos and Eisenman, 2002).

Narratives of hope were always present. Participants spoke about the hope of freedom, justice, education etc. Hope acted as an expansive source of positivity and facilitated survival (Ni-Raghallaigh, Gilligan & Robbie, 2010). The role of hope in resilience has also been highlighted in prior studies (e.g., Goodman, 2004; Sleijpen et al., 2016). Afuape and Krause (2016, p.212) argue that hope is not about optimism and feeling, but is a doing process, a relationship that exists in the "in-betweenness of interaction". Hence, hope is not for the individual to bring forth, but for the community to notice and support, allowing for the co-existence of hope and hopelessness (ibid). This understanding of hope fits best with participants, as hope was not held alone but with others and often narrated within a framework of 'doing'; contributing to participants' resilience.

Participants placed great value on education and work, which became a means of gaining control over their lives, status and power to support their community and provide for their families who they had left behind. Sleijpen et al., (2016) argued that the characteristics of the wider socio-political environment in which refugee people exist are important for facilitating or impeding resilience. Furthermore, Summerfield (2005) highlighted that work has always been central to how refugee people establish a viable place in a new society. This was especially evident in participants' narratives. Access to resources and freedom to build a meaningful life were essential in the process of resilience.

4.2. Critical Review and Limitations

This next section will outline some of the key challenges and limitations of the study, alongside my personal reflections.

4.2.1. Recruitment

Many of the organisations I initially approached to recruit participants expressed a reluctance. The feedback was often that they felt these groups of people would 'not engage' or that they were 'vulnerable' and this was a sensitive topic. Organisations act as the gatekeepers to these populations, calling into question the extent to which research may subsequently avoid individuals and topics, silencing their voices and overlooking the positive impact partaking in research may have (Kvale, 1983).

The organisations from which I recruited often worked with individuals who are seeking asylum or have recently received leave to remain, narrowing down the population sample. Consequently, participants interviewed were fairly similar, all between the ages of 19-35 and the majority male; a reflection of the demographic profile of Eritreans seeking asylum (Conner, 2016). This generation will have a different experience of Eritrea, in comparison to those who are older and would have experienced the occupation of Eritrea and the Ethiopian-Eritrean war. Whilst this means that there is more consistency when exploring collective narratives, I am aware that other narratives, which may vary across generations and historical contexts, may have been lost.

4.2.2. Data Collection

The use of single in-depth interviews for data collection may be criticised (Riessman, 2002). Interviews on participants' experiences may not be separated from the complex web of social relations in which the researcher/researched are positioned. As such, the analysis presented a snapshot of how participants constructed their world and experiences in that moment in time (Lyons & Chipperfield, 2000). Conducting multiple interviews would have allowed me to

gain a deeper level of meaning and richness to data (Cotterill, 1992). However, this was not possible due to time constraints.

4.2.3   Interviews

I had never conducted qualitative research prior to this study and interviewing participants for research was a new experience. I often found it hard to separate out my role as researcher from my role as therapist. Especially as both can be viewed quite similarly; both involve a telling of experiences by a participant while the other empathetically listens, with the view to interpret and understand the narrative (Hart & Crawford-Wright, 1999). I was often left questioning the very idea of 'boundaries', which created an idea that the role of therapist is mutually exclusive from the role of researcher, instead of overlapping in many ways. I found it helpful to shift my focus towards the values and ethics involved in engaging individuals in dialogue about their experiences.

I was also aware of my role in shaping narratives within this study. For example, I often started my questioning by asking about life in Eritrea and finished by asking about life in the UK. Thus, imposing a chronological order and an external idea of what should be told, possibly limiting their choice to narrate their life in a way that made sense to them. My interests, values and beliefs, as well as the research questions, would have shaped the direction of this study from its conception, as well as what openings I chose to follow and what was shut down in participants' narratives. Andrews (2007) stated that she often found that there were certain stories she was more receptive to hearing. I found I was often more interested in hearing stories of resistance and strength and how these connected to sociocultural and political understandings. Thus, these stories may have been privileged in the interview process, making me less attentive to other stories and subsequently influencing the analysis. Aspects of my analysis were in line with what I intended to look for, especially in regards to stories of resilience, strength and the political context of extreme adversity. I have questioned the extent to which I have interpreted the data in the context of my own philosophies, values and experiences, which were influential and would have subsequently driven my discussion.

4.2.4   Quality of Analysis

Prevailing concepts of validity and reliability in research rely on realist assumptions of 'truth'. As such, traditional notions of reliability do not apply to narrative studies. Validity can be reconceptualised to represent the process through which we make claims for the trustworthiness of our interpretations (Mishler, 1990).

Coherence, persuasiveness and transparency can be used to evaluate 'trustworthiness' of our analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These refer to whether, interpretations are reasonable and convincing, the theoretical argument is consistent and different parts of an interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Below I have outlined how I attempted to uphold these criteria:

- *Persuasiveness:* To uphold this, I provided direct quotes from the transcript to support interpretations and used peer review and feedback to ensure my analysis sustained this criterion.
- *Coherence:* I attempted to clearly state the research rationale, allowing the reader to understand my reasons for the chosen methodology and arguments presented for the interpretations (Yardley, 2008). I also described how the interpretations were produced (Riessman, 1993).
- *Transparency:* I upheld this by making transparent my own epistemological assumptions and biases through the process of reflexivity. Alongside this, I made transparent my research strategy, data collection, analysis and interpretation (Riessman, 1993).

4.2.4.1.   Reflections on analysis

My interpretation and my analysis were narrowed down, due to space constraints, according to what I felt was salient in narratives and important for answering the research questions. This meant that my own voice was privileged and that the reader is limited in their ability to appraise the narratives' meanings (Riessman, 1993). I was eager to do participants' narratives justice in my

representation but found this difficult to achieve when I could only present a small portion of their narratives and could not present extended sections of their transcripts. Whilst I analysed the whole transcript as being vital to a participant's narrative, I felt the delicate and intricate details and subtleties in people's stories were lost, which may have impacted transparency and persuasiveness and led to more one-dimensional readings.

4.2.5. Use of interpreter

An interpreter was used for some interviews, where they either played a full interpreting role or were present to interpret when needed. Thus, narratives were not just a construction between the researcher and participant but within a triad of relationships. By not discussing the role interpreters played in the research more explicitly, I have rendered them invisible within participants' narratives (Vera & Patel, 2012). It would have been important to explore the influence interpreters had over the research process and incorporate the interpreter's reflections on the interviews.

The use of interpreters also presented methodological challenges. The use of language to construct the self and others means that interpretation may have the power to reinforce or challenge power inequalities, in which speaking for others becomes a political issue (Temple &Young, 2004). One participant in this research was dependent on the interpreter to speak for them, therefore, my transcript was reliant on the interpreter's words. Since words have specific meaning, dependency on an interpreter to make sense of and convey language strips an individual of political and personal power and the opportunity to define themselves in their own terms (Westermeyer, 1990). Especially as the words interpreters translate will be filtered through their own ideas and judgments (Haenel, 1997). Hence, at different times, the study may have been empowering and disempowering for participants.

It is important to reflect on my own role in the triad relationship. I held a great deal of power in relation to the interpreter, shaping narratives by the stories I chose to follow. Whilst power imbalances were evident, there were also times where the

interpreter was more present in shaping the narratives, where for example, they would elaborate on their background knowledge of what the participants were discussing and facilitate understanding of particular words and concepts with which I was not familiar. Due to time constraints, the interpreter was not present in the analysis of the narratives they partook in creating; collaboration with the interpreters was limited and further demonstrates the imbalance of power in such relationships.

Methodological limitations also lay in the analysis of the transcripts. Two of the participants' transcripts would have had involvement from external individuals who were involved in the back translations of transcripts and triangulation of terminology. As such, the meaning of participants' stories is reliant on several individuals, all who come with their own sociocultural contexts, which would invariably influence their translations of participants' talk. As such, the construction of meaning in participants' stories are a myriad of understanding from several individuals, and can not be said to directly reflect the actual meaning of participants.

4.2.6. Reflections on Power

I reflected on how the interview setting may have threatened the power held by participants and impacted their narratives. The title of my project may have served to 'other' participants as refugee people, from the general population, but perhaps even within the Eritrean population in the UK. It may have also served to encourage narratives which centred on being a refugee person, shaping their construction of self, which may have been different had the title not implied I was interested in the 'refugee experience'.

As a British-born Eritrean female, I could be seen by participants as standing outside or inside what they conceived as the Eritrean collective. This would have influenced expectations of my presumed knowledge and ideas about Eritrean culture, power and emotional vulnerability, impacting the ways in which participants may have wished to narrate their lives. I am aware that these co-created narratives, may have differed in some ways had I been, for example, a

male or a non-Eritrean person, which may have opened up some avenues for dialogue and closed others down.

Whilst I emphasised confidentiality and anonymity, the Eritrean community is a small one and there are few degrees of separation between individuals. Awareness of this may have silenced narratives which may have been seen as contradictory to 'Eritrean culture'.

4.2.7. Reflections on Privilege

During this research, I was reminded of Du-Bois' (1994) concept of White Privilege. I reflected on the role of privilege in my life in which, whilst I am oppressed as a black woman, I also hold a great deal of privilege, as I am free to work, study and earn money. This gives me power and freedom to shape my future in many ways not always granted to Eritrean refugee people. I have come to realise that the resources and benefits I have considered my rights have turned out to be privileges, granted to me by virtue of being born in the UK. Afuape (2011) uses the metaphor of wind to reflect on privilege as not being concrete or fixed, but is instead like a flow and a force that may change direction; this metaphor was particularly pertinent during this study.

4.3. Implications and Recommendations

This next section will discuss the implications for clinical psychology theory, practice and research. Whilst this research was carried out to explore understandings of extreme adversity and strength amongst Eritrean refugee people, the implications of the study can extend beyond this group, to wider populations of refugee people. Although participants are not representative of these wider populations, their narratives highlight the challenges of applying a Western-dominant narrative of trauma globally.

4.3.1. Clinical Psychology: Theory

This study has implications for dominant narratives of trauma which have informed psychological theory, subsequently shaping local and global mental health practices. Narratives of trauma are underpinned by ideological assumptions and realist epistemologies, which lend themselves to viewing human experience through the lens of psychological damage. This may be more meaningful within capitalist societies, where feeling good about yourself is a distinctive feature of contemporary culture, and where happiness is privileged over other emotional states (Furedi, 2004). Assuming universality of constructs such as 'psychological trauma' is to impose ideological and epistemological systems, which may be incompatible with the meaning individuals have given to extreme adversity. Thus, psychological theories of trauma may act as cultural imperialism serving to disempower and oppress refugee people and colonise understandings of adversity (Summerfield, 1999).

During tellings of extreme adversity, participants often narrated their needs, such as food, security and safety being infringed upon. Maslow (1954) argued that a variety of human needs (from food and water to safety and security) must be met before we can achieve our full potential in life. Psychological theories have often explicitly linked notions of need, with the notion of human rights (Doyal, 2001). Theoretical understandings of needs as human rights may help us to view extreme adversity as violations of human rights, helping us to have a theoretical and practical basis to our work that is not apolitical and based on the development of social justice.

Consequently, this research serves to highlight the need for alternative frameworks, when trying to understand extreme adversity. Adapting psychological theory to view adversity through frameworks of collective and social suffering, acceptance, socio-political injustice may serve to de-ideologize artificial realities (Martin-Baro, 1994) and decolonise narratives of extreme adversity; allowing room for understandings which extend beyond the individual.

As such, it is important to note that the importance of politicising distress can be extended to individuals who have experienced hardship, inequality and are oppressed, as well as refugee people. Individuals who may have experienced political and social injustices and had their responses to these sanitized and pathologized within apolitical and medical framework.

4.3.2   Clinical Psychology: Practice

4.3.2.1.   *In the therapy room*

Dominant understandings of adversity have led to models of working which assume psychological therapy is needed to reduce or 'treat' emotional distress. This is at odds with how participants narrated their experiences. Thus highlighting the importance of listening to people's narratives before determining what 'support' would be most appropriate if any. Particularly within cultures, like Eritrean culture, where speaking about emotions or voicing individualised adversity, may not be the norm or have different connotations.

Clinical psychology may instead work in a more client-led manner, transcending understandings based on emotions and formulating extreme adversity within the wider contexts in which refugee people have made sense of their life, as well as within the collective and systemic ways they have responded to adversity (Afuape, 2011). This may also involve a more collaborative conversation, which acknowledges and builds on clients' abilities, resources and values. Thus utilising people's virtues that may have been hidden by dominant narratives of trauma (Martin-Baro, 1994) and supporting their preferred ways of being and resisting in the world.

It will be important for psychologists to further recognise and consider the variability and volatility of refugee people's socio-political contexts. Psychologists may then work to 'co-create' the intents, expectations and hopes for therapy (Fredman, 2008). This may be helpful in ensuring that we avoid assumptions that we can 'treat' the effects of political injustices and that therapy is needed for 'recovery'.

This may also mean taking a non-neutral stance and working to name experiences of injustice (Patel, 2008; Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1995). This may involve asking questions, not just about how they are feeling or sleeping, but about what happened, who did it and why (Patel, 2008). Further allowing a space to explore and address issues of power in all contexts.

Within my role in a CAMHS team, I have noticed that, on hearing refugee people's experiences of adversity, professionals refer them for psychological therapies. These referrals, albeit with good intentions, may be imposed upon the refugee person by the helping professional. Consequently, there have been times when individuals have not welcomed or wanted psychological support. This highlights the role of power within helping relationships and is a reminder that psychological intervention may not always be ethical, helpful or wanted (Lilienfield, 2007; Gotzsche, 2016).

4.3.2.2.   *Moving beyond the therapy room: Sociopolitical level*

It is important to consider the extent to which clinical psychology services and health professionals set up and maintain sick roles, pathologizing and psychologizing human suffering, in the absence of structures through which to reconstitute a meaningful life (Eastmond, Ralphsson & Alinder, 1994). In doing so, refugee people continue to be viewed as damaged, instead of messengers of injustice. The focus on harm at only the individual psychology level, for which 'treatment' is offered, only serves to divert attention away from addressing inequality at all levels and the need for political action (Patel, 2008).

Therefore, it is essential that we move beyond the therapy level, as this is not sufficient to interrupt injustice on a societal level (Martin-Baro, 1996). Primary and secondary service frameworks may then focus on values, principles and ethics when providing service to people in distress (Afuape, 2011). This may involve, for example, services and organisations ensuring there is always access to interpreters, as not doing so would be to render refugee people voiceless. Thus re-enforcing power differentials, stripping them of personal and political power and of the opportunity to assert their rights (Patel, 2002) and influence how services 'support' them.

Instead of focusing on 'treating' effects of injustices, psychologist may work indirectly to provide clinical supervision for organisations and service providers who are working with individuals who have suffered human right violations. Helping them to think about the impact of the work on themselves and aiding the process of reflection on power differentials, which bring biases, beliefs and assumptions - which influence their practice - into consciousness (Patel, 2003b).

It may be important to move service provisions away from diagnosis-centred care towards trying to understand needs, with an awareness that they will be multifactorial. Services may then work to ensure that the voices of communities are heard when designing service structures, as they will hold a wealth of knowledge about needs and support required when rebuilding their lives in a new country (Fernando, 2005). This could include working to provide opportunities for social, economic and community support in a culturally familiar manner (Grey & Young, 2008). Additionally, psychologists could work alongside groups, communities and institutions to support collective, religious and practical ways of adapting and surviving in a new country. All participants storied the importance of community, wanting to help others and being encouraged or supported by those who had come before them. This is not to place psychologists at the centre of working with refugee communities but to highlight how psychologist may become agents of the local community, to support political and social responses to extreme adversity.

Patel (2008) argues that rather than focusing on the effects of torture, it may be better to reflect on the aims of it, helping us to focus on perpetration rather than the inner-world of the individual. This may also be a better way to work with adversity amongst Eritrean refugee people. Connecting to their own understandings of extreme adversity and redefining indefinite military service as modern-day slavery and government policies as political violence. Psychologists may then work with testimonies, as opposed to therapies, reframing survivors' stories of adversity in the socio-political context in which it actually took place (Bala, 2005). For example, the documentation of political violence and torture as a medico-legal report, to support an asylum claim, may be a validating

experience for the refugee person (Afuape, 2011), acting as a public document of an oppressive regime that violates human rights. The act of remembering can then be used to make changes in the social world, instead of being confined to the therapy room. This highlights the importance of psychosocial support not being apolitical, paying attention to what has happened to people and their current contexts, bringing violence back to cultural consciousness and perceiving it as a political issue, which will enable us to envisage strategies to overcome it (Seifert, 1998).

Participants spoke about adversity in the UK, in the context of a lack of social and economic opportunities and resource, in which government policies may often block the survival and adaptation of refugee people. For example, participants narrated not being able to work whilst seeking asylum. During the passage of the Immigration Bill 2015-16, the government rejected a clause that would have enabled individuals seeking asylum to take up work (Gower, 2016). Psychologists may then work to open doors for dialogue with those outside the mental health profession, i.e. sociologists, religious and community leaders, lawyers, and politicians, to help develop insight into the effects of government policies (Bala, 2005). Additionally, psychologists may lobby for changes in policy, which currently make asylum processes more difficult, isolating and distressing, replicating experiences of control, oppression and power that refugee people have fled. For example, since 2005, people recognised as a 'refugee' are initially only given permission to stay for five years, making it difficult to plan and make decisions about the future (Refugee Council, 2010). It is essential that we advocate for more optimal conditions for refugee people, working to make systems that interact with them more welcoming. This is especially important as racism, hostility, inequality and oppression in services, as well as society, may disrupt adjustment and notions of home (Muir & Gannon, 2015).

4.3.2.3. Thinking globally

This research highlights that adversity across the globe may not fit Western narratives of psychological trauma. Diagnostic labels such as PTSD should not be imposed by global humanitarians in a naïve and reductionist way (Moghimi, 2012). For psychology to play a role globally, it needs to appreciate the nuanced

ways people and societies have learned to survive in the face of adversity. Examination of extreme adversity outside of the trauma lens moves us to focus on the causes of distress and suffering, in which we, as psychologists, must redefine our roles as human rights advocates (Patel, 2008). Psychologists may then support refugee people to seek reparation and justice, condemning and challenging violence and human right violations, and working to prevent injustices that cause social suffering (Patel, 2008).

4.3.2.4.   Dilemmas of taking a political approach to 'trauma'
Ioakimidis (2013, p.3) states that social work may be considered a "frontline profession". He stresses the political nature of the work and the enhancement and commitment of social work to social justice and the emancipation of oppressed communities. Similarly, psychology may be considered a 'frontline profession', working directly with some of the most vulnerable people in society, in which psychologist too must make a commitment to social justice.

Psychology, however, has often been an individualised discipline in which models and theories have been used by mental health professionals to perpetuate social, economic and politically sanitized models of distress (Boyle, 2011; Punamäki, 1989) and healing. In psychology traditions, direct involvement in political matters may be frowned upon (Punamäki, 1989). Dilemmas may arise when psychologists try to move away from individualised ways of working, to ways that are political, whilst being employed in an environment which imposes formal and informal constraints. For example, where services require lengthy and distressing retellings of 'trauma histories' and/or completion of 'trauma' questionnaire that may cause distress completing. Such practices may only serve to cause unintended harm. Another example may be where services expect 'psychology work' to be confined to the therapy room, whilst psychologists may feel the best use of time may be indirect work, supervising and liaising with solicitors and the home office in support of an asylum application, taking a more political approach to the work.

Ioakimidis (2013) argues the importance of social workers maintaining an ethical commitment to clients, by adopting a social justice stance. Similarly, a social

justice positioning will ensure that psychologists act in the best interests of their clients where conflicts may arise. Psychologists have an ethical duty to act in the interest of their clients and do no harm (Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists, 2008). Psychologists, similar to social workers, may use this ethical positioning within their profession, to defend the values and ethical commitments of the profession.

4.3.3. Implications for Research

This research was done with a small group of participants, hence, more research is needed in dialogue with Eritrean refugee people, as well as other communities. This would allow other voices to be heard and generate alternative frameworks of understanding for professionals. For example, this study only had one female participant, research with more Eritrean refugee women, who may have varied experiences to men, is important in order to explore and privilege their understandings of extreme adversity. Such research should be conducted outside the lens of trauma, as not doing so will only serve to perpetuate the psychological trauma fallacy, silencing stories that are more relevant to their experiences (Young, 1995).

Participants often storied the difficulties of adjusting to life in the UK. Further research may explore difficulties in host countries and the current contexts in which refugee people are surviving, rather than focusing on pre-exile experiences. Such research could be used to understand the processes and factors that have facilitated adaptation and ability to build a meaningful life. Given how all participants narrated the role of the community in the UK, and that refugee people are often from collectivist cultures, further research could also explore community resources and processes. This will allow us to develop enhanced ways in which we can support and work with communities.

It is important to think about what environments we may be recreating when we carry out research. For example, one participant jokingly asked if this was going to be like a "home office interview", upon seeing my notepad and pen. Future research may need to consider ways for exploration in a less threatening and

more naturalistic manner. Methodologies that work in dialogue with refugee people, perhaps like action-research, may be less intimidating. They may also be helpful in highlighting and addressing oppressive contexts, power and acts of resistance. This would further allow researchers to ask for whom the research is being carried out and who benefits from it.

4.4. Conclusion

Over the years I have witnessed many of my family members risking death to leave Eritrea. I have often felt angered at what they have suffered and helpless to do anything about it. My frustration is often compounded within my social and professional context, where internalised dominant discourses, imposed upon refugee people, are viewed as the 'right' way to make sense of people's responses to adversity. Thus, ignoring culturally relevant forms of meaning-making and the political contexts in which refugee people have been forced to flee their homes.

Through doing this research I have experienced a range of emotions from exhaustion and sadness at the level of political, economic and social injustices faced by participants and awe at the strength shown in all they have overcome and continue to survive. As an Eritrean woman, I was frustrated with myself for not finding more female participants and reflective of the silencing of gender-based violence against women and how I may have further silenced the voices of women in research. I remain conscious that my own desires to focus on participants' stories of dignity and hope, in the context of so much suffering may have made me less attentive to aspects of their stories which attempted to name the violence that had threatened their life. This research has attempted to shed light on the political injustices faced by Eritrean refugee people in their homeland and in the UK. I have often personally struggled with the question of whether any of this will make a difference, but I continue to hope for a world in which justice prevails.

5.   REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A: SEARCH TERMS AND PAPERS YEILDED

The following search terms were used to access the literature surrounding refugee people's experiences of extreme adversity. Literature was identified within the databases EBSCOhost, PsychARTICLES, PsychINFO and Science Direct.

1) ESBSCO PsychINFO and PsychARTICLES.

Date parameters: 1980 to 2017

Search Term 1	Search Term 2	Number of Articles
Refugee	Adversity	310
Refugee	Distress	1,099
Refugee	Trauma	4,443
Refugee	Psychology	6,580
Refugee	Therapy	2,250
Refugee	Post Traumatic Growth	21
Refugee	Resilience	1,021
Refugee	Strength	820
Refugee	Human Rights	4,704
Refugee	Justice	2,647
Refugee	UK or United Kingdom	2,647
Refugee	Britain or England	8,381
Eritrea	Refugee	313
Eritrea	Trauma	27
Eritrea	Adversity	2
Eritrea	Distress	29
Eritrea	Stress	70
Eritrea	Resilience	5
Eritrea	Strength	30
Eritrea	Politics	555

2) Science Direct

Date parameters: 1980 to 2017

Search Term 1	Search Term 2	Number of Articles
Refugee	Adversity	645
Refugee	Distress	2,947
Refugee	Trauma	3,336
Refugee	Psychology	2,729
Refugee	Therapy	4,394
Refugee	Post Traumatic Growth	596
Refugee	Resilience	1,437
Refugee	Strength	4,838
Refugee	Human Rights	8,586
Refugee	Justice	3,209
Refugee	UK	5,463
Refugee	United Kingdom	3,320
Refugee	Britain	3,754
Eritrea	Refugee	380
Eritrea	Trauma	299
Eritrea	Adversity	30
Eritrea	Distress	243
Eritrea	Stress	1,316
Eritrea	Resilience	130
Eritrea	Strength	777
Eritrea	Politics	378

A snowballing effect from relevant articles was utilised, looking for appropriate literature on their reference lists. Additionally, Google Scholar and grey literature were also examined for relevant documents utilising the above search terms.

APPENDIX B: SEARCH STRATEGY

1. Titles and abstracts were used to assess relevance of the literature
2. All articles which were not considered relevant to the study were excluded. This included studies that did not talk about refugee people in relation to adversity.
3. Literature which spoke about the following was included:
   a. Trauma, PTSD, global mental health
   b. Criticisms of trauma discourse and PTSD
   c. Interventions for refugee people
   d. Resilience and strength
   e. Experiences of refugee people in the UK
   f. Ethnographic studies that spoke about extreme adversity (for example war) and cultural understandings of adversity.
   g. Eritrea and the historical and current socio-political context
   h. Eritreans understandings of adversity
4. Literature which was considered relevant was examined in more detail.
5. A snowballing effect from relevant articles was utilised, looking for appropriate literature on their reference lists.
6. Google Scholar and grey literature were also examined for relevant documents utilising the search terms listed in Appendix A.

APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET

<u>**University of East London**</u>
School of Psychology
Stratford Campus
Water Lane
London E15 4LZ

<u>**Participant Information Letter**</u>

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am looking for individuals to take part in a study. This study is about:

"Narratives of Extreme Adversity and Strength Amoungst Eritrean Refugee People"

This is a letter to let you know a little bit more about the study and what it will involve, before you decide whether or not you would like to participate. This study is being carried out as part of a Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology within the University of East London. Please take your time to read through this information. If you have any more questions or need anything clarified, please contact me using the details below.

What is this study about and why is it being carried out?

This study is about trying to understand how Eritrean refugee people in the UK understand their experiences of hardship and what gives them strength. With the Eritrean community growing in the UK, I believe it is really important to better understand how the Eritrean people respond, endure and talk about difficult experiences. I am also really interested in understanding what has given Eritrean refugee people strength during their time in Eritrea, their journey to the UK and when living in the UK. I am hoping that by better understanding how Eritrean refugee people understand extreme hardships and strength, the way in which organisations and professionals support refugee people will be improved, allowing them to provide better support, that is more relevant to the Eritrean culture.

Who can take part in this study?

This study is looking for people who have been born in Eritrea and consider themselves Eritrean and have come to the UK seeking asylum. We are looking for individuals who are over the age of 17 years.

What it will involve?

This study will involve talking about your experiences growing up in Eritrea, your journey to the UK and life in the UK. You will not have to talk about anything you do not feel comfortable talking about and will be able to share as much or as little as you would like. You do not have to discuss any difficult experiences that you have had. The interview will last for approximately 60 minutes however you may stop the interview early if you wish.

Where will the interview take place?

The interview will be arranged over the telephone. I will ring you to arrange a date, time and place that is most convenient for you.

Will you share my details and information?

Everything you share with me in the interview will be kept private and confidentially stored on a password-protected computer. All information that you give me that may identify who you are will also be taken out or made anonymous. I will be keeping transcripts and audio recordings of the interviews but these will be kept confidentially and no one but myself will have access to them. The audio recording will be deleted after successful examination and the transcripts will be stored confidentially for 5 years and will then be destroyed. Your real name will not be used in the analysis and the write up. The only time I may need to pass on what you tell me is if it involves current harm to yourself or others. In this event I will always talk to you first and discuss what action may be needed.

Do I have to be involved?
No, you do not have to be involved in this study. It is completely your choice to do so and you do not need to provide a reason. You are also able to change your mind about participating in the study at any time without giving a reason. Once we have had our interviews together I will aim to analyse the data.

What if I change my mind after I have had the interview?
You are still allowed to change your mind and withdraw after you have had the interview. In this case all the information you provided will be withdrawn and destroyed. If you do wish to withdraw after the interview has taken place, please do so before January 2017.

Will this study be published?
This study will be written up and submitted as part of a doctoral thesis, in the University of East London. This study may be published in the future and be discussed as part of a presentation. All your details will be anonymous within this write up and whenever the study is shared. If you are interested in the results of the study a copy can be sent to you.

Does this study have ethical approval?
In order for research to minimise risk of harm, ethical approval is always needed to conduct research. This study has received ethical approval from the University of East London. If you have any concerns about his research or about how it was conducted you can contact the study supervisor Maria Castro, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ (Tel: 020 8223 4422, Email: m.castro@uel.ac.uk) or Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mary Spiller, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ (Tel: 020 8223 4004, Email: m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk).

Any other questions

If you have any other questions please feel free to contact me, using the details below.

Name: *Haben Ghezai*
Address: University of East London
                 School of Psychology
                 Romford Road
                 London E15 4LZ
Email: *u1438300@uel.ac.uk*
Telephone: 0208 223 4422

This information sheet is for you to keep. Thank you for taking the time to read it.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent Form

Please complete this form once you have read the information sheet and/or listened to an explanation about this research.

Title: "Narratives of Extreme Adversity and Strength Amongst Eritrean Refugee People"

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. If you have any questions regarding taking part in this research or arising from the information sheet please ask, before signing this form. You will also be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Please tick or initial the box:

I have read and understood the information sheet given to me in this study ☐

I confirm I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep. ☐

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study and discuss the answers and details of this study. ☐

I understand that all the information given in this study will remain confidential and only the researcher involved will have access to identifying data. ☐

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study even after the interview has been conducted and withdraw my information, without reason before [Dec 2016]. After this date I understand that the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted.

☐

I understand what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.

☐

I consent to being audio recorded

I hereby fully and freely agree to take part in the research, which has been fully explained to me.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS): ………………………………………….

Participant's Signature: ………………………………………………………….

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS): ……………………………………….

Researcher's Signature :..………………………………………………………..

Date: ………………………………

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

<u>Introductions :</u>

Reminder of what the study is about, confidentiality, right to withdraw, ask if they have any questions about the research & informed consent sheet signing (if not done so already).

The following questions will form a framework to guide the research questions and possible topics.

<u>Possible Questions :</u>

- ☐   Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like growing up in Eritrea?
- ☐   The Eritrean people have been through many difficult experiences Including war.
- ☐   Can you tell me about how you and your family managed some of
- ☐   The difficulties that may have arisen when you were in Eritrea?
- ☐   How do you make sense of these events?
- ☐   Can you tell me a little about why you left Eritrea?
- ☐   Can you tell me about what the journey to the UK was like?
- ☐   How did you manage some of the difficulties that arose?
- ☐   What things have helped you manage/ give you strength?
- ☐   How have things been for you in the UK?
- ☐   Have your ways of managing and coping changed since you came
- ☐   To the UK?
- ☐   Can you tell me how your ways of managing and coping have changed?
- ☐   Can you tell me how they haven't changed?

<u>Prompts</u>
- ☐   Can you tell me a little more about that?
- ☐   Can you explain what you mean by that?
- ☐   Can you tell what that was like?
- ☐   Can you tell me about what that means to you?
- ☐   How do you understand that?
- ☐   Can you give me an example?

<u>Debriefing</u>

- ☐   How do you feel about the conversation we had? Do you have any questions about this research or what we have talked about that you would like me to answer? Provide information on where they can go if further support is needed.

APPENDIX F: TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

Transcript Convention	Meaning
[1]	Pause - LENGTH IN SECONDS
[Silence]	Pause - 10 seconds or more
[Laughs] [Sighs] [Coughs]	Laughter – Sighing - Coughing
[Inaudible]	Inaudible – unable to make out what has been said – approximate number of words or length of time specified
<I: Text> <P: Text>	Interviewer's or Participant's interjections - overlapping
[12-13]	Transcript line numbers
…	Where interviewer interjections such as short utterances of encouragement, e.g. 'uh-huh' or 'yeah' been removed Also used to replace participant utterances such as 'errr'
[…]	Where lines or words of transcript have been excluded
Italics	Indicates a cultural proverb, idioms, sayings etc

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: John Turner

SUPERVISOR: Maria Castro Romero

COURSE: Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

STUDENT:

 Haben   Ghezai

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: Exploring how extreme adversity and strength are contextualised amongst Eritrean refugee people.

DECISION OPTIONS:

1.   **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a

revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

HIGH

MEDIUM

LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):
It is possible that some narratives may prove a little upsetting to the researcher, but the risk is low and management of this will likely be effective and supported by the supervisor

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data. N/A *(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)*

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/

APPENDIX H: DEBRIEFING SHEET

<u>DEBRIEF SHEET & CONTACTS</u>

Thank you very much for making this study possible.
This study aimed to explore how you understand the difficult experiences as well as what gives you strength. I am really interested to hear what you found helpful or unhelpful.

Some of the things you have talked about today may have left you feeling low or upset. This is quite normal and often passes after a few days. However, if these feelings persist there are local sources of support and comfort, which may already be familiar to you:

The most immediate sources of comfort and help are likely to be *your own family and friends.* You can also contact the charity that currently supports / has supported you who can provide you with further advice and support or direct you to other services. I can also liaise with the organisation from which you were recruited, should you require additional support after the interview.

Your GP may be able to refer you to more specialised local support services. You can also contact services such as these:

<u>Migrant helpline</u>
Migrant helpline is a charity, they offer support to migrants in distress
01304 203 977

<u>Samaritans</u>
The Samaritans is a helpline which is open 24 hours a day.
Telephone: 08457 909090
Website - www.samaritans.org

<u>Eritrean Community in the UK (ECUK)</u>
ECUK is a community organisation that work especially with Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers.
Telephone: 02077007995
Email: office@ericomuk.org.uk
Address: 84 Mayton Street, London, N7 6QT

<u>Refugee Support Network (RSN)</u>
Refugee Support Network help young **refugees** to build more hopeful futures through education.
Address: Suite 4.1, The Chandelier Building, 8 Scrubs Lane, London, NW10 6RB
Website: refugeesupportnetwork.org

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONS USED TO GUIDE ANALYSIS

1. Why are they telling the narrative? What are they trying to communicate?
2. What purpose does the narrative serve?
3. How are they positioning themselves in the narrative?
4. What context are they placing the narrative in?
5. What contexts are being neglected or un-attended to?
6. What identity/identities are they performing in the narrative?
7. What is shaping the identities they are taken on?
8. What are the stories they are telling about who they may be in the future?
9. What are the contradictions in their stories?
10. What other stories are they drawing on?
11. What other voices can be heard in their story?
12. What collective story are the telling?
13. What resources are they drawing on?
14. Why are these resources important?
15. How are these resources shaping the story they are telling?
16. How are they trying to communicate their story to you?
17. Who is being forgotten/excluded in their story
18. What are the larger patterns of storytelling?
19. What social roles are being performed?
20. What is this narrative saying about their place in the world?
21. How have you (as the researcher) contributed to this narrative?

APPENDIX J: SAMPLE OF ANALYTIC PROCEDURE

247. or any problems you face, you can't sleep in peace, you always
248. get ordered to work away from home, being told to go back to
249. you country … doing night shifts as a guard, all of it, we are
250. used to…. Its basically in our blood.
251. **Interviewer:** Mmmm.
252. **NADIA:** So you don't have a choice but you have to think how
253. you can work to get the best life.
254. **Interviewer:** So you're always moving forward.
255. **NADIA:** Yeh.
256. **Interviewer:** Mmmm…Its interesting you said …like its in your
257. blood almost.
258. **NADIA:** Yeh.
259. **Interviewer:** That was interesting… I was wondering if you could
260. tell me more about that. What you meant by it?
261. **NADIA:** Err what I mean is from your childhood, its an arduous
262. life, if you pass these problems from then you get used to the
263. arduous life.
264. **Interviewer:** Mmmmm
265. **NADIA:** Like…Think about, it from when I was little from when I
266. was 11 years old the stress that started with me, even when I
267. have come here at this age to continue with it errr the
268. arduousness errr the problems have grown up with us.
269. **Interviewer:** Mmmm how do you not let that over power you.
270. **NADIA:** Do you mean how did it not crush me?
271. **Interviewer:** Yeh.
272. **NADIA:** Yeh. It crushes me, it crushes me. Like it crushes you,
273. really, even its obvious that it crushes you. So sometimes you see
274. English girl or Israeli girl the same age as you, when you see her
275. and compare our bodies, you see a massive difference. One
276. English girl my age will be thinking about her college or makeup
277. whereas I am thinking about my siblings and how they're going
278. to pay the rent this month and buy food, or
279. what my son is going to wear. That's what I am thinking about
280. not about myself. So do even in this life as a woman I can't think
281. about myself how they [P] My son is in Israel. Its hard as a
282. mother to leave my son behind but I have no choice because
283. even when I was there I didn't get to see my son. For 12 to 16
284. hours he would stay with a babysitter.
285. **Interviewer:** Mmmmm.
286. **NADIA:** So I can get them food to eat. And if I was to look after
287. him myself then I can't him. So I only had one choice because we

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Haben Ghezai
Talking about life in Israel
Discrimination – a constant reminder she does not belong
Working hard – perhaps contributes to a narrative of self-sufficiency - hasn't given up

Haben Ghezai
Hardship is a part of her – weaved into her very being
'Our blood' – role of the collective - perhaps tied to wider forms of story telling – a collective struggle in hardship?? perhaps connected to stories she told of her mother

Haben Ghezai
Element of acceptance – not defeated but resistant and defiant

Haben Ghezai
Suggested she is moving forward

Haben Ghezai
Following that 'small' story

Haben Ghezai
Life has always been hard; she has known no different – but also life for Eritreans have always been a struggle

Haben Ghezai
Problems grown with you, are not unique of exception - familiarity of hardship

Haben Ghezai
Make the assumption that she has not been broken – polarised

Haben Ghezai
Embodied reality of hardship, not just mental but physical effect on the body in comparison to others – adversity as having real effects on real bodies.

Haben Ghezai
Material reality of what it means for your family and loved ones. Narrative of what it means to be leaving in exile – economic context

Haben Ghezai
Priorities have continued to be her loved ones – from a young age he has retained an identity in which she is providing – putting her own needs last

Haben Ghezai
Personalises the story – as a women then as a mother
What it means to be an Eritrean mother in exile

Haben Ghezai
Has left son behind- guilt at leaving him verses the hope of a better future for him once she has been granted asylum in the UK

Haben Ghezai 4 minutes ago
Limited access to economic resources – food mean in order for her and her son to survive – she must leave him – in Israel to work and now to get asylum in UK

APPENDIX K: SAMPLE OF SPIDER DIAGRAM - INDIVDUAL
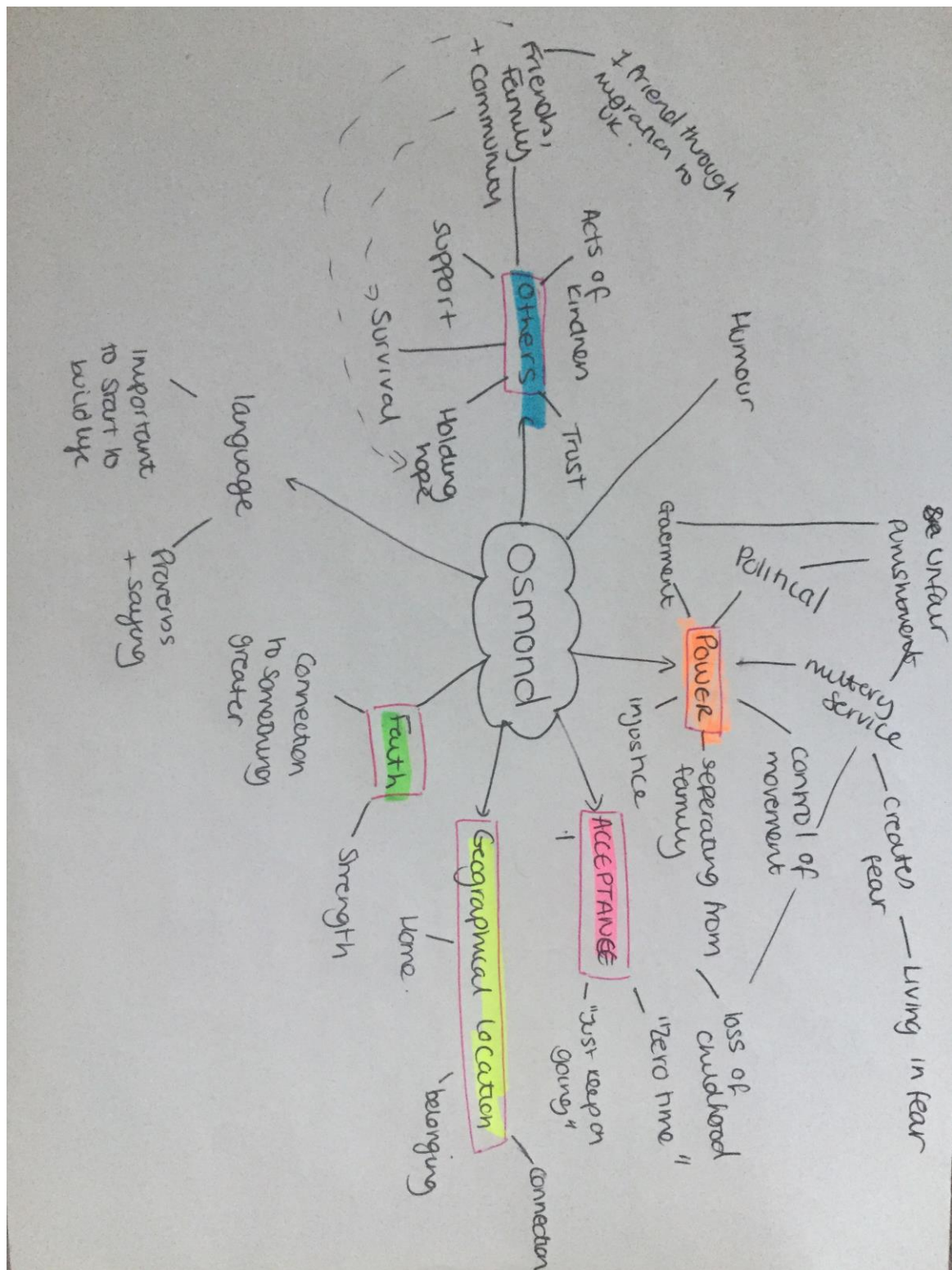
APPENDIX L: SPIDER DIAGRAM – GROUP
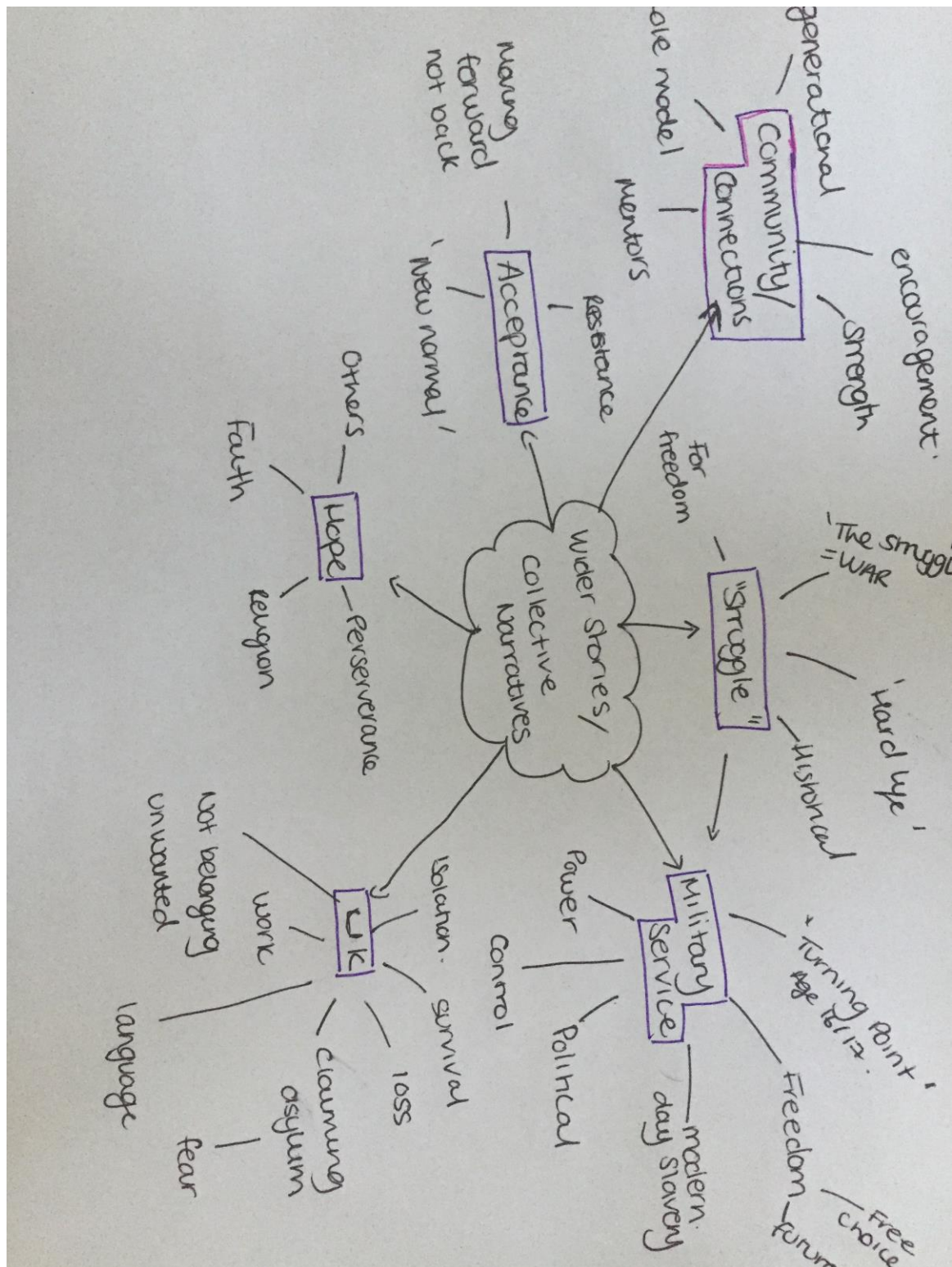
APPENDIX M: STEPS TAKEN WHEN MOVING FROM INDIVIDUAL TO BROADER NARRATIVES

1. First I ensured that the data had been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail

2. Individual transcripts: Initial analysis at an individual level

3. I moved on to look at individual transcripts for more general stories/themes/broader narratives that they may be telling and documented these on an individual spider diagram.

4. I then moved on to check that the stories/themes/ broader stories outlined were consistent and reflective of individual narratives by re-reading individual narrative.

5. I then moved on to look across individual diagrams and transcripts and mapped out connecting stories/broader narratives/themes.

6. I then checked that wider stories were consistent with transcripts by re-reading.