

From Support to Solidarity: Refugees' Interactions with Church Communities in London

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Abstract

This study explores the role of church communities in the everyday lives of refugees in London. It is concerned with how refugees' interactions with church communities contribute to their strategies to establish community and home in new geographical locations. Such a study makes an important contribution to understanding how refugees, as social agents, actively seek solutions for their lives and how civil society responds to refugees at a time when states are failing to fulfil their obligations to them.

This research adopts a lived religion approach which recognises the importance of the agency of individuals and collectivities such as church communities, as well as the power of organisational actors such as religious institutions. The idea of religion as lived experience allows for consideration of the way religion can cross boundaries through the everyday strategies of individuals. Consequently, in-depth interviews with refugees, clergy and laity were a very important source of data for this study. Data was also collected and recorded during ethnographic fieldwork which took place in 2013 in churches and refugee centres across the city of London.

The evidence from this study showed that finding a place of belonging is the most important objective in refugees' choice of church communities even if it means crossing the boundaries of Christian denominations or of religious faith to achieve this. The evidence also revealed that church communities go beyond filling the gap in state welfare provision by providing refugees with access to social networks and to advocates who can represent them in acts of solidarity.

The first of two main conclusions drawn from this study is that the opportunity for refugees to choose and act in the social context of church communities counteracts the disenfranchisement that is often experienced by them in other areas of life. Secondly, when solidarity with refugees is based on notions of common humanity then hospitality is given to the Other as an equal thus reducing the risk of a dominant group merely accommodating and tolerating the stranger.

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Explanatory notes

Protestant churches: Protestant churches in Britain can be divided into two groups: state and non-state churches. The Church of England (C of E) has been the state church in England since the separation of the English Church from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534. Non-conformist churches are so called because they do not 'conform' to the governance of the Church of England; they are sometimes called 'Free Churches' indicating their freedom from the state.

Church of England: The Church of England is sometimes called the Anglican Church. There are a range of church traditions in the Anglican Church from 'high' churches that use traditional liturgy and religious symbols such as incense in worship services, to 'low' churches that take an informal approach to worship with less religious symbolism.

Non-conformist churches: Non-conformist is the generic term that is used to describe churches that include traditional, established denominations such as Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical, United Reformed, and Pentecostal churches, as well as newer groups of churches such as Black Majority Churches (BMCs), the British New Church Movement (BNCM) that is associated with the Charismatic Movement of the 1970s, and independent churches including BAME and migrant churches.

Catholic Church: The Catholic Church is also known as the Roman Catholic Church.

Orthodox churches: Most Orthodox churches belong to two groups: Oriental Orthodoxy and Eastern Orthodoxy. The Orthodox churches in this study are part of the Oriental Orthodox group which is comprised of Armenian, Coptic, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Syrian, and Indian churches.

Mainstream church: The term mainstream church is used in this thesis as a generic term for churches from established church denominations as opposed to more recent denominations.

Conversion of historical monetary sums: Where historical sums of money are quoted in the text footnotes have been inserted with the approximate equivalent value in 2016. Historical monetary sums were converted using the 'National Archives currency converter' to give equivalent values in 2005 (the last year on this converter).¹ The 2005 value was then converted to the equivalent value in 2016 using the 'Historical and UK inflation rates calculator'.²

Bible references: All quotes from the Bible contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

¹ National Archives currency converter available at:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp#mid> (Accessed: 27 April 2016).

² Historical and UK inflation rates calculator available at: <http://inflation.stephenmorley.org> (Accessed: 27 April 2016).

Abbreviations

BMC: Black Majority Churches.

BAME: Black, Asian and minority ethnic.

BNCM: British New Church Movement.

C of E: Church of England also known as the Anglican Church.

FBO: Faith-based organisation.

IDP: Internally displaced person(s).

IRC: Immigration removal centre.

LCRN: London Churches Refugee Network.

NGO: Non-governmental organisation.

RCO: Refugee community organisation.

UKBA: UK Border Agency (closed in 2013 and replaced by UKVI).

UKVI: UK Visas and Immigration (replaced UKBA in 2013).

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

VPR: Vulnerable Person Relocation (or Resettlement) scheme.

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There is in philosophy ... a slender spark, capable of being fanned into a flame, a trace of wisdom and an impulse from God.

Clement of Alexandria [*ca.* 150-220]

The Stromata (Miscellanies)

(Quoted in Beach and Niebuhr, 1973, p.75)

Chapter 1

Introduction

On the whole, religious interactions and interventions have been guided by a logic entirely at variance with the core beliefs underlying state policy and the dominant stereotypes held by the native population (Portes and DeWind, 2007, p. 20).

This study is an enquiry into the role of local church communities in the everyday lives of refugees in London. It is concerned with how refugees' interactions with local church communities can contribute to refugees' strategies for meeting the challenges of life in a different culture and for establishing themselves in new locations. It considers how refugees, as social agents, actively seek solutions for their lives, and how churches function as local community organisations that offer support and solidarity to refugees.

Such an enquiry into the interactions of refugees and church communities does not suggest that the responsibility of the state for the legal protection and the provision of welfare for refugees should be reduced. Indeed, church communities and refugees participate in campaigns that urge the British government to fully meet their responsibilities for the just treatment of refugees (City of Sanctuary, 2016; Citizens UK, 2015; Citizens for Sanctuary, 2011). It is due to the failures of successive British governments apropos the welfare of refugees that civil community organisations and FBOs, including churches, have stepped into the gap

(Snyder, 2012; Crawley, Hemmings and Price, 2011; Ivereigh, 2010). Although, churches have long played a role in relation to refugees, as we will see.

In proposing that refugees are social agents this thesis aims to discover how refugees mobilise religious belief in new locations and make choices about connections to church communities as a way of re-establishing community and home. I shall argue that refugees mobilise religion to transcend borders. I shall seek to understand how church communities, which are often understood to be part of the establishment, use religious doctrine and traditions of hospitality to the stranger to respond to refugees in ways that contest state discourses. I shall also argue that the notion of hospitality is important for understanding how the interactions of refugees and church communities go beyond a social capital type conceptual framework.

One of the aims of this study is to give attention to the perspectives and experiences of refugees as well as to those of clergy and non-clergy (laity). I propose that narrative accounts of refugees, clergy and laity are important and effective for advancing understanding of the role of religion in the everyday lives of refugees. Ali Smith (2016) the novelist and patron of Refugee Tales argued that 'the telling of stories is an act of profound hospitality' that will help us understand the world.

The telling of stories is an act of profound hospitality [...] that will tell us everything we need to know about the contemporary world.

Story has always been a welcoming-in, is always one way or another a hospitable meeting of the needs of others [...] The individual selves

we all are meet and transform in the telling into something open and communal (Smith, 2016).

Throughout the research process, and especially during the fieldwork phase, I was concerned that this study should be conducted in a way that was hospitable toward refugees believing that this approach was not only right from an ethical perspective but that it would also yield the best insights.

The next section sets the scene for the research by considering some of the national and global events that related to refugees during the period of this study from 2013 to 2016. In particular I have paid attention to the responses of the British church and state to these events.

Setting the scene: refugees and the church and state in Britain: 2013-2016

At the outset of this research I could not have predicted some of the national and global events relating to refugees that coincided with this study; events which increased the precariousness of life for refugees in the UK and further afield, raised public awareness of refugees in the UK, especially through media coverage, and even led to a brief public altercation between church and state. Therefore, I felt it was important to give an overview of some of these current affairs together with the responses and involvement of the church and the state, to help set the scene for the context of this research with refugees and church communities.

UK state policy: creating a hostile environment

In 2013, the same year that I undertook fieldwork with refugees and church communities in London, the British government drew together an internal ministerial group known as the 'Hostile Environment Working Group' whose remit was to 'come up with new ways to make immigrants' lives more difficult'

(Aitkenhead, 2013). One of the outcomes was the British government's 'Go Home' campaign in the summer of 2013 that included the commissioning of vans to be driven around the streets in six London boroughs displaying large adverts with the message 'Go Home' and a contact text number to arrange a return, as well as leaflets, posters and messages in local newspapers urging 'irregular' immigrants to return 'home' (*BBC News*, 2013). The Home Office campaign was widely criticised by human rights organisations, Liberal Democrat politicians within the coalition government, and religious leaders; the campaign was eventually banned by the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) (Barrett, 2013; Saul, 2013; Taylor, 2013).

Syrian refugees coming to Europe

Meanwhile, in the global context, increasing numbers of Syrians were fleeing to refugee camps or undertaking hazardous journeys to Europe, often in unseaworthy vessels across the Mediterranean Sea, in order to escape the escalating conflict in Syria (Amnesty International, 2014).³ The large numbers of refugees and migrants from Syria and other countries who had drowned in the Mediterranean caught the attention of the British media; perhaps all the more so because it was so close to home on Europe's borders. It also caught the attention of Pope Francis, the newly appointed Roman Catholic Pope, who celebrated his first Mass outside of Rome in Lampedusa, Italy as an act of solidarity with refugees and migrants – Lampedusa being one of the main destinations for refugees who crossed the Mediterranean at that time. Pope Francis spoke out against the 'globalization of indifference' that leads to the tragic loss of life of migrants and he included a message to Muslims in his homily:

³ Over one million Syrians took refuge in neighbouring countries in the first five months of 2013. Source: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php> (Accessed 24 July 2016)

I give a thought, too, to the dear Muslim immigrants that are beginning the fast of Ramadan, with best wishes for abundant spiritual fruits. The Church is near to you in the search for a more dignified life for yourselves and for your families (*News VA, 2013*).

Further evidence of the solidarity of the Catholic Church with all migrants is illustrated by the annual *World Day of Migrants and Refugees*. For example, in 2015 the theme for the annual *World Day of Migrants and Refugees* was 'Church Without Frontiers, Mother of All' (*Zenit, 2016*).

The British government had been reluctant to receive Syrian refugees despite calls from the UNHCR and other European countries for Britain to share the responsibility for hosting refugees. On 23 January 2014, peers in the House of Lords published an open letter to the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, urging Britain to respond to UNHCR's call to take in Syrian refugees (*Independent, 2014*). Six days later, in a statement to parliament on 29 January, the Home Secretary introduced the Vulnerable Person Relocation scheme (VPR) (Great Britain. Home Office, 2014). However, the scheme was not limited to Syrian refugees and twenty months later in September 2015, only 216 Syrians had been admitted under the VPR scheme (Larsson, 2015).

In September 2015, further pressure was put on the British government to invite more Syrian refugees to Britain following the publication of photos in the media of the body of a three-year-old Syrian boy on a beach in Turkey – a casualty of a boat carrying refugees that had sunk on the journey to Europe (Smith, 2015). For a brief time, there was a sympathetic narrative about refugees in some of the British media which contributed to a surge of public pressure for the UK to take in more

Syrian refugees. Initiatives by organisations such as Citizens UK and Avaaz prompted thousands of volunteers in the UK to pledge to help resettle Syrian refugees and to lobby their local authorities to make provision for Syrian families (McVeigh, 2015).⁴ Within days the UK government agreed to work towards resettling 20,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees in Britain over five years (Wintour, 2015). Although this was a relatively small number of refugees compared with the total number of Syrian refugees coming to Europe, it was a concession by the UK government since they had previously resisted such arrangements.

Disagreement and rapprochement between church and state

Church leaders and church communities were actively engaged with campaigns to invite more Syrian refugees to the UK and offers of assistance with resettlement. In a private letter to the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, dated 10 September 2015, 84 Church of England bishops voiced the discontent of many in the UK about the inadequacy of the British government's response and proposed an increase from 20,000 to 50,000 Syrian refugees (Sherwood and Helm, 2015). When David Cameron failed to respond to the bishops' private letter a spat ensued between the church and the state. The bishops made public the text of their private letter to David Cameron in the Observer newspaper and accused David Cameron of ignoring their offers of help with 'housing, foster care and other support' of up to 50,000 Syrian refugees (Church of England, 2015; Sherwood and Helm, 2015; *Guardian*, 2015). Two days later David Cameron responded to the bishops' letter in a speech in Parliament: 'I think they [the bishops] are wrong and I will say so

⁴ 'Avaaz is a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere.' 'Avaaz' means voice in many European languages. Available at: <http://secure.avaaz.org/page/en/> (Accessed: 10 July 2016).

very frankly' (Watt, 2015). Cameron criticised the bishops for not acknowledging the aid sent by the UK to Syrian refugee camps to encourage them to stay in neighbouring countries rather than attempt to cross the Mediterranean into Europe and reiterated the government's intent to only take 20,000 refugees into Britain (Watt, 2015). There would be no capitulation on the part of the UK government.

Following the public exchange between the bishops and David Cameron in October 2015, the government has continued with the VPR scheme. According to British Home Office statistics, 1,602 persons were resettled in the UK between October 2015 and March 2016 under the VPR scheme with one-third settled in Scotland and only thirty-three refugees in London (Addley and Pidd, 2016).

So, what of the bishops and the churches since 2015? In a sign of rapprochement between the church and the state, the Archbishop Justin Welby joined the newly appointed Home Secretary, Angela Rudd, at Lambeth Palace for the launch of the government's 'Full Community Sponsorship' scheme in July 2016 (Welby, 2016; Great Britain. Home Office, DCLG and DFID, 2016). The scheme allows churches, other faith groups and civil society groups to directly sponsor refugee families and support them during resettlement in the UK. The Archbishop made a commitment to welcome a family to live in a cottage in the grounds of Lambeth Palace.

However, on closer reading of the guidelines of the Community Sponsorship Scheme some concerns emerge. The refugee families will come to the UK as part of the VPR scheme and not in addition to it. Moreover, the VPR scheme is not limited to Syrian families. The community sponsorship guidelines reiterated that in 2015 David Cameron agreed to receive 20,000 Syrians but then states: 'Several hundred

individuals will be resettled over the next year with up to 3,000 resettled over the lifetime of this Parliament' (Great Britain. Home Office, DCLG and DFID, 2016).

Should another general election not be called until 2020, and taking into account the 1,602 persons already resettled, it means that less than one-fifth of the '20,000 in five years' target will have been met.

Despite the apparent détente, the campaign of the bishops would seem to have failed. Not only has the bishops' call for 50,000 Syrian refugees to be resettled in the UK been ignored but, according to the British government's own calculations, only a small percentage of their target resettlement of 20,000 Syrian refugees is likely to be met. In the meantime, the British government has taken advantage of the goodwill of civil society community groups and reduced the cost of resettlement of refugee families to the state.

Impact of British government policy and legislation on refugees

The British government's immigration policy and legislation during the years of this study is indicative of the neoliberal approach to the philosophy of governance that has informed both New Labour and the Conservative governments. Since the 1990s successive Immigration and Asylum Acts have produced progressively restrictive policies that have severely limited refugees' access to state support (Great Britain, Gov.uk, 2014; Fletcher, 2008).⁵ Restrictive immigration policy and legislation contribute to the British government's strategy to create a hostile environment for individuals seeking asylum in Britain as was mentioned earlier in this chapter (Aitkenhead, 2013).

⁵ A timeline of British government policy and legislative changes affecting refugees is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/policy-and-legislative-changes-affecting-migration-to-the-uk-timeline#history> (Accessed: 19 July 2017).

In particular the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act 'introduced complete reform of the support system for asylum seekers' (Fletcher, 2008, p.11). For instance, state support for refugees was reduced from 90% to 70% of the income support given by the state to British citizens at that time. Such a reduction put those seeking asylum well below the poverty line – income support in Britain is the recognised poverty line. Moreover, instead of the all the support being given in cash, a much-criticised voucher scheme with a £10 cash allowance was introduced. The voucher scheme was subsequently abolished but the level of support for refugees seeking asylum in Britain has remained the same. Section 95 of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act also introduced a dispersal scheme whereby refugees who needed assistance with housing could not choose where they live. Dispersal areas are located outside of London and South East England.

In the 2002 permission for refugees to work if an asylum claim exceeded six months was removed. This continues to be the case and refugees seeking asylum are prohibited from working except in very exceptional circumstances. The 2002 Act also reinstated vouchers instead of cash for 'Section 4' support of individuals whose asylum claim had failed but who could not leave Britain.

Paradoxically, successive legislation has forced refugees to rely solely on state support yet, at the same time, the legislation has increasingly restricted that state support. The Joint Commission on Human Rights on asylum seekers in 2007 stated that the British government's policy and legislation on refugees was tantamount to a deliberate policy of destitution (Great Britain. Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007, p. 41). No changes have been made to government policy

since the Joint Commission's report in 2007 that would alleviate these circumstances.

Against this backdrop of restrictive government policies and an officially engineered hostile environment for immigrants in Britain, local churches on the ground have continued to offer hospitality and support to refugees who have managed to get into the UK (Parveen, 2016). The interactions between refugees and church communities that are in view in this study are not the result of a government scheme but are the everyday actions of members of society. It was everyday encounters with refugees that led to my interest and involvement in refugee studies along with my own personal experience of being a migrant.

Coming to the research

Although I come to this research with some personal experience of being a migrant, my journey on a cruise liner from Britain to Australia in the 1960s could not have been more different from the journeys refugees are forced to take in unseaworthy vessels across the Mediterranean and elsewhere. My family were some of the many Europeans who responded to the invitation from the Australian government to emigrate in search of a better life. Under a sponsorship scheme my parents paid £10 each towards the cost of the journey and my brother and I went free of charge; a bargain even in the 1960s. The whole migration experience was a positive one for me and the years I spent in Australia were some of the happiest of my childhood. However, it was a different story when my parents decided to return to Britain when I was in my early teens.

Back in Britain in the 1970s, I experienced some of the issues that surround resettlement of migrants where what was 'home' is no longer 'home' since both the

individual and the society have changed with time (Korac, 2009). I also learnt something of what it is like to be treated as a 'foreigner'; not least by education department officials who placed me in a 'failing' school without any testing of my ability or reference to my Australian school reports. It was presumed – and this was verbalised to me by one education official – I would have received an inferior education in Australia compared to that in Britain; something that was very far from the truth in my experience.

However, my interest in pursuing the study of refugees began much later in life while I was working for a church that is situated on the outskirts of London. The majority in the church community were white British although people from at least twenty nations were also part of the congregation. In particular it was my interaction with two women who had come to the United Kingdom as refugees that stands out as seminal with regard to the start of my research journey.

In conversation with the two women I learned how they had been forced to leave their respective countries: one, because of the threat of religious persecution and the other, because of a political coup. The lives of both women had been at risk – others known to them had been killed – and both had undertaken perilous journeys to escape. However, I had known the women for some time before they told me their stories. As far as I was aware, they had not told anyone else in the church the full circumstances about their experiences and, in many ways, why should they? The women never referred to themselves as refugees and, consequently, no-one in the church community ever referred to them, or thought of them, as refugees. Both women had received refugee status before coming to the church and it is possible they had help from previous churches or refugee

community organisations. One woman had subsequently married a British citizen and the other was still pursuing full British citizenship.

The church was a very important space for these two refugee women both as a place to practise their Christian faith and as a place of belonging. I observed that the migrant history and citizenship status of church members, such as these women, seemed to be unimportant and irrelevant within the church community. The two refugee women were regarded like any other individuals and religion, rather than national identity, served as the predominant and unifying identity within the church community. Consequently, the two refugee women could choose to belong and to relate to those in the church community without any need to identify themselves by migrant labels such as refugee or asylum seeker.

I became interested in exploring refugees' interactions with church communities and the effect of those interactions on refugees' experiences, including the effect on settlement within British society and their ongoing local and transnational connections. Individuals in the church community where I worked were largely unaware of the issues facing refugees and were not actively involved in social action on behalf of refugees. However, I was aware that other churches were more actively engaged in supporting and championing the cause of refugees and I was interested in exploring these churches further.

Therefore, I proposed to embark on research that would give primacy to the decision-making of refugees as social actors whilst not overlooking the motivations and practices of church communities that provide refugees with vital services, both spiritual and material. Whilst I recognised that all identities define and establish boundaries, I wanted to think about the boundary of religion

'creatively rather than dissolving it' (Garnett and Harris, 2013, p. 3). The result was this study which was based on twelve months' fieldwork with refugees and churches in London that was conducted in 2013.

Prior to this I completed a Masters degree in Refugee Studies which helped to broaden my understanding of forced migration and provided the opportunity to undertake research into the concept of sanctuary. I had noticed there was an increasing trend for organisations concerned with the support and advocacy of refugees to frame their responses in terms of sanctuary (Marfleet, 2011; Darling, Barnett, and Eldridge, 2010; Squire, 2009a; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008; Bau, 1985). My Master's thesis explored some of the historical continuities and changes in the practice of sanctuary in England and the United States and the relevance of sanctuary for contemporary responses to refugees.⁶ I found that grassroots groups, both faith and non-faith, were contesting the role of the state to grant or deny asylum by reclaiming sanctuary as a right for all.

However, like much research that considers humanitarianism and refugees, I was aware there was a gap in my Masters' research in considering the perspectives of refugees themselves that warranted further attention. Furthermore, I found this was not the only gap in research where refugees and religion were concerned as the next section reveals.

⁶ The context of my research was sanctuary in Britain and the United States and focused on Christian traditions and practices. The practice of sanctuary is also associated with other religions and cultural traditions as Tahir Zaman's (2016) recent research into Islamic traditions of sanctuary ably demonstrates.

Gaps in literature: refugees and the role of religion

Until recently, the role of religion has been largely neglected in the literature on migration (Beyer, 2007; Portes and DeWind, 2007). This lack of research on the role of religion in forced migration was highlighted by Goździak and Shandy (2002) in their introduction to a Special Issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* (JRS) on 'Religion and Spirituality in Forced Migration'. Twelve years later, Hollenbach (2014, p. 457) reached the same conclusion and argued that 'this area has received less academic and practitioner reflection than its importance warrants'. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007, p. 140) suggested the significant gap in the literature has resulted from approaches that have subsumed religion 'under the broad rubric of culture', or that have been influenced by secularization theories which hypothesised that religion would decline and eventually die out – theories that had been largely discounted by the turn of the 21st century (Christiano, Swatos, Jr., and Kivisto, 2002; Berger, 1967).

Despite the overall gaps in the literature there has been some recent interest in the study of religion and forced migration. However, this research has often focused on humanitarian efforts of churches and FBOs such as, the special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2011) on faith-based humanitarianism in contexts of forced displacement, rather than on the role of religious faith within refugee communities themselves. Similarly, empirical research with undocumented migrants in the US has largely explored churches and FBOs from the perspective of immigrant advocacy and support (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008 and 2007; Cunningham, 1995). However, Hagan's research into Latin American migration is a notable exception since it explored 'the importance of religion, faith, and everyday religious practices to migrants' and demonstrated how religion

'permeates the entirety of the migration experience' (Hagan, 2008, p. 7). Zaman's (2016) recent research into Islamic traditions of refuge in the Middle East is another departure from an approach that is concentrated primarily on the humanitarian efforts of religious organisations. Instead, Zaman explored the innovative ways that refugees mobilise religious traditions and practice in order to meet the challenges of exile.

There has been some academic research on social movements in Britain that promote the wellbeing of refugees and migrants in the UK such as *City of Sanctuary* and *Strangers into Citizens* which are both strongly supported by faith organisations including churches and mosques (Ivereigh, 2010; Squire, 2009a). Furthermore, recent literature has examined responses to refugees from Biblical and theological perspectives (Houston, 2015; Snyder, 2012). Houston considered how these Biblical perspectives might 'provide a basis on which the institutions, structures, and policies of our societies may be challenged' (2015, p. 1). Snyder (2012, p. 212) observed that her research and theological reflection on the Church's engagement with refugees in the UK only 'touched on' refugees' experiences of churches and that consequently there was a need for 'more probing studies based on primary research'.

Gaps in literature: research on refugees in cities in the Global North

This study also addresses a second area where there are gaps in literature – refugees who live in cities in the Global North. Whilst the attention of research with urban refugees in the Global South is heartening, research with refugees in the cities of the Global North has not been integrated into this literature. For example, the chapter on urban refugees and IDPs in the recent and comprehensive

Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies followed ‘current conventions’ and focused ‘almost exclusively on displaced persons and processes in ‘Southern’ cities’ (Landau, 2014, p. 141). Landau argued that the scope of the chapter was ‘too limited to bridge...[the] gap’ that is the lack of literature with refugees in cities in the Global North (2014, p. 141). Additionally, Landau suggested there were ‘significant gaps in our knowledge’ of urban refugees that are partly ‘due to particular forms of blindness in how we understand urban displacement’, and partly the result of ‘logistical’ issues that researchers face when gaining access to ‘invisible’ or ‘hidden’ urban refugee populations (Landau, 2014, pp. 140-141; see also Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007, p. 283-285).

According to Landau (2014) there are strong arguments for future research that integrates the experiences of refugees in the Global North with urban refugees in the Global South. Therefore, this empirical research with refugees and church communities in the city of London could contribute to any future research that integrates the stories of urban refugees in the Global South with those in the Global North.

To address the gaps in literature about urban refugees and about religion and forced migration this study sets out to explore the role of religion in refugees’ everyday lives in London. It will seek to answer the following questions:

- Why and how do refugees choose to connect with local church communities, and what are refugees’ expectations and experiences of those interactions?

- How do refugees mobilise everyday lived religion to help mitigate the effects of forced migration and the challenges associated with settling in new locations?
- Why and how do church communities support refugees, and to what extent is this guided by Christian doctrine and traditions of hospitality to the stranger?

Outline of the thesis

This chapter has introduced the aims of my research into refugees' interactions with church communities. I have briefly discussed the background and context of this research during the period this study was undertaken from 2013 to 2016 with particular attention given to the actions of church and state. I have introduced the gaps in literature and set out the research questions that helped to guide the research.

The second chapter considers the context of this research with refugees and churches in further detail focusing on the city of London which was the urban location of the study. I discuss the consequences of progressively restrictive British immigration policy and legislation as well as public spending cuts both for refugees and for church social activism agendas. I have also included some historical background of refugees and churches in London.

In the third chapter I discuss the conceptual approach of lived experience which helped to frame my research. I found that the complex relationship between refugees and religion required an interdisciplinary approach which drew together insight of several theorists across the social science disciplines including forced migration studies, the sociology of religion, anthropology, sociology, and theology.

In particular the theories developed by Tweed (2006), Orsi, (2002), and Levitt (2007) which are located at the intersection of religion and migration contribute to the conceptual understanding of this study. I also explore Derrida's (2005; 2001) notion of unconditional and conditional hospitality in comparison with Christian traditions of hospitality advanced by Bretherton (2006).

The fourth chapter discusses the qualitative research strategy which was informed by narrative approaches and the data collection techniques that were adopted for the empirical collection of data during fieldwork in churches and refugee centres in London. This chapter also discusses some logistical issues associated with researching 'hidden' populations as well as important ethical issues in the context of forced migration research.

The next three chapters (5 - 7) describe, discuss and analyse the findings. In chapter five I focus on refugees' choices of church communities and the role of that religion and culture might play in those choices. In the sixth chapter I look at how refugees' everyday lived religion provides the context for surviving and thriving in new locations. In the seventh chapter I give attention to church communities' responses of hospitality and solidarity toward refugees.

The final chapter draws together the research findings and considers how the research could be taken further.

Definitions: who is a refugee?

To help the reader, this section explains how I have defined who is a refugee. In this study, the term 'refugee' signifies forced migrants – or 'involuntary' as opposed to 'voluntary' migrants – who have been compelled to leave their homes and homelands because of threats to their lives, and to travel across national

borders to find safety in new countries.⁷ I have used 'refugee' to refer to both refugees and asylum seekers and I have avoided using 'asylum seeker' unless directly quoting a reference that has used this term. 'Asylum seeker' is the label given to refugees while their application for official recognition as a refugee is under consideration by the government of a host country.

The essential point I am making here is that individuals who have self-identified as refugees should continue to be regarded as such during the official asylum processes that determine whether the government of the host country recognises this or not. Therefore, in this research the term 'refugee' can include those who have received leave to remain in the United Kingdom; are awaiting a decision from the UK Home Office; are appealing against refusal of leave to remain; or have been refused leave to remain but are unable to, or have decided not to, return to their country of origin.⁸

Additionally, 'refugee' can also include those who are in the UK through 'irregular' or unofficial immigration routes and have not registered as asylum seekers; this could include 'overstayers' who remain after their visa has expired. Refugees outside of the official immigration system often live on the margins of society and therefore, they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and destitution.

⁷ The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention defined the term 'refugee' and outlined the rights of the displaced and the legal obligations of States to protect them. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html> (Accessed: 16 May 2016).

⁸ Since 2005, refugees whose asylum claims are successful are not given indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the first instance. Instead, refugees are granted humanitarian protection (HP) which allows them temporary leave to remain for five years. At the end of this period individuals can apply for settlement (ILR). In some circumstances, discretionary leave (DL) is granted – initially for three years – and this can be renewed for longer periods. Refugees granted DL can apply for settlement after six years. (Source: Asylum Aid)

I am not suggesting that using the term 'refugee' is unproblematic. Like 'asylum seeker', the migrant label 'refugee' carries with it connotations that can stereotype and stigmatise forced migrants as victims and dependents (Zetter, 2007; 1991). Colson (2007, p. 231) argued that some forced migrants may prefer the term 'asylum seeker'. However, I have not found this to be the case in the UK where forced migrants prefer to distance themselves from the label 'asylum seeker' because of its negative associations with their experiences and treatment while their asylum claim was being processed by the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) department. When compared with 'refugee', the term 'asylum seeker' has been the more pejorative term where the perceptions of the general public in the UK are concerned; a consequence of the unwarranted negative notions about asylum seekers that have been promulgated by popular media and some politicians (Greenslade, 2005; Lyn and Lea, 2003). British media that takes a more sympathetic approach to forced migrants tends to use the term 'refugee' rather than 'asylum seeker'.

I recognise the subjective nature of nomenclatures and that the influences of politics and the media on public perceptions means that opinions can, and do, change over time. Furthermore, I acknowledge that 'sympathetic' narratives can also stereotype forced migrants. However, the primary reason I have chosen to use the term 'refugee' and not 'asylum seeker' throughout this study is because it was the preferred term of the forced migrants I met during this research.

Additionally, where I have used the term 'urban refugee' this includes all refugees who live in towns or cities rather than in a refugee camps.

The next chapter explores further the context of this study by considering the background and circumstances of refugees living in the city of London and the intersection with London churches.

Chapter 2

Refugees and churches in London

More than 2,000 migrants from the three [Catholic] Dioceses packed the side aisles of the Cathedral, bursting into applause after the Cardinal's homily and at various points in the Mass. Many were in tears. 'We hope that this Mass will communicate to you that, as far as the Catholic Church is concerned, you are Londoners', the Cardinal told them. 'We want you to feel welcome in our parishes and our schools and our ethnic chaplaincies. We want you to know that you belong' (Ivereigh, 2010).

Introduction

The last chapter set the scene for this research by considering global and national current affairs that were pertinent to refugees in the period which covered the duration of this research from 2013 to 2016. Attention was also given to the responses of the British church and the state to these events.

The aim of this chapter is to explore further the context of this research with refugees and church communities in London. Since the refugees in this study are city-dwellers as opposed to refugees who live in rural camps, the chapter begins by considering the attitudes and responses of western governments and international agencies toward urban refugees. Attention is then given to refugees who live in the cosmopolitan city of London and the effect of the British government's neoliberal approach in relation to refugees' livelihoods.

This chapter also considers how social activism by London churches addresses some of the gaps in statutory support services for refugees that have arisen due to the British government's progressively restrictive immigration policy and legislation as well as cuts in welfare provision. It looks at two contemporary examples of social activism involving partnerships of London churches as well as partnerships with other groups which indicate that churches can pool resources across London to increase the effectiveness of their actions on behalf of refugees.

The current statistics about London churches and churchgoers are used to demonstrate the impact of 21st century immigration on Christianity and churches in the capital city. This is then put in the historical context of past refugees' and migrants' interactions with London churches as well as some of the historical attitudes of the state toward these immigrants.

City-dwelling refugees

Refugees who arrive in London are among the growing number of global urban refugees living in cities and towns.⁹ Although there are differences in the experiences of refugees in the Global North and those living in cities in the Global South, there are also similarities. I suggest that the views of international humanitarian agencies in relation to city-dwelling refugees have not only shaped responses to urban refugees in the Global South, they have also influenced current responses to refugees in the Global North. Therefore, it is helpful to briefly consider some of the wider global context in relation to city-dwelling refugees as a backdrop to this study of refugees in London.

⁹ 'Over 60 per cent of the world's 19.5 million refugees and 80 per cent of 34 million IDPs live in urban environments' <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/urban-refugees.html> (Accessed: 5 July 2016).

McConnell's (2013) study of urban refugees is a rare example of integrated research undertaken both in cities of the Global South and the Global North, including London. McConnell (2013) effectively used photographs of refugees taken at night to graphically portray, as well as to record, the isolation and life in the 'shadows' that is the experience of many refugees living in cities. Furthermore, McConnell's research showed that many city-dwelling refugees across the globe are forced to live on the margins of society where they are 'forgotten' and 'hidden', denied citizen's rights, and unable to access statutory support services (McConnell, 2013; Marfleet, 2007). Paradoxically, despite their 'invisibility' urban refugees are also vulnerable to being the focus of 'campaigns of exclusion' as well as being scapegoats for the failures of state policies (Greenslade, 2005; Lyn and Lea, 2003).

There is a history of refugees living in cities of Europe and North America – albeit a chequered history as will be discussed later in this chapter. However, I suggest that stereotypical views that refugees should be in camps – as well as essentialist constructions that refugees are helpless and dependent – have infiltrated and influenced the current immigrant policies and practice of western governments even though these views originated in relation to refugees in the Global South (Bakewell, 2014; Landau, 2014). For example, whilst the British government increased overseas' aid to humanitarian agencies working with Syrian refugees within camps and with internally displaced Syrians, it limited the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Britain to 20,000 'vulnerable displaced Syrians' over five years.¹⁰ The figure of 20,000 refugees is put into perspective when this is

¹⁰ 'We [UK government] *expect* to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during this Parliament' [italics mine]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/syria> (Accessed: 10 December 2015).

compared to the 807,337 Syrians who made refugee applications in Europe, the 4.39 million Syrians living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, and the 7.6 million internally displaced Syrians in 2015.¹¹

The background to the current conventional concepts of city-dwelling refugees can be found in the response of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to refugees who lived in towns and cities in the Global South. In the late 1990s, the UNHCR considered these urban refugees an aberration: 'an exception rather than a norm' (UNHCR 1995; UNHCR, 1997). In 2009, the UNHCR revised their policy on urban refugees and recognised 'the need to address the issue of urban refugees in a more comprehensive manner' (UNHCR, 2009). However, according to Chatty and Marfleet (2013, p. 9), the earlier 1997 UNHCR position on urban refugees continued to influence action on the ground in the Global South with 'some of its [UNHCRs] leading officials [admitting] there was little change in the agency's policy and practice'.

In the context of research with refugees living in London, and more generally with refugees in the Global North, there are shortcomings with the 2009 UNHCR report on urban refugees, since its focus was limited to 'developing and middle-income countries' and expressly stated that it 'does not examine the challenge of refugee integration or the issue of subsidiary protection standards in the industrialized states' (UNHCR, 2009, p. 3). The omission of refugees living in cities in 'industrialized states' has contributed to a bias in research toward urban refugees in the Global South; such as, a report on *Urban Refugee Research and Social Capital*

¹¹ Statistics available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (Accessed: 10 December 2015).

(Lyytinen and Kullenberg, 2013). Whilst the research findings and conclusions in Lyytinen and Kullenberg's (2013) report provided general insights about urban refugee communities and social networks that can inform issues in the Global North, its application was limited because of the omission of any studies of refugees living in cities in the Global North.¹²

I am not suggesting that the notion that refugees should be contained and controlled in camps and essentialist constructions of refugees being devoid of agency or capabilities are the only explanations behind state border controls and the treatment of refugees in Britain and other western nations. I recognise, there are a web of political motivations that drive policy and practice, as well as the popular media. However, I suggest that such concepts are reflected in the widespread use of indefinite detention in immigration removal centres (IRCs) in Britain which frequently amounts to containment and control of refugees rather than short-term remand prior to removal from the UK. Furthermore, policies such as refugees being prohibited from having any form of employment have the effect of keeping refugees in positions of helplessness and dependency.

Landau (2014, p. 141) argued, the overall reluctance on the part of the UNHCR to engage with refugees in cities was motivated by scepticism about the veracity of urban refugees' claims and the fears of mounting costs. Likewise, I suggest that scepticism about the veracity of refugees' claims together with fears of mounting costs are contributing factors that drive antagonistic state responses toward

¹² Of the twenty-six studies in seventeen countries in the Global South, ten were in Africa, four were in the Middle East, two were in Asia, and one was in Latin America. The majority of the studies were conducted in Kampala (17%), Johannesburg (11%), Cairo (11%), Nairobi (11%), and Amman (8%).

refugees and that these factors are evident in British policies and practices, as well as in other western nations (Anderson, et al., 2014; Souter, 2011).

Furthermore, Malkki's (1995a) observations from research in Tanzania which revealed that refugees in towns tended to 'dissolve national categories' may suggest a further reason for the antipathy of nation states towards urban refugees who could be regarded as a disruption to the 'national order'. Malkki observed that urban refugees responded to their displacement from the 'national order' in a way that was 'radically different' from the responses of those in refugee camps (1995a, p.4). Urban refugees 'dissolved national categories in the course of everyday life and produced more cosmopolitan forms of identity', whereas, refugees in camps saw themselves as a 'nation in exile' (Malkki, 1995a, p.4).

However, although there are undoubtedly opportunities for refugees in London to embrace cosmopolitan forms of identity – as we will see in this research – this cannot be assumed. Some city-dwelling refugees work hard at preserving their distinct cultural and national identities in diasporic communities and continue to see themselves as a 'nation in exile'. Malkki's (1995b, p. 511) own warning against essentialising the refugee experience holds true in this regard.

Moreover, it needs to be borne in mind that urban environments will vary from place to place and not only between the Global South and the Global North.

London has similarities and differences to other global cities in North as well as to other conurbations in the UK. Therefore, it is important to look closer at the specific circumstances of refugees in London.

Refugees in the cosmopolitan city of London in the 21st century

London is the largest metropolitan area in Britain and one of the most diverse cities in the world (Cock, 2010; Piggott, 2009).¹³ The city is home to nearly half of Britain's migrants and more than one third of London's residents were born abroad (Gidley, 2011, p. 2). London is characterised by what Vertovec (2007, p. 1024) has described as 'super-diversity' where 'increased numbers of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants' live in the same city. To recognise the super-diversity of London is also to recognise that vast inequalities exist in the city.

Determining how many refugees are living in London is problematic because British government data on refugees is incomplete (Blinder, 2015; Quevedo, 2010; Stewart, 2004). In particular official statistics undercount 'irregular migrants' including those refugees whose asylum claim has been rejected but who have not left Britain. Consequently, there is an indeterminate number of people without 'valid' immigration status who live in London and who are not included in official statistics (Cock, 2010, p. 14; p. 23). Researchers from the London School of Economics estimated there were 442,000 'irregular residents' living in London in 2007 (Gordon, *et al.*, 2009, p. 7) which highlights the extent of the gap in official statistics.

That being said British Home Office statistics about refugees who are in receipt of statutory support while their asylum claim is under consideration provides some

¹³ According to the 2011 census, 8.2 million people were living in London which was almost 15% of the British population. (Source: Office for National Statistics)

insight into recent trends. Statistics for the first quarter of 2014 showed that only 4% (915 individuals) of the total number of refugees in the UK who had applied for asylum were housed in supported accommodation in London (Researching Asylum in London, 2014). The low percentage of refugees in British government supported accommodation in London is the result of immigrant dispersal policies that were introduced in 1999 to reduce the concentration of refugees living in London by housing refugees elsewhere in Britain. Guidance on the British government's website explains to refugees who have just arrived in the UK that they will be given housing if they need it but they cannot choose where they live; moreover, it is unlikely they will be housed in London or south-east England (Great Britain. Gov.uk, 2016).

British Home Office statistics for the first quarter of 2014 also showed that 58% (1708 individuals) of refugees who were in receipt of subsistence-only support lived in London (Researching Asylum in London, 2014) suggesting that, rather than move away from London, refugees look for alternative ways of finding accommodation through social networks and opt to receive subsistence-only support which is set at £36.95 per person, per week (Great Britain. Gov.uk, 2016).¹⁴ This low level of support causes considerable hardship for refugees who are forced to rely on the charitable support of others.

Although there are risks of destitution for all refugees throughout the different stages of the asylum process, for refugees who have chosen to live in London on subsistence-only support the risks of destitution are considerable. Moreover, the

¹⁴ This figure is correct as of 2016. Most refugees are not allowed to work until they have been granted leave to remain.

organisations who have historically supported refugees have experienced large cuts to funding and grants due to the austerity measures associated with the current British government's neoliberal approach.

Consequences of British immigrant policies and public spending cuts

Should a refugee's claim for asylum be refused by the British Home Office and he or she decide to appeal against the decision subsistence-only support is stopped *unless* the refugee agrees to go into government supported accommodation which can be anywhere in Britain and almost certainly outside of London (Great Britain. Gov.uk, 2016). Therefore, this policy particularly affects those refugees who had previously chosen to stay in London on subsistence-only support – a greater percentage of refugees than elsewhere in the UK as seen above. It is not uncommon for these refugees to have been living in London for many years due to often long delays in the asylum process. Rather than move hundreds of miles away from their social support networks which may have been established for a considerable time, many refugees choose to remain in London and forego any subsistence support. Consequently, these refugees often end up in destitution.

The appeal process can be very lengthy and should a refugee be refused permission to stay in the UK following appeals it is not a given that they will leave the UK. Some refugees are unable to return to their country of origin for a variety of reasons and others decide not to return. In both circumstances the result is destitution.

However, it is not only refugees whose claim for asylum is refused who are vulnerable to destitution. Once refugees are granted leave to remain in Britain their subsistence support and any accommodation is stopped 28 days after the

British Home Office decision. The British government expects refugees to secure housing and income for themselves in this very short time-scale (Basedow and Doyle, 2016).

In 2007, the UK Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights found that 'enforced destitution had become an immigration control policy' and recommended that it cease (Great Britain. Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007, p. 41; p. 110). Despite this recommendation, the British government have not changed their approach and the risk of destitution for refugees seeking asylum in the UK continues to be a reality.

Refugees with no access to public funds 'present a challenge' to NGO and voluntary service providers. A challenge that has been further exacerbated by the British government's spending cuts that have reduced, and in some instances abolished, central and local public funding initiatives related to services for refugees (Gidley, 2011, p. 4; Cock, 2010; Wintour, 2010). The reductions in funding have had far-reaching consequences for both large and small charities and organisations.

In 2011, the government funding for the largest independent refugee charity in Britain, the Refugee Council, was cut by nearly 62% compared with the previous year resulting in a drastic reduction in frontline services (Hill, 2011). Local Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) who have an important role for service delivery, support and advocacy for refugees were also among the organisations that experienced cuts in public funding.¹⁵

¹⁵ 'The impact of the spending cuts on refugee community organisations'. Available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0001/5813/Briefing_-_impact_of_spending_cuts_on_RCOs_22_1010.pdf (Accessed: 23 June 2016).

At one refugee and migrant centre all local authority funding for education services was stopped with very short notice which necessitated a drastic reduction in the English language classes for refugees (Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants, 2014). The refugee centre was forced to reduce opening hours from five days a week to one day a week which also reduced refugees' access to the centre's other support services and activities. Following a fund-raising appeal, the centre had increased its opening times to two days a week by 2016 with plans to increase this to three days a week by the end of the year. During 2013-2014, the refugee centre had previously provided support to refugees and migrants from 33 countries of whom over a third were 'destitute asylum seekers without the right to work' (Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants, 2014).

One of the key findings of the Oxfam research report on 'the survival and livelihood strategies of refused asylum seekers living in the UK' was that 'churches appeared to be an important source of support for those [refugees] living in destitution' (Crawley, Hemmings, and Price, 2011, p. 5).

London churches and social activism on behalf of refugees

Churches support refugees in different ways, from the provision of church buildings for refugee centres to practical resources and language classes (Knott, 2014; Brown, 2013; Crawley, Hemmings, and Price, 2011). A national survey of social action undertaken by churches from different denominations across the UK showed the level of support provided by churches (Knott, 2014). Although much of the broad range of church-based social action could benefit refugees and others in society, the frequency of teaching English as a foreign language suggested a high level of engagement with refugees and migrants. The top ministry for church staff

in terms of time spent was teaching English as a foreign language with an average of 2,203 staff hours in 12 months during 2013-14. Teaching English as a foreign language was ranked third in terms of volunteers' time with an average of 713 volunteer hours for the same year.

The key statistics from Knott's (2014) survey also showed that churches have increased their overall involvement in social action since the UK government's cuts in welfare spending. Some of these statistics included:

- 36.5% increase in spending by churches on church-based social action from approximately £288m in 2010 to £393m in 2014.
- 72% of churches financed social action themselves without any external grants.
- Volunteer hours spent on church-based social action in 2014 increased by 59.4% from volunteer hours in 2010.
- Food distribution was ranked the activity with the highest involvement across all churches at 80.2% in 2014 which was a significant increase from 7.8% in 2010 when it was ranked the 16th most frequent activity.

The *London Church Census* report showed that nearly one quarter of London churches (23%) undertake some community activity during the week apart from Sunday worship services (Brierley, 2013, p. 12). Brierley (2013, p. 12) found that midweek community activities in London churches had an average attendance of 71 people per church whereas for churches in the rest of the UK it was 55.

Although not all midweek community activities would be specifically aimed at refugees, nonetheless these activities could be accessed by refugees and provide them with material, emotional or spiritual support. Notably, Brierley's calculation

of attendance at midweek church community activities does not include the activities of other organisations who rent church buildings during the week, such as refugee and migrant centres, which would considerably increase the numbers of people accessing community activities at churches.

Most church social action on behalf of refugees happens behind the scenes on an individual everyday basis which means it is hard to measure. Accessing 'hidden' lives was one of the main challenges of this study and how it was achieved will be discussed at length in the fourth chapter on research methods. However, some advocacy on behalf of refugees involved more high profile and public social activism such as the *Strangers into Citizens* campaign which united churches and other faith groups together in a common cause.

Although churches have been historically renowned for their denominational differences which have at times even led to violent altercations – especially between Protestants and Catholics – there has been an increasing cooperation in ecumenical partnerships and projects (Sagovsky and McGrail, 2015). Church activism in response to social injustices can provide an area of common ground around which churches can unite while 'agreeing to disagree' about different styles and forms of church worship and of church governance as understood and practiced by their theological and ecclesiastical traditions. Moreover, social activism in response to social injustices can also provide a platform for partnering with other faith groups and non-faith community organisations.

The *Strangers into Citizens* campaign was organised by Citizens UK (Grove-White, 2012, p. 48). The campaign had arisen from concerns within faith communities about the precariousness of the lives of undocumented migrants many of whom

would have been personally known to church communities. The *Strangers into Citizens* campaign called on the British government to give conditional amnesty to long-term undocumented migrants. It had some cross-party political support as well as the endorsement of the mayor of London at the time, Boris Johnson, and the Greater London Authority.

On May Day 2009 following three years of campaigning, church services were held concurrently at Westminster Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Methodist Central Hall: 'the first time in living memory that the nation's three mother churches had joined together in this way' (Ivereigh, 2010, p. 129). The church congregations then met in Parliament Square with other faith groups, trade unionists, and refugee groups before marching to Trafalgar Square, by which time their numbers had grown from seven thousand to eighteen thousand people (Ivereigh, 2010, p.129). However, despite the strong support for the campaign, it was unable to achieve its goal of securing an amnesty for undocumented migrants (Grove-White, 2012, p. 48).

One ecumenical organisation *London Churches Refugee Network* (LCRN) holds quarterly meetings and an annual conference to raise awareness among churches of the issues faced by refugees. LCRN helps to support the efforts of London churches who have refugees in their congregations or church-based projects such as drop-in centres that cater for refugees. LCRN's regular meetings help to facilitate networking between churches and to provide up-to-date information about British immigration policies and practices. LCRN has also issued statements on behalf of London churches to politicians about immigration issues. In 2007, the

London Churches Refugee Fund was launched to provide small grants to organisations assisting refugees; mostly church-based drop-in centres.

At this point it is helpful to take a closer look at London churches and churchgoers and especially the effect of immigration and cosmopolitanism on those churches.

London churches, churchgoers and the impact of immigration

The statistics for religion and church attendance in London and the rest of the UK illuminate an interesting paradox. On the one hand the percentage of people in London who identified as Christian in the 2011 census was the lowest for the UK: 48.4% compared with a national average of 59.3% (Office for National Statistics, 2012).¹⁶ On the other hand, church attendance in London has been increasing whereas church attendance has been declining elsewhere in the UK and especially in rural areas (Brierley, 2013). The most significant difference between church attendance in London and the rest of England is that 32% of churchgoers are aged between 20 and 44 years, compared with 20% in this age-range in the rest of England (Brierley, 2013, p. 8). It has been argued that this growth in church attendance can be partly explained by the church attendance of migrants who live in London (Brierley, 2013; Gledhill, 2014; Cacciottolo, 2010).

The *London Church Census* report revealed that in the seven years between 2005 and 2012, church attendance in London increased by 16% 'from just over 620,000 to just over 720,000' which, as already has been highlighted, is a unique growth compared with other areas in the UK (Brierley, 2013, p. 3). Notably, 82% of this

¹⁶ Compared with the UK, London was the region that had the highest percentage of people who identified as Muslim and 'other religions': 12.4% and 10% respectively. London also had the largest percentage of people who did not state their religious affiliation and the second lowest percentage of those who stated they had no religious affiliation (Office of National Statistics, UK Census 2011, Religious Affiliation in London).

increase in church attendance in London was female with the mean age of female churchgoers being 42 years old (Brierley, 2013, p.7). However, the overall differentiation between male and female churchgoers in 2012 was 56% female and 44% male which was comparable to the rest of England in 2005 (Brierley, 2013, p. 7). Strikingly, more under 20-year old London churchgoers were male with 29% male and only 24% female (Brierley, 2013, p.7).

London churchgoers are more likely to attend church every Sunday than elsewhere in Britain and, on average, churchgoers had been attending the same church for 10 years (Brierley, 2013, p. 14). The longevity of church attendance is of note since it belies the notion that the increase in church attendance is only the result of *recent* immigration; it shows that trends of growth have been sustained for well over a decade. Two-thirds (70%) of churchgoers were 'active/regular members', 22% 'committed but not active', and 8% were 'not yet committed' (Brierley, 2013, p. 14). The close proximity of churches was a factor for churchgoers and, on average, churchgoers lived two miles from the church; less in Outer London than Inner London where transport is easier (Brierley, 2013, p. 14).

The rich variety of London churches reflects the cosmopolitan population who live in the city. The *Commission on Urban Life and Faith* report (2006, p. 11) observed that churches in London were 'increasingly ethnically, socially and culturally very diverse' and that 'within this mix, socially active Black majority congregations [BMCs] are developing prominence in inner cities and becoming a voice in urban civil society'. This is in evidence on any given Sunday in London when numerous BMC church communities can be found meeting across the city; often in rented commercial buildings, such as warehouses, or in hired church halls. Three-fifths

(62%) of Pentecostal and New churches rent their church premises and one-third of these churches rent the building for the whole day (Brierley, 2013, p. 14). The *London Church Census* report observed that the high growth rate in these two groups of churches correlates to the numbers of immigrants in London (Brierley, 2013, p. 3). However, since not all immigrants stay in London the report conjectures that church attendance could reduce by two percent in the future (Brierley, 2013, p. 3).

Although 9% of the overall population of London are churchgoers on a Sunday this varies according to ethnicity of churchgoers: 4% of the Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi population; 8% of the white population; 16% of the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese population; and 19% of the black population (Brierley, 2013, p. 11). Almost half of churchgoers in Inner London were black (48%) with 38% white, and 14% other, whereas in Outer London, 21% were black, 66% white, and 13% 'other' (Brierley, 2013, p. 11). Provision is made by some churches for worship services to be translated or held in languages other than English. For instance, the website of the Catholic archdiocese of Southwark has extensive lists of masses and services for ethnic communities that are held in Southwark as well as the contact details of ethnic chaplaincies (http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/ethnic_home.htm, no date). Brierley (2013, p. 11) found that '14% of church services in London are translated into a language other than English'.

The *London Church Census* report (Brierley, 2013, p. 4) categorised London churches into three main groups according to rates of growth:

- BMC and immigrant churches
- Larger churches which are mainly Catholic, Anglican, or BMC's

- Smaller churches

The BMC and immigrant churches were the fastest growing churches and accounted for 27% of churches and 24% of churchgoers. Although the 'larger churches' had congregations of at least 200 people meeting each Sunday – with one-third of these churches having more than 500 churchgoers – they were all growing at a slower rate than the BMC and immigrant churches. 'Larger churches' accounted for 23% of the churches but 54% of churchgoers. This percentage of churches to churchgoers in 'larger churches' was almost reversed for 'smaller churches'. 'Smaller churches' accounted for half of all churches but only 22% of the churchgoers. The 'smaller churches' included all other churches not in the first two categories and they were nearly all in decline (Brierley, 2013, p. 4).

Brierley (2013, p. 13) found that one London church in seven had started a new church within the previous twenty years and that 93% of these new churches were continuing to meet five years later by which time three-quarters were financially self-supporting. Although the growth rate is higher among BMC and immigrant churches than traditional English denominations there is growth across all denominations in London. The conclusion of the *Commission on Urban Life and Faith* report (2006, p. 11) that, 'Older, traditional ways of being church are being superseded by new, eclectic – often evangelical or Pentecostal – churches' is not the complete story in London. The *London Church Census* report (Brierley, 2013) showed that older, traditional churches such as Anglican and Catholic churches have also experienced increased attendance (Goodhew, 2012; Harris, 2012; Cacciottolo, 2010).

According to Goodhew (2012), the Anglican diocese of London, which is the largest diocese in Britain, has grown by over 70% since 1990. Harris's (2012, p. 45) research with one Catholic church in the East End of London showed that there had been a marked rise in weekly attendance in recent decades to current figures of 'around 1,200 people from more than 40 different migrant backgrounds'. In the light of increased attendance at Catholic churches, Cacciotto (2010) argued that immigrants may have 'saved' the Catholic Church from decline.

Brierley (2013, p. 12) calculated that, in addition to Sunday worship services, an additional 310,000 people attended mid-week activities at London churches 120,000 of whom only attended a mid-week activity. When the sole mid-week attendees were added to the number of those attending on Sundays it showed that a total of 840,000 people who lived or worked in London attended church which is over 10% of the entire London population, or 1 in 10 Londoners (Brierley, 2013, p. 12).

I suggest that this overview of London churches and churchgoers shows the impact of immigration on the church in 21st century London. The following section looks at some of the historical context of refugees in London and the involvement of churches.

Refugees' interactions with London churches: views from the past

Although London has a very long history of receiving refugees, how those refugees were received and treated differed immensely (Marfleet, 2006; Winder, 2004; Merriman, 1993). Refugees and migrants have been important for the development of Christianity in England yet, apart from the Irish refugees of the mid-nineteenth century, Martin (1967) made no reference to this in the historical

background to the *Sociology of English Religion*. Of notable absence was any reference to the impact of the Protestant Huguenots who fled religious persecution in France and the French Catholic refugees who fled the French revolution.

Before considering the particular significance of the Huguenot and Irish refugees' interactions with London churches, it is helpful to look briefly at other groups of refugees who came to London during the 16th to 19th centuries. The largest numbers of refugees who came to Britain during these centuries were Christians – both Protestants and Roman Catholics – and churches were often the key providers of support for refugees. Jewish refugees only arrived in London after the mid-17th century having been officially banished from England up to this time (Friedman and Klein, 2008).¹⁷

In the early 18th century, although the Huguenots had been mostly welcomed in England, the Palatines who were a largely destitute community of Protestant refugees from Germany did not fare so well (Marfleet, 2006, p. 105). On arrival, 'several thousand' Palatines were accommodated at Blackheath, South London in what was effectively 'the world's first official refugee camp' (Winder, 2004, p. 103). Lutheran Church officials from the High German Church at the Savoy administered a relief fund patronised by Queen Anne and politicians while Londoners raised an impressive £20,000 (Winder, 2004, p. 104).¹⁸ When a government policy of dispersal of Palatines across England failed, thousands who did not voluntarily return to Germany were deported. 5,000 Palatines were sent to Ireland, although

¹⁷ Many of the first groups of Jewish refugees to arrive after this date settled in Spitalfields, East London. Britain's Jewish community grew from 60,000 in the late 19th century to 300,000 in 1914 (Friedman and Klein, 2008).

¹⁸ It is unclear if Winder had already converted this to the equivalent value in 2004. If not, £20,000 in 1710 would be approximately equivalent to over two million pounds in 2016.

only 1,000 stayed, and 3,000 were sent to the American colonies of whom nearly 500 died on board the ships *en route* to their destinations (Winder, 2004, p. 105).

In the late 18th century, French Catholics fled to England to escape the French revolution. Compared to the Irish Catholics who arrived later in the mid-19th century, the French Catholic refugees were much fewer in number with approximately 5,600 priests and 4,000 lay French Catholics living in London in 1801 (Old Bailey Proceedings 1674-1913, 2015). Although some were from privileged backgrounds, like so many refugees before and since, they often arrived with almost nothing; possessions were frequently lost during the perilous boat journeys in stormy seas. One English bishop complained that the British government funds were insufficient to meet the needs of the refugees and that '2,295 [...] were on the limits of survival' (Carpenter, 1999, p. 61). A monetary collection for these 'political' refugees was taken in English churches and over £70,000 was raised; such a large sum may be due, in part, to the connections that privilege affords.¹⁹ However, historical records state that 'poor émigrés' settled in St Pancras, London and were given the use of an Anglican Church for Catholic worship and funerals (Carpenter, 1999, p. 88). Needless to say the Huguenots were not so disposed to welcome their countrymen who they perceived were the cause of their own earlier exile.

During the 19th century, London became the major centre for European political exiles, 'a palimpsest of generations of displaced people plotting return and revenge' (Sassen, 1999, p. 36). The British government had a liberal, open door policy toward these 'well-educated, cultured' exiles and none were refused entry

¹⁹ Approximate equivalent value in 2016 is a staggering £5,451,719.

or deported (Sassen, 1999, p. 36 and p. 81).²⁰ However, European political exiles came in relatively small numbers compared to the Irish refugees of the same period or other groups of exiles such as the Huguenots from earlier periods. Porter (1979, p. 4) argued that the European exiles in Britain during the nineteenth century were 'just not numerous enough [...] to present any great social problems which were not easily and locally resolvable'.

The reason for considering the Huguenots and the Irish refugees further is that their interactions with church communities in London resonates with the current context of refugees in London in two ways. Firstly, church communities were fundamental to their survival, and secondly, the refugees strengthened the churches with the Huguenots bolstering the Protestant cause and the Irish refugees reinvigorating Catholicism.

The Huguenots and London churches

The Huguenots were Calvinist Protestant refugees who fled to England to escape religious persecution in the Low Countries and France at various times in the 16th and 17th centuries (Winder, 2004; Gwynn, 1998; Cottret, 1991). It is to the Huguenots that we owe the introduction into the English language of the word 'refugee' which originates from the French 'réfugié' (Merriman, 1993, p. 43).

In London, the Huguenots were granted an Augustinian Friary in London for use as a 'Stranger Church'. The church was known as Austin Friars and it became England's first official Reformed Church, the 'first foreign-language church' and 'the roomiest church in the City' (Winder, 2004, p. 59). The French eventually

²⁰ Marfleet (2006) pointed out that during the same period, the British government deported tens of thousands of people to penal colonies in Australia for, what was often, very minor offences.

established their own church in Threadneedle Street which was to become the largest and most important of the Huguenot churches. The church regulated the spiritual and secular life of the refugees who lived in Southwark, Smithfield, St Katherine's Dock, Whitechapel and Farringdon (Winder, 2004, p. 59). According to Cottret (1991, p. 15), the Threadneedle church community 'oscillated constantly between 5,000 and 10,000 people' with the highest levels in the 1590s and 1630s.

The churches in London responded to the boatloads of newly arrived Protestant refugees by putting on extra church services and by raising money within both the church community and the local community. Austin Friars's poor-chest distributed £10 per month in 1565; this increased to more than £70 per month after 1572 with the Bishop of London contributing a gift of £320 to the refugee fund (Winder, 2004, p. 64).²¹ The Bishop of London also gave a directive to local clergy for the collection of donations for Huguenot refugees to be made in their parishes and for congregations to be made aware of their moral responsibilities for the welfare of Huguenot refugees (Marfleet, 2006, p. 108; Winder, 2004, p. 64).

The motivation behind the campaign in support of the Huguenot refugees was not solely due to altruistic sympathies with the suffering of co-religionists. Religion and politics went hand in hand and the presence of the Huguenots achieved two goals for the state. Firstly, the Huguenots reinforced the Protestant cause in England and, secondly, the presence of the Huguenots helped to increase England's power over their rivals France (Marfleet, 2006, p.106). The Huguenots' backgrounds and skills contributed to the maximising of England's resources while depriving England's enemies of resources at the same time. Nonetheless, there

²¹ Approximate equivalent values in 2016: £10 = £2,417, £70 = £16,919, £320 = £77,346.

was opposition to Huguenot refugees from some English craft workers who perceived the Huguenots as a threat to their livelihoods. There was also opposition from a few politicians. In one incident, a Bill to permit the building of a French church was opposed by a member of Parliament on the grounds it would 'create a perpetual settlement for foreigners in the heart of the city to the prejudice of our own merchants and traders' (Gwynn, 1998, p. 29).

In the 17th century, the Huguenots fled to England in much larger numbers as religious persecution in France intensified. It has been estimated that at least 50,000 Huguenots came to England and that half settled in the Greater London area (Gwynn, 1998; Merriman, 1993, p. 43; Cottret, 1991, p. 21). By early 18th century, almost a quarter of the population of London was French (Winder, 2004, p. 84). Since the majority of refugees arrived in London with very few resources, the generosity of churches was crucial to the Huguenots survival; particularly financial support and social networks that could provide job opportunities. Winder (2004, p. 101) describes the Huguenots' communities as 'genuine communes [...] groups of neighbours who attended the same church, helped one another and clung hard to their French culture'.

At the end of the 17th century, there were 14 French churches in Westminster and nine in Spitalfields (Merriman, 1993, p. 44). However, in ways that are familiar to those of second generation migrants to this day, second generation Huguenots resisted pressure from the previous generation for them to stay within the French Church with its strong associations to French culture. Cottret (1991, p. 17) describes how there was 'constant harassment of young people who deserted the French-speaking Reformed Church for their local English parish'.

For those in the Westminster churches the step to the English parish churches was not a large one. The Westminster, or 'Savoy', churches already followed an Anglican Church pattern of worship since the condition for granting the Huguenots use of the Savoy Chapel in 1661 had been that the Anglican prayer book was used, albeit translated into French (Gwynn, 1998, p. 13). The Spitalfield churches held to a traditional French Reformed type of church service. Eventually, all the French churches went into decline and the only remaining Huguenot Protestant Church in London is in Soho Square.

The Irish and the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church

Catholic churches are now commonplace across Britain which makes it easy to forget this has not always been the case. Following the English Reformation, Catholicism was prohibited for almost three centuries. Freedom to pursue the Catholic religion in Britain was granted by an act of Parliament in 1829 (Winder, 2004, p. 202) and it was not until 1863 that the first Catholic church was built in Britain since the mid-sixteenth century (Winder, 2004, p. 189). Therefore, the arrival of Catholic Irish forced migrants at the time of the Great Famine was timely for the Catholic Church. Conversely, the Catholic Church provided the Irish with a much needed refuge from the notoriously harsh reception and treatment they received from British society.

The Great Famine forced large numbers of Irish to leave Ireland and to seek refuge in Britain – the country whose very agricultural policies and political system had been largely responsible for their demise and the ruination of Ireland (Winder, 2004, p. 196). Forced migrants from the Global South face similar circumstances

today due to economic and political factors associated with globalisation (Marfleet, 2006).

Although small Irish communities had been present in London during the 17th and 18th centuries, the Great Famine from 1846 to 1849 brought 400,000 Irish 'refugees from the potato famine' who came 'piled into boats bound for Britain's western ports' (Winder, 2004, p. 3; p. 195). Most of these forced migrants settled in major cities including London where the Irish made up 4.6% of the London population in 1851 (Merriman, 1993, p. 119). In the national Religious Census of the same year, 1851, 4% out of 36% who attended church on the day of the census survey were Catholics (Martin, 1967, p. 19).

According to Martin, apart from a minority of English Catholic families, the Catholic church attendance of 4% was the result of a 'trickle of converts and a flood of Irish' (1967, p. 23). However, Martin overlooked the fact that some of these Catholics would have been the descendants of French 'political' refugees who had fled to England to escape the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century (Carpenter, 1999).

Martin (1967, p.23) argued that the Catholic Church was 'the only vehicle of ethnic identity' for the Irish but it is likely that the Irish pubs played a similar role for the Irish community. However, the Irish pubs and their publicans also had another important role where the Catholic Church was concerned. Since the practice of Catholicism had been banned for centuries there were few church buildings and a lack of priests. According to Martin, the Irish publicans gave 'their parlours to the Mass and their sons to the priesthood' (Martin 1967, p. 23). It is notable that the priests who were involved in the long struggle against English exploitation were

themselves from the same exploited groups. Moreover, it was their status as priests, along with a measure of education they had received through the Church that enabled them to 'act as guardian(s) to the immigrant community' (Martin, 1967, p. 23).

The arrival of Irish refugees and migrants were very important factors for the expansion of the Catholic Church in England (Merriman and Visram, 1993). From the 19th century until the 1960s, Catholic churches were predominantly Irish communities (Leech, 2002, p. 50). The diminishing church attendance of subsequent generations of Irish has been offset by new refugees and migrants coming to Britain from other countries. The Catholic Church in London in the early 21st century has been described as a site of 'Christian cosmopolitanism' (Harris, 2012, p. 43) which is another way of saying the Catholic Church in London is predominantly a migrant church.

Conclusion

The historical context of Huguenot and Irish refugees in London reveals a pattern of mutual benefit that resulted from the interactions of refugees and churches. It would seem a similar relationship exists in the contemporary context of 21st century London with the reinvigoration of traditional, established Christian churches as well as the creation of many new churches. However, contemporary social activism by churches on behalf of refugees suggests that, compared to the past, churches in the 21st century are more willing to work in partnership with different denominations as well as with other faith groups and community groups. This chapter has also considered refugees in London in the global context of urban refugees and how embedded attitudes of western governments and international

agencies toward city-dwelling refugees contributes to a prevailing culture of hostility toward refugees in the Global North. The challenges faced by refugees have been further exacerbated by the British government's neoliberal approach that has guided immigrant policy and given rise to public spending cuts which, in turn, have considerably reduced the support services that refugee charities and organisations can provide. Church communities have helped to fill some of the ensuing gaps in refugees' support services.

It is against this background that the next chapter considers some key conceptual theories that helped to inform research with refugees and church communities.

Chapter 3

Lived experience at the intersection of religion and migration

Religion-in-action cannot be separated from other practices of everyday life ... The emphasis in the study of lived religion is on *embodied* practice and imagination, as men, women, and children exist in and move through their built and found environments (Orsi, 2010, p. xxxix, emphasis in original).

Introduction

This chapter explores some key conceptual theories that might inform research at the intersection of religion and migration. I found this required an interdisciplinary approach that mobilised theories from across the social science disciplines including forced migration studies, the sociology of religion, anthropology, sociology, and theology. The main conceptual thread that runs throughout this chapter and that frames this study is everyday lived experience.

The concept of lived experience has been significant for informing recent theories of religion (McGuire, 2008, Ammerman, 2007; Hall, 1997). Importantly, theories of religion that are informed by lived experience allow for religion to be studied from the ground-up and can accommodate global perspectives and different religious faiths. In contrast, sociological theories of religion that were developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries were often 'top-down' and largely focused on European institutional Christianity.

The concept and study of lived experience also has been important in anthropological research that looks at forced migration (Chatty, 2014; Turton, 2005; Malkki, 1995a; Malkki 1995b). This chapter begins with a brief consideration of forced migration as lived experience underlining how this helps understanding of refugees' agency and the social networks that might offer support and solidarity. Since this study is located at the intersection of migration and religion it has been useful to give particular attention to theories which have arisen from empirical research of everyday religion in the lives of immigrant communities (Orsi, 2010; Thomas Tweed, 2006; Peggy Levitt, 2007).

Whilst cognisant of the influences of church denominational institutions on local churches, this study is primarily concerned with how local churches function as communities. Therefore, it has been helpful to draw on insights in social theory about community and to apply those insights to churches. In particular I consider Alison Gilchrist's (2009) theory of a well-connected community and Alistair Ager's and Alison Strang's (2008) framework for refugees' integration which provides classifications of refugees' social connections.

Finally, I consider how Jacques Derrida's (2005; 2001) and Luke Bretherton's (2006) theories of hospitality might contribute to conceptual understanding about the way interactions between refugees and church communities might go beyond a social capital type conceptual framework. Derrida's (2005; 2001) conceptual understanding of conditional and unconditional hospitality offers a framework for considering the nature of hospitality given to refugees by church communities. Although the notion of hospitality is not unique to Christianity, I felt it was also important to briefly consider hospitality within a Christian framework since this

could inform the actions of individuals within church communities and possibly the expectations of refugees.

Forced migration as lived experience: agency and social networks

To view forced migration as lived experience is to recognise that refugees, like all human beings, are social agents who make choices and act upon them (Korac, 2009; Marfleet, 2006; Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2005). It belies essentialist notions of '*the* refugee experience' which imply that refugees are a homogeneous group with common characteristics and experiences; notions that often portray refugees as victims with impaired capacity who are devoid of agency (Sigona, 2014).

Moreover, forced migration as lived experience places refugees at the centre of research and gives primacy to refugees' perspectives and experiences (Chatty, 2014; Eastmond, 2007; Colson, 2003). It helps to avoid the objectification of refugees such as is implied by the unfortunate use of the pronoun 'what' not 'who' in two headings on the UNHCR webpage *Asylum in the UK* that gives information about refugees in Britain: '*What* are refugees?' and '*What* is an asylum seeker' (UNHCR, 2016, emphasis mine).

At the heart of lived experience are the concepts of agency and social networks. Stephen Castles (2003, p. 13) identified both human agency and social networks as having a major role in the social processes of forced migration and argued there was a need for any analysis of forced migration to take this into account. Similarly, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (2014, p. 6) argued that academic research across the disciplines should 'ensure that policies, studies, and discourses do not deny the agency of displaced persons'. The role of agency in the lived experience of

refugees was commented on by nearly all the contributors to a book on refugees and the transformation of societies. They found that the empowerment of refugees was primarily due to refugees' own agency; 'often against the grain of denigrating labels and stereotypes' (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2005, p. 8).

A helpful definition of agency is found in Norman Long's (2001, p. 49) actor-orientated approach which suggests that individuals possess both knowledge and capability whereby circumstances can be reflexively interpreted and skills can be employed for accessing resources to their advantage:

'Agency implies both a certain knowledgeable ability, whereby experiences and desires are reflexively interpreted and internalised (consciously or otherwise), and the capability to command relevant skills, access to material and non-material resources and engage in particular organising practices' (Long, 2001, p. 49).

In this way, I suggest that refugees use agency to devise coping strategies despite the structural constraints that can result from the practical consequences of forced migration and/or from the imposition of state immigrant policies.

Furthermore, Long's (2001, p. 49) reference to non-material as well as material resources has a particular resonance with this research. Non-material resources associated with religious faith could be regarded of high importance to refugees who are religious. Aspects of social relationships, such as a sense of belonging and friendship, are also important non-material resources for refugees who face isolation and loneliness in new locations. I suggest that a particular benefit of church communities, along with other faith communities, is their potential to provide refugees with environments that gives them access to both non-material

and material resources in one place or community. Moreover, church communities can facilitate the social networks and connections that are important for refugees' organising practices as well as their access to resources. This will be discussed further in the section on communities and social networks in this chapter.

With the concepts of agency and social networks in mind, Cheung and Phillimore's (2013) survey of social networks, social capital and refugee integration in the UK provides interesting insight into the value of church communities for refugees.²²

In Cheung and Phillimore's (2013) survey the type of social network that refugees most valued was a place of worship. Refugees gave this the highest score of 63%; family in the UK came second, and friends in the UK third, with scores of 58% and 44% respectively, while refugees rated refugee community organisational networks (RCOs) at 30% (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013, p. 11).

However, in the same survey (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013), when refugee workers and policy makers were asked to score what they regarded to be the most valuable types of social networks for refugees they consistently gave a very low score to places of worship. Refugee workers scored places of worship at only 15%; policy makers scored these at 16% (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013 p. 11). Refugee workers and policy makers assumed that refugees would most value contact with friends and family in the UK although the percentages they gave for these were still considerably lower than percentages given by the refugees.

²² '[A] longitudinal survey conducted with all new refugees between 2005-2009 exploring integration outcomes in four sweeps in the 21 months after leave to remain was received' (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013, p. v).

When the question about social networks was expanded from the most valued place of contact for refugees to the most valued place where refugees could ask for help, refugees scored a place of worship the highest with 52% whereas both refugee workers and policy makers scored places of worship at a low 13% (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013, p. 11).²³

The results of Cheung and Phillimore's (2013) survey showed a striking gap in the understanding of refugee workers and policy makers about the importance of places of worship in the lived experience of refugees. In particular it raises questions about refugee workers' and policy makers' appreciation of the agency and capability of refugees to seek out and access social networks. Moreover, perhaps Cheung and Phillimore's (2013) survey also indicates how much concepts of refugees as being devoid of agency and having impaired capability are embedded within humanitarian institutions and statutory bodies. These stereotypical definitions and notions are often difficult to reconcile with the lived experiences of refugees (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2005, p. 14).

An added advantage of a lived experience approach to forced migration is that it is not limited to the experiences of refugees but it can include the agency of other social actors who are part of refugees' social and support networks. Here the agency of the supporters of refugees within church communities can be considered alongside that of refugees to provide a more holistic understanding of how church communities operate as social networks for refugees. In the next section a lived

²³ Refugees rated family at 51%, friends at 50%, and RCO type networks at 38% as places where they can ask for help. Refugee workers and policy makers rated family at 23% & 26%, friends at 33% & 26%, and RCO type networks at 13% & 16% respectively as places where refugees can ask for help (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013).

experience approach to religion is considered with a view to understanding how this might be incorporated with a lived experience approach to forced migration.

Religion as lived experience

In this study, I have focused on how religion is experienced, expressed and practised in the everyday lives of refugees. Religion here is understood as more than a set of beliefs about God, gods, or the sacred but as something that people do (Christiano, Swatos, Jr., and Kivisto, 2002). According to Robert Orsi (2010, p. xxxix, emphasis in original), the study of lived religion emphasises the '*embodied practice and imagination*' of individuals. Moreover, giving attention to the everyday interactions of individuals can help religion to escape from 'the pigeonholes to which modernization theories assigned [to] it' (Ammerman (2007, p. 228), as in secularization theories with their strong Eurocentric assumptions (Davie, 2013; Beyer, 2007, p. vii).

A lived experience approach to religion has been variously described as 'religion-in-action', 'lived religion' and 'everyday religion' (Orsi, 2010; McGuire, 2008; Ammerman, 2007). Although the study of religion as lived experience – '*la religion vécue*' – can be found in French traditions of sociology, in recent years there has been growing interest in lived religion in the United States (Orsi, 2010; McGuire, 2008, Ammerman, 2007; Hall, 1997). In particular Robert Orsi's (2010) seminal research that explored the everyday religious experiences of immigrants living in New York's 'Italian Harlem' paved the way for further scholarly research into lived religion in the US. Lived religion has not received the same attention in the UK. However, in a revised edition of her book on the critical agenda of the sociology of religion Davie (2013) added a chapter on religion and the everyday.

According to Orsi (2010, p. xxxix), 'religion-in-action' is inseparable from other practices of everyday life, from how individuals perform the necessities of day-to-day life, or from 'other cultural structures and discourses'. To put this another way, 'the sacred and the spiritual spill over' into everyday life (Levitt, 2007, p. 109). However, Felski (1999, p. 16) argued that the everyday must be secular because 'it conveys the sense of a world leached of transcendence ... no longer connected to the miraculous, the magical, or the sacred'. I suggest that such a distinction between the secular and the religious in everyday lived experience is not possible. The quotidian can be imbued with the sacred, and the mundane of the everyday infused with notions of transcendence as observations of the everyday lives of refugees and migrants reveal (Orsi, 2010; Hagan, 2008; Tweed, 2006). Furthermore, Ammerman (2007, p. 9) cautioned against assumptions that the religious and the secular are mutually exclusive and recommended that we remain 'open to the possibility that the boundaries between them are permeable'.

In the context of understanding the role of religion in transnational migration, Levitt (2002, p. 5-6) argued that we need to build from the ground up with the everyday religious lives of individuals as the starting point. Of course, it cannot be assumed that all refugees are religious. Although religious conviction and practice can be intensified as a result of migration experiences – as Hagan's (2008) research found – the reverse is also possible and some individuals may choose to reject or abandon faith for a variety of reasons.

However, even if refugees are not religious themselves, many come from places in which religion and culture are interwoven in social life. Religions can provide a cultural repository even for individuals who do not regularly participate in

religious practices (Ammerman, 2007, p. 226). In this way, religion shapes how refugees live their everyday lives, including with whom they associate and the types of communities to which they belong (Levitt 2007, p. 109). Therefore, a lived religion approach that situates all religious creativity within culture can be helpful, provided we take into account that 'culture is not a hermetic field of singular meanings' but 'messy, contested, unstable, always in motion' (Orsi, 2010, p. xxxvii-xxxviii).

Although religion as lived experience is concerned with grassroots, everyday practices of individuals, it also gives attention to collective practices and to the religious institutions and structures that inform everyday religious practice (Orsi, 2010; Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2007, p. 193; Tweed, 2006). Orsi (2010, p. xxxvii) described how the study of lived religion gives attention to 'institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas – all the media of making and unmaking worlds'. Since religion as lived experience takes place at the intersection of the everyday practice of individuals and religious institutional realities it can provide a useful framework apropos the interactions of refugees with church communities that are in view in this study.

Whilst the power of religious institutions should not be underestimated, by giving attention to everyday lived religion we can explore how individuals both shape and are shaped by religion (Christiano, Swatos, Jr., and Kivisto, 2002). Ammerman (2007, p.13) argued that throughout history 'change ... has been born in the interstices where everyday [religious] practice goes beyond official dogma'. Through everyday practices refugees and migrants re-create global religions in local contexts by appropriating religion and religiously-informed activities to re-

articulate place and space and social location (Ugba, 2008; Beyer, 2007; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). In London, refugees and migrants have brought change to churches and church attendance as I discussed in chapter two.

Furthermore, Ammerman's (2007) theory – that is, everyday religious practice which 'goes beyond official dogma' can bring about change – is not limited to changes within religious institutions such as were observed by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, p. 1027). Popular beliefs, as opposed to official dogma, also can be mobilised to contribute to change in society, for instance, resistance to social injustice (Ivereigh, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008; Smith, 1996). One example of this is the sanctuary movement in the United States in the 1980s which comprised a collection of individuals from churches and synagogues who were involved in the provision of transport and shelter of Central American refugees (Villazor, 2008; Bau, 1985). The base communities in Latin America that put into practice the principles of liberation theology are another example (Boff and Boff, 1987).

Therefore, I suggest that it is overly simplistic to view religion as always oppressive and the religious as inevitable victims of oppressive religious institutions. Although religious institutions can oppress they can also liberate. Since refugees, like other individuals, act as social agents within religious institutions there is the potential for them to bring change and transformation within culture and religion (Levitt, 2007, p. 107). Furthermore, refugees are capable of mobilising resources – both material and non-material – from within religious institutions both for themselves and for others (Verter, 2003; Long, 2001, p. 49).

Referring to the agency of individuals, Ammerman (2007, p. 234) argued that everyday religion happens in the 'fascinating flow of choosing and creating that constitutes modern social life.' Since the opportunities for refugees to choose and create within modern social life can be severely hampered due the immigrant policies of western governments, I suggest that the role of religious communities can have increased importance. Moreover, since the ideology and practice of religion is not coincident with the ideology and practice of nation-state borders (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1026), religious communities, such as churches, can be some of the few spaces where refugees can exercise agency, make choices and create.

However, as Orsi (2010, p. xlii) reminds us, 'choice never exists apart from constraint'. The benefit of studying religion as lived experience is that it can accommodate such dichotomies as choice and constraint, 'structure and agency, tradition and act, imagination and reality' by simultaneously bringing to light the resourcefulness of religious imaginings and practice together with their limitations (Orsi, 2010, p. xlii). Bearing in mind Orsi's (2010, p. xxxix) emphasis on imagination as well as practice in the study of lived religion, the next section considers the significance of religion as a means for refugees to reimagine space and place and to redefine ways of belonging.

Transcending borders: reimagining place and space, and redefining belonging

Space, place and belonging have particular significance for refugees as they live with the memories of past homes and homelands, the experiences of journeys across nation-state borders, and the uncertainties and challenges involved in the recreation of home in new geographical locations (Chatty, 2014; Korac, 2009;

Levitt, 2007; Turton, 2005). Religion expressed and experienced through narratives, symbols, liturgy, and ritual can provide an important means for the religious to reimagine space and place and to redefine belonging as previous research with migrants in the US has indicated (Orsi, 2010; Hagan, 2008; Levitt, 2007; Tweed, 2006).

From the perspective of refugees, the advantage of religion is that it can operate outside of, and across, nation-state borders (Levitt, 2007; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). According to Levitt (2007, p. 111) religion is 'the archetypal spatial and temporal boundary crosser'. The personal and internalised nature of religious belief means that it is one of the few things that cannot be taken away from refugees as they cross nation-state borders, even if how they are permitted to perform and express their religious belief in host countries might be restricted. Therefore, religion can be perceived as a constant in a world of flux that is often the experience of refugees. It is not difficult to see how the importance of religion can be intensified by the experiences of forced migration.

At the same time, I recognise that some religion can be strongly associated with nation-states and ideologies of national belonging and can bolster political and cultural constructions of the nation (Anderson, 1983). Moreover, I also recognise that religion can construct its own borders around religious belonging, although I suggest that these borders are not always as impermeable as Yuval-Davis (2011) argues. As mentioned in the last section, religious people are capable of adapting and mobilising religion for their benefit and the benefit of others (Verter, 2003; Long, 2001). However, in this section I give particular attention to how refugees

mobilise religious imagination and practice to transcend borders (Levitt, 2007; Tweed, 2006).

The common theme that emerged from Tweed's (2006) theory of religion and Levitt's (2007) theory of the transnationalisation of religious life for migrants in the US, is that religion, manifested in belief systems, can be mobilised by individuals to position themselves in and across geographical places and social spaces. In particular Tweed's (2006) use of the spatial metaphors of 'crossing' and 'dwelling' to describe his theory of religion hints at why religion can be significant in the lives of many refugees. According to Tweed (2006, p. 74), 'religious women and men are continually in the process of mapping a symbolic landscape and constructing a symbolic dwelling in which they might have their own space and find their own place'. There is an obvious parallel with the lived experiences of refugees who have taken physical journeys to new geographical places across national borders and who face the challenges of emplacement in new locations.

Tweed emphasised how religion operates to situate individuals in geographical places and social space by appealing to what he termed 'supranatural forces' to legitimise and prescribe social locations with notions of belonging: 'you are this and you belong here' (2006, p. 75). Tweed's words are mirrored in the Cardinal's homily given for a Mass that was held in London and attended by more than two thousand migrants (Ivereigh, 2010).²⁴ The Cardinal appealed to what Catholics would understand as the Divine authority of the Catholic Church to legitimise the migrants' place and their sense of belonging. He told the gathering of migrants that, 'as far as the Catholic Church is concerned, *you are Londoners*. [...] We want

²⁴ Quoted in full at the beginning of Chapter 2, this work.

you to feel welcome in our parishes and our schools and our ethnic chaplaincies. We want you to know that *you belong*' (Ivereigh, 2010, emphasis mine).

Tweed's theory of religion lists four places where religion situates the devout in the imagination and practice of the religious: 'the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos' (2006, p. 74). In the context of the experiences of refugees, I suggest that *the host country* could be added as a fifth place in Tweed's list: the body, the home, the homeland, *the host country*, and the cosmos. Finding place and remaking home in the host country is of great importance to refugees, and religion can help refugees to negotiate and orientate how and where they belong in new geographical places (Tweed, 2006). However, the host country does not necessarily replace the homeland in the hearts and minds of refugees, as transnational practices such as the repatriation of bodies of the deceased to countries of birth would suggest.

Religious imagination and practice also helps to maintain connections between the host country and the homeland by providing a link between the 'here' and 'there'; thus helping to facilitate the transnational belonging of refugees (Levitt, 2007).

Religion transcends nation-state borders as Levitt (2007, p. 111) wryly commented, 'the birth of the modern nation-state system has not required God to use a passport'. Religion also transcends the boundaries of time by providing refugees with the means to feel part of a 'chain of memory' that links the past, present, and future (Levitt, 2007; Hervieu-Léger, 2000). Similarly, Tweed (2006, p. 5) argued that religion is both retrospective and prospective.

Consequently, research into the role of religion in the lives of refugees leads to a transnational conceptual framework where culture and identity are disengaged

from territorialised, nation-state concepts of place and space (Chatty, 2014; Levitt, 2007; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). Nevertheless, a paradox exists in terms of the lived experience of refugees. Although religion provides refugees with ways of constructing different social realities, and in some respects, to transcend what Malkki (1995b) has termed 'the national order of things', at the same time refugees still live with the very real constraints associated with immigration policies that are a consequence of politically and socially constructed nation-state boundaries (Malkki, 1995b; Anderson, 1983).

In this section, I have taken a social constructivist position whereby it is understood that geographical place is made meaningful by people and that social space is socially constructed. I have suggested that refugees mobilise religion to reimagine place and space and to redefine belonging in ways that transcend nation-state territorialised concepts. As Chatty (2014, p. 81) reminds us, spatial meanings are determined by those who have the power to make places out of spaces. In many ways, refugees have been rendered powerless through state immigration policies. Therefore, refugees' connections to religious institutions that do have power are of particular importance as the previously cited example of the Cardinal's homily demonstrated. How churches operate as communities providing refugees with access to local and transnational social networks will be discussed further in the next section.

Churches as communities and social networks

One of the consequences of forced migration for refugees is the loss or disruption of community, and therefore, the loss or disruption of social networks that are ubiquitous elements of community life. Social networks can be vital sources for

support and solidarity for individuals within any given community. Therefore, for refugees, re-establishing community in host countries is an essential part of the process of remaking home since it can provide the social context in which social relationships and networks can flourish (O'Neill, 2010; Zetter et al, 2006; Zetter, Griffiths, and Sigona, 2005). Although some research has been undertaken into the role of social networks for refugees and migrants (Griffiths, Sigona and Zetter, 2005; Williams, 2006), the role of church communities has been largely overlooked.

Faith communities can have a significant role in re-establishing community and in facilitating social connections for refugees, both locally and transnationally (Levitt, 2007; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt, 2002). Of course, it cannot be assumed that all churches operate as communities or that all churches will be supportive of refugees. Moreover, whilst communities can be places of support and solidarity, careful attention also needs to be given to any inequalities and constraints within communities or the exclusion of outsiders (Bauman, 2001; Crow and Allen, 1994).

The concept of community has multiple meanings not least because community is experienced in different ways by different groups of individuals (Crow and Allen, 1994). In this study, local churches are understood as communities that are structured mostly around common ties of religious affiliation, although common ties of experience and shared culture may also be involved (Gilchrist, 2009; Crow and Allen, 1994). Identity within church communities is predominantly constructed around Christian traditions, popular belief and official dogma, and symbols and rituals, all of which inform the codes and conventions of belonging as well as the way in which individuals go about their everyday lives (Orsi, 2010;

Gilchrist, 2009; Geertz, 2002; 1973). Ethnic or national cultural traditions also can be interwoven with religious identity to a lesser or greater extent depending on the church community (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Geertz, 2002; 1973). According to Ammerman (2007, p. 227), religiosity has many dimensions which means it cannot be 'neatly bundled into an identity package'. Since identity is constructed, individuals use different religious and cultural elements in order to 'sustain or re-create a place in a world of plural cultures' (Ammerman, 2007, p. 227).

Gilchrist (2009, p. 6) observed that individuals can belong to several communities at once, giving rise to a 'fluid, almost hybrid, form' of flexible networks. Zetter *et al.* (2006, p. 24) found that refugee and migrant groups are not an exception to this ability to simultaneous belonging to different communities, although paradoxically 'this cohesion can also coexist with separateness'. However, Levitt's (2007, p. 109) observation that many migrants did not feel a sense of belonging to any one faith community is interesting in the light of the anthropological research with refugee and migrant communities that was mentioned previously in this chapter (Orsi, 2010; Tweed, 2006). Levitt's (2007, p. 109) research found that many migrants were flexible about the faith communities they attended and that they were happy to worship at different churches, temples, or mosques that were close to their place of residency rather than belonging to one particular congregation. However, Levitt's study raises the questions as to whether the close proximity of the places of worship influenced the migrants' choices, and whether they had access to non-religious communities that provided them with social networks thus negating the need for any one particular faith community to provide these.

Local church community affiliations to transnational Christian denominational institutions, such as the Catholic Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and the Anglican Communion, can give individuals ‘a sense of global religious membership that complements, competes with, or supersedes national membership’ (Levitt, 2007, p. 110).²⁵ Although in some respects global religious communities are imagined, the religious institutional organisations behind them are powerful, well-organised, transnational operations (Levitt, 2007; Anderson, 1983). Levitt (2007, p. 110) described the Catholic Church as having ‘the most highly articulated, widely recognized system of transnational governance, linking its members through its national conference and social movement chapters around the world’.²⁶ It follows that a refugee’s previous religious affiliation to a Christian denomination could be helpful both for making initial connections and for the refugee’s sense of belonging. For instance, a Catholic from Africa who goes to a Catholic Church in the UK will experience the same, or similar, liturgy and ritual even if in another language. Many Christian denominations are undoubtedly global brands.

As with communities in general, local church communities are comprised of personal, collective, and organisational networks that arise from the informal interactions and connections of individuals which can be mobilised for everyday life, as well as in times of difficulty and crisis (Gilchrist, 2009, p.3; Crow and Allen, 1994). Crow and Allen (1994, p. 1) defined community life as comprised of

²⁵ The Anglican Communion has ‘around 85 million members, spread across 38 Provinces in more than 165 countries’. Available at: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/pages/anglican-communion.html> (Accessed: 5 November 2015).

²⁶ The numbers of Roman Catholics worldwide estimated at almost 1.1 billion members in 2010. Available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/> (Accessed: 6 November 2015).

'interlocking social networks of neighbourhood, kinship and friendship'. In Gilchrist's (2009, p. 1) theory of a well-connected community social networks are understood in a wider sense as connections between groups and organisations as well as people: 'the experience of community is generated by and manifest in the informal networks that exist between people, between groups and between organisations'. Connections with people and organisations beyond the immediate borders of communities could both increase the potential for community members to access resources outside the community and encourage a culture of inclusivity and openness to change within the community itself.

In their framework for refugees' integration, Ager and Strang (2008) conceptualised social networks as 'social connections' that operate in three ways: as 'social bonds' with family, co-ethnic and co-religious groups; as 'social bridges' into other communities; and as 'social links' with statutory organisations.

Ager's and Strang's (2008) model for social connections as social bonds, social bridges, and social links suggests that the effectiveness of a church community for facilitating support networks for refugees will be directly related to the social connections that exist within the church community. For instance, 'social links' with structures of the state are likely to be stronger for church communities that are connected to the Church of England than for BMC and immigrant churches. On the other hand, the 'social bonds' of refugees in BMC and immigrant churches could be stronger than within traditional denominational churches in the UK. A shared Christian faith, especially if linked to the same denominational affiliation, could also provide the basis for strong social bonds within traditional UK churches. BMC and immigrant churches are more likely to provide refugees with effective

'social bridges' in terms of transnational connections. It follows that traditional established churches that are embedded within British society, such as the Church of England, could be more beneficial to refugees in terms of social bridges into society in the UK.

The notion that individuals can access support through social networks suggests a link to notions of social types of capital. However, I will suggest in the following section that it is necessary to look beyond social capitals theories when exploring the support and solidarity that church communities give to refugees.

Beyond social capital and faith capital

Membership of social networks with shared values is central to theories of social capital (Field, 2008; Lin, 2002; Burt, 2000). Individuals need social networks both to accrue and to use social capital. Therefore, it is perhaps to be expected that Ager and Strang (2008) drew on social capital theories in their model of social connections for facilitating refugee integration (Putnam, 2000; 1995; Woolcock, 1998). According to Field (2008, p. 20), social capital is 'quintessentially a product of collective interaction'. Gilchrist (2009, p. 11) argued that social capital 'is the value added through networking processes' which 'resides within the web of ties and linkages that we call community'. It could be said, therefore, that social capital is essentially redundant without the existence of social networks or connections.

Since faith communities are comprised of social networks, some theorists have conceptualised faith as social capital (Bunn and Wood, 2012; Baker and Smith, 2010; Furbey, et al. 2006). As with communities in general, belonging in faith communities is based on shared norms of trust and mutuality. According to the theory of faith as social capital, members of faith communities use connections to

social networks within their faith community both for accruing and using social capital (Bunn and Wood, 2012; Baker and Smith, 2010; Furbey, et al. 2006).

Individuals with pre-existing connections to religious institutions also can use this faith capital to gain access and to belong to other faith communities in different locations, such as the example of a Catholic from Africa finding a familiar connection to a Catholic Church in the UK that was mentioned previously in the last section.

Although social capital and faith capital theories can partly explain the interactions between refugees and church communities, I suggest that neither social capital nor faith capital theories provide the full picture. Firstly, social and faith capital theories tend to ignore the complexity of 'human action and relationships of all sorts – religious and otherwise [which] are about a great deal more than maximizing rewards' (Ammerman, 2007, p. 227). For instance, religious actors are just as likely to relate a story about the way religion helped them when they suffered as they are to speak about 'rewards' (Tweed, 2006; Geertz, 1973).

Therefore, giving attention to the narratives of religious actors is important for understanding the complexity of religious action (Ammerman, 2007; Orsi, 2010).

The next chapter on research methods explores further how narrative approaches informed my research design in order to help accommodate religious complexity.

Secondly, social and faith capital theories do not explain why church communities give support to individuals who have no pre-existing social connections to Christianity or to the same Christian denomination. Therefore, I suggest we need to look beyond social and faith capital theories to understand why church communities support individuals who do not share their Christian faith, or do not

belong to their particular denominational church organisation, and may never do so. Although the types of support given to refugees by church communities include material support it often extends beyond this; for instance, solidarity with refugees regarding issues of justice around their individual circumstances. In the next section I explore how hospitality could provide a useful concept for understanding the interactions between refugees and church communities that cannot entirely be explained by social capital or faith capital theories.

The main title of the next section was taken from a phrase used by Bretherton (2006, p. 133) in his theory of hospitality. Bretherton's use of the word 'economy' provided a link with the economic concepts hinted at by social capital theories. Although the word 'blessing' has religious undertones, I am using 'blessing' in a generic sense to describe the support given by one person to another.

Hospitality: 'an economy of blessing'

Hospitality operates in a different way to social capital theories. Whereas social capital and faith capital are concerned with those who belong in the same social setting and networks, acts of hospitality can go beyond interactions with only those who belong and include the stranger, or the other (Bretherton, 2006; Derrida, 2005; 2001; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). I suggest that the inclusion of the stranger and the other in the concept and practice of hospitality means that it deserves attention in forced migration studies. In this section, I am interested in investigating how the concept and practice of hospitality might contribute to the way refugees are received in communities. Of particular interest is whether hospitality addresses the dynamics in the relationship between recipient and 'helper' vis-à-vis issues of power; issues which are central to

concerns about humanitarian responses to refugees (Harrell-Bond, 2002). Of course, the issue of power relations is also fundamental to the ability of individuals to benefit from social capital (Portes, 1998; Bourdieu, 1986).

The concept and practice of hospitality can be found in various cultures.

According to Derrida (2005, p. 6) 'there is no culture or social bond without a principle of hospitality'. For example, Chatty (2013) has drawn attention to the way Arab hospitality – *karam* – underpins a humane approach to refugee policy in the Middle East. In Africa, hospitality is central to the principle of communal life – *ubuntu* – which influences how individuals relate to one another (Tutu, 2015a; Cornell, 2014).

In the well-known political treatise, 'Perpetual Peace', Immanuel Kant (1795) proposed the conditions of 'universal hospitality'. However, Kant's universal hospitality was limited to the rights of a 'foreigner' to visit without being treated with hostility; that is, hospitality as the right of visitation rather than the right of residence (Westmoreland, 2008; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). The primary focus of Derrida's consideration of the concept and practice of hospitality was a comparison between 'conditional hospitality' – as defined by Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, and philosophers of law such as Kant – and 'unconditional hospitality' (Derrida, 2005; 2001; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 77). Derrida defined unconditional, or unlimited, hospitality as the giving to 'the new arrival all of one's home and oneself [...] without asking a name or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 77). Considering conditional and unconditional hospitality together, Derrida argued that the '[o]ne calls forth, involves, or

prescribes the other' (Derrida, 2005; 2001; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 147). Thus, Derrida drew attention to the tension that exists between conditional and unconditional hospitality which make them difficult to reconcile.

By definition, conditional hospitality requires that certain terms and expectations are adhered to regarding the receiving of guests by a host. In a conditional hospitality scenario, a guest enters at the invitation of a host who has laid out the terms of that visit. Therefore, the invitation becomes a gesture of power (Houston, 2015, p. 153), whereas unconditional hospitality requires that the host's home becomes the home of the other without any expectation of, or request for, reciprocity. With unconditional hospitality power is relinquished by the host so that anyone can 'come in' and receive hospitality. Therefore, in an unconditional hospitality scenario, there is also the possibility that the 'home' of the host can be violated by the visitor; the home that made hospitality possible in the first instance (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 53).

For Derrida, the question of hospitality was more than a theoretical one. Derrida was writing and speaking about hospitality at a time of particular oppression of undocumented migrants in France – the *sans-papiers*.²⁷ In 1996, the imposition of the Debret laws allowed French security forces to summarily detain and deport *san-papiers* even if they had lived in France for many decades (Powell, 2006; Derrida, 2001, p. ix). Derrida was critical of the French government for their neoliberal stance of allowing immigration when there was an economic necessity for it and then opposing it when elections needed to be won in an effort to counter

²⁷ *Sans-papiers* translated from French literally means (people) without (identity) papers and is used to describe undocumented migrants.

right-wing political parties (Powell, 2006, p. 216) – policy that continues to be the response of neoliberal governments in Europe and other western nations in the twenty-first century.

The concept and practice of hospitality suggests a close link to sanctuary and refuge. Interestingly, several hundred *sans-papiers* took refuge in Paris churches on two separate occasions in 1996 only to be forcibly removed by French security forces despite mass demonstrations by protestors in Paris (O’Connell, 1996). The French government also made it a crime to give refuge to a foreigner for more than eight days: a ‘crime of hospitality’ (Powell, 2006, p. 216). During an interview in 1997 it emerged that Derrida was involved in the sheltering of individuals who were *sans-papiers* at that time (Derrida, 2005).

Derrida’s (2005) personal involvement in acts of hospitality that gave refuge to *sans-papiers* highlights how individuals, civil society, and the state can be at odds and have different roles regarding hospitality toward refugees. The state essentially sets the conditions and the limits of hospitality toward refugees through immigration regulations. Some individuals and members of civil society groups may want to be hospitable toward refugees but the conditions set by the state can make that difficult or impossible to achieve. For example, many individuals in Britain were prepared to open their homes to unaccompanied refugee children from the Calais Camp known as *The Jungle*. Civil society groups, such as Citizens UK, charities, churches and other faith communities set up support networks in conjunction with local authorities in preparation for the arrival of the refugee children. However, the state failed to approve the admittance of refugee children into Britain for many months, despite the protests

of individuals and campaign groups that included some politicians. The dismantling of the Calais Camp by the French government in October, 2016 eventually forced the UK government to begin to admit unaccompanied refugee children (England, 2016; Pidd, 2016).

Different ideologies and traditions inspire acts of hospitality that are performed by individuals and civil society. The following section looks at hospitality in the Christian tradition since this coincides with this study of refugees' interactions with church communities.

The parable of the host and the guests

Cultural and religious traditions have different forms of hospitality. Hospitality, therefore, needs to be understood within particular traditions (Bretherton, 2006, p. 127). Since my research is concerned with church communities, in this section I consider hospitality as found in the doctrines and social practices of the Christian tradition. I am not suggesting that church communities will always be hospitable; history clearly shows that religious people can be both hospitable and inhospitable. However, I am interested to understand how concepts of hospitality in the Christian tradition inform interactions between refugees and church communities, and how these concepts compare with Derrida's notions of conditional and unconditional hospitality (Derrida, 2005; 2001; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000).

Stories of hospitality are a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament. Biblical texts that cite 'cities of refuge' and the principles of fair treatment and love for the 'alien [who] resides with you in your land' (Leviticus, 19 v. 33-34) are often quoted in the context of the support of refugees and migrants. However, there are also

stories of exclusion in the Old Testament that were based on the Israelites' perceived need to be set apart or holy; stories that are in direct contrast with the more welcoming texts such as love for the alien. Bretherton (2006) argues that, in the Christian tradition, Jesus deals with the dichotomy of hospitality and holiness by making hospitality a means of holiness. According to Bretherton (2006, p. 130), through his own acts of hospitality Jesus both rejected, and presented an alternative to, Israel's quest for holiness that involved the exclusion of the other.

There is not the scope for in-depth theological analysis here. However, it is helpful briefly to consider the New Testament parable that Bretherton (2006, p. 131) regarded as central to understanding hospitality in the Christian tradition.

Although this parable in the gospel of Luke (14 v. 15-24) is traditionally known as the parable of the great banquet, I suggest that for the purposes of this enquiry, the parable of the host and the guests is, perhaps, a more apt title. In the context of a feast, the biblical text relays the conversation Jesus had with his host who was a prominent Pharisee prior to Jesus's telling of the parable (Luke, 14 v. 7-14). The conversation is relevant because it sets the scene for the parable which is related to it. Jesus told his host that he should not invite his friends, relatives or rich neighbours to a banquet because if he did so, they may invite him back and he would be repaid. Instead, Jesus told his host he should invite the poor and those who were disabled to the banquet because they could not repay him. As a result, the host would be blessed, although the blessing would not be received on earth but in heaven. In the parable that followed, the privileged were invited to the banquet but gave excuses and chose not to attend – an insult within that culture –

whereupon the invitation was extended to the disadvantaged and marginalised including those outside of the community.

Jesus's conversation with his host and the subsequent parable challenged the norms of the day regarding hospitality. Jewish, as well as Greek and Roman views of hospitality, inclined toward an emphasis on reciprocity. The guests who Jesus suggested should be invited had nothing to bring, either in terms of status or gifts, which meant that the host was not indebted to the guests. Bretherton (2006, p. 133) deals with the potential of the guests being indebted to the host by arguing that the host needed the guests because without them there would be no banquet. The picture is one of mutuality where the purpose is relationship, the communion of host and guests (Bretherton, 2006).

Bretherton (2006, p. 149) concluded that to warrant hospitality the stranger does not have to deserve it, earn it, or possess some quality to make them worthy of acceptance in the human community. Furthermore, in New Testament texts Jesus identified both with the host and the guests. As a guest, Jesus also could appear in the guise of a stranger – 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' – and as the destitute and marginalised (Matthew, 25 v. 35-36). Thus, Jesus is implying that the treatment of the stranger should be no different to treatment of Jesus. By putting himself in the positions of both guest and host, Jesus modelled the basis of the relationship and, perhaps, also inferred that circumstances can change so that a host might find herself as the guest and in need of the hospitality of someone else.

Central to the Christian concepts of hospitality is the idea of mutuality in the relationship between host and guest. This begins with the disregarding of the things that are associated with status that could make the relationship between

host and guest unequal. The responsibility to lay down power is with the host and reward is not to be expected or sought this side of heaven.

The Christian tradition and understanding of hospitality would seem closer to Derrida's definition of unconditional hospitality. Of course, practice can fall short of the ideal. However, the question arises as to whether the Christian principle of hospitality works because both the guest and the host know the terms under which that hospitality is to be practised. Since the terms are already laid down by Christian tradition, the need for the host to exercise power and lay down terms of hospitality – as in Derrida's conditional hospitality – is removed. Since the host and the guest both know the terms, this can be the ground for trust so that unconditional hospitality is less likely to be abused. Mutuality and trust based on terms that are implicitly understood and passed on through cultural traditions, also may be the basis of other cultural forms of hospitality, such as *ubuntu*.

Finally, in the context of hospitality toward refugees, conditions will always exist by virtue of the involvement of the state that sets itself up as the ultimate authority regarding who is to be invited and who is not. The corollary is that, on occasion, the church might find itself actively in opposition to those who would be, according to the Christian criteria of hospitality, inhospitable to the stranger (Bretherton, 2006, p. 141).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the notion of lived experience can be usefully employed in the study of interactions between refugees and church communities. I suggest that when religion is studied from the position of everyday lived experience – lived religion – then understanding can be advanced about how

religious faith shapes refugees' practice and imagination as they seek to re-establish community and make social connections and networks in new geographical locations.

Instead of beginning with fixed definitions of religion, lived religion emphasises individual lived experience within social contexts and considers how the complexities of religious practice are interwoven into everyday life. It recognises the agency of individuals and of collectivities – in the case of this study, church communities – as well as the power of organisational actors such as religious institutions. The theoretical openness of lived religion takes into consideration how religion can cross boundaries through the everyday strategies of individuals which has significance for this study into the interactions between refugees and church communities.

The notion that individuals use religion to cross boundaries is found in Tweed's (2006) theory of religion that conceptualises religion as fluid and in motion as opposed to static. Summed up as 'crossing and dwelling', Tweed's (2006) theory emphasises how individuals mobilise religion to find place and move across space. Tweed's theory is helpful for considering how refugees might use religion to negotiate and orientate how and where they belong as well as to make sense of their experiences of forced migration. However, it is important to allow for the possibility that there may be multiple 'crossings' and 'dwellings' rather than a singular 'crossing' with a final 'dwelling' that signals arrival. Religion can help refugees remake home even in transitory places as the concepts of place and space are reimagined by them within a religious paradigm so that belonging can be redefined in ways that transcend nation-state territorialised concepts.

Churches can operate as well-connected communities and provide refugees with social networks that can be mobilised for support in everyday life as well as in times of difficulty and crisis. I suggest that we need to look beyond social and faith capital theories to understand why church communities might support refugees particularly when refugees do not share their Christian faith, or do not belong to their denominational church organisation, and may never do so. I propose that hospitality could provide a useful concept for understanding the interactions between refugees and church communities since hospitality can go beyond interactions with those who belong, and include the stranger, the Other.

Importantly for this study the concept of lived experience supports a ground-up approach to research and in the next chapter I discuss the qualitative research methods that I employed to explore the lived experiences of refugees and individuals in church communities in respect of the interactions between them.

Chapter 4

Research methods and methodology

Fieldwork proceeds through relationships. This means that something that was not there before – understanding, memories, disappointments, and so on, hidden, unacknowledged, unformulated, or even unknown – becomes present in the exchanges as people tell their stories to another person who listens to them and responds. (Orsi, 2010, p. xliii)

Introduction

The central purpose of this qualitative research was to understand refugees' experiences and interactions with church communities in London. Several key research questions helped to frame my research strategy and these are recapped here from chapter one: Why and how do refugees choose to connect with local church communities, and what are refugees' expectations and experiences of those interactions? How do refugees mobilise everyday lived religion to help mitigate the effects of forced migration and the challenges associated with settling in new locations? Why and how do church communities support refugees, and to what extent is this guided by Christian doctrine and traditions of hospitality to the stranger?

The last chapter explored how the concept of lived experience is central to the theoretical framework of this research. Lived experience also informed my chosen research methods which are the focus of this chapter. As discussed previously, the study of lived experience supports a ground-up approach to research in which the

perspectives, experiences, and interactions of the everyday lives of individuals are central to any enquiry. By using a lived experience approach in this study, I could give attention to how refugees use agency to make choices and act upon those choices despite structural constraints that result from being refugees.

Furthermore, by considering religion as lived experience it has been possible to consider how refugees, clergy and laity mobilise their beliefs and practices within different social contexts and to explore the nature of their interactions and of support and solidarity. Consequently, in-depth interviews with participants were a very important source of data for this study and narrative research methods helped to inform my research design.

The ethnographic fieldwork phase of this study took place in 2013 in churches and refugee centres across the city of London where I listened to and observed refugees, clergy and laity in nine churches that are affiliated to different Christian denominations, as well as refugees, staff and volunteers in five centres and one food bank that were all situated in church buildings. During my ethnographic fieldwork I purposively selected participants for in-depth interviews that provided the rich data set. This chapter discusses my research methods and methodology as well as some of the issues I encountered during fieldwork such as logistical issues of access to hidden refugee populations and ethical issues that might arise in the context of forced migration research.

Research design

My original research aim of including the first-hand experiences and perspectives of refugees, as well as those of clergy and laity, was fundamental to my qualitative research design that was informed by narrative research methods (Squire *et al*,

2014; Creswell, 2013; Reissman, 2008; Clandinin, 2007; Eastmond, 2007). The importance of the inclusion of narratives in research is a recurring theme in theories of lived experience that were discussed in the last chapter (Orsi, 2010; Levitt, 2007; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Ammerman, 2007). Narrative research is based on experiences as they are expressed in the 'lived and told stories of individuals' (Creswell, 2013, p.70). However, Reissman (2008, p. 3) pointed out that 'transforming a lived experience into language and constructing a story about it is not straightforward'.

One of the benefits of using narrative methods in forced migration research is that narrative enables the diversity of refugees' experiences to be appreciated in the context of what are often 'universalizing and stereotypical descriptions of what it means to be a 'refugee'' (Eastmond, 2007, p. 253; see also Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, by focusing on the everyday stories of individuals, narrative research can 'introduce marginalized voices' and advance understanding of what is hidden, unnoticed, and unrecorded which is especially apt for this research with refugees in London (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, 2008, p. 1). Like city-dwelling refugees around the world, many refugees in London live on the margins of society, and consequently, whether by choice or circumstance their lives are often 'hidden' from view (Landau, 2014; McConnell, 2013; Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007; Marfleet, 2007). Furthermore, belonging to church communities does not change refugees' own decisions to stay 'hidden' and to keep their immigrant history and citizenship status a secret. Indeed, churches are some of the few places in society where refugees do not have to undergo any sort of questioning about their immigration history or status to gain admittance and

acceptance. I was also aware when considering my research design that social action within church communities often takes place behind the scenes on a one-to-one basis and that member-clergy confidence is usually a guiding principle in church communities.

Given the often unpredictable circumstances of refugees in London who can move or be relocated at very short notice, together with the diverse and complex lives of the refugees who were in view in this study, quantitative research methods that rely strongly on surveys and statistics would be highly problematic and an impractical and unsatisfactory method for collecting data (Bryman, 2008). On the other hand, I also considered the concerns of Jacobsen and Landau (2003) about some small-scale qualitative research methods in forced migration that fail to be methodologically and ethically robust. I agree with Rodgers (2004) that whilst the need for robust methods in research is unquestionable, the introduction of more quantitative data in forced migration research can be both problematic and at times, unethical.

Rodgers (2004, p. 48) argued that neatly designed surveys may completely miss the defining aspects of the social experience of refugees. Moreover, surveys presuppose that the researcher already knows the relevant questions that need to be answered. Rodgers (2004, p. 48) also argued that quantitative research surveys could 'obscure the politically uncomfortable origins of these problems and optimistically advance technical interventions that address symptoms rather than causes'. These potential pitfalls can occur because surveys do not reveal in-depth data about everyday lived experiences of refugees.

A qualitative approach that uses narrative research can facilitate the production of in-depth descriptive data about the lived experiences of refugees, as told by refugees and those who interact with them. Narrative research accommodates a ground-up approach and it brings to the fore issues that are important to refugees instead of issues that have been predetermined by researchers who design surveys and questionnaires. Narrative research can reveal insights into refugees' agency, belonging and social networks. Through narrative research it is also possible to explore the 'radical discontinuities' in the lives of refugees as well as their 'struggle to make sense of disruptive change' (Eastmond, 2007, p. 251).

Having chosen to draw on a narrative approach, my research design needed to give attention to overcoming the logistical issues of access to urban refugee populations. Therefore, the issue of how to gain access to participants and to win their trust as a researcher were important, early considerations. I had reasoned that my previous knowledge and experience of church communities in London could help with access to refugees. However, the solution to these issues of access was not fully resolved at the initial design stage of my research. My experience suggested that some aspects of the design process of a qualitative study can emerge during fieldwork (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 19; Creswell, 2013, p. 65).

Once my fieldwork began, I found part of the solution to the logistical issues of gaining access to participants for my research was to employ what I will call a *carpe diem* approach. As I visited churches and refugee centres throughout a twelve-month period, I made the most of every opportunity, collecting narratives along the way. These narratives were a valuable addition to the narratives that

were obtained through planned, in-depth interviews at a later stage (Brinkman and Kvale, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

My *carpe diem* approach was akin to Rodgers's (2004) approach to research with forced migrants which he termed 'hanging out'. Although the phrase 'hanging out' could imply passivity in a colloquial sense, Rodgers (2004) described this as a participatory approach that gives attention to the production of knowledge through 'informal, interpersonal and "everyday" types of encounters' between refugees and researcher. Rodgers's (2004) approach can accommodate fieldwork environments that require researchers to be 'constantly negotiating, constantly reevaluating, and maintaining flexibility and openness to an ever-changing landscape' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 71).

An important development in my research design which emerged during fieldwork was that refugees introduced me to church communities rather than only clergy and volunteers introducing me to refugees. I had thought that individuals within church communities would introduce me to the refugees who would become my participants. In fact, the role of some refugees as collaborators in the research brought a change in the dynamic of our power relations (Dona, 2007). To involve some refugees as collaborators with me in the research, and not just as willing participants, was an encouraging development that resonated with the ethos of this research.

I was mindful that any research design that involved gaining trust and access to participants required consideration of ethical issues and concerned to ensure that participants' involvement in the research did not expose the immigrant status of any refugees who did not want this revealed to others. Confidentiality and other

ethical considerations will be discussed later in this chapter. The next section describes the research sites at which my fieldwork was based.

Research sites: churches and refugee centres in London

Churches and refugee centres in London provided the social contexts where I could meet, observe, and interact with refugees, clergy and laity, centre staff and volunteers. The purpose was twofold: to identify and select potential participants in this study and build relationships with them, and to increase my knowledge and understanding of refugees' interactions with church communities through observation and involvement with individuals in churches and refugee centres.

Over a period of twelve months I carried out observation in nine London churches that support refugees. My visits were all the result of invitations from refugees, clergy, laity or volunteers except in one instance when, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I attended a church that I already knew had a long association with a refugee centre that I also had a connection with. In this case, I introduced myself and spoke to the clergy about my research at the end of the worship service. The nine churches that I visited are affiliated to different Christian denominations and included: four Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) churches including two Ivorian churches, one Nigerian church, and one Persian church; three Anglican churches, one Catholic church; and one BNCM church.²⁸

Although worship services in churches are public meetings, I felt it was important that the clergy in each of the churches where I attended worship services should be aware that I was conducting research into refugees' interactions with church

²⁸ Non-conformist churches in the British New Church Movement (BNCM) are sometimes referred to as New churches or House churches. The churches are part of a neo-charismatic, evangelical, Christian movement originally known as the House Church Movement.

communities. In every instance, I was given unrestricted access to speak to any church members who were interested in participating. On two occasions, the clergy publicly introduced me to the congregation during the worship service and endorsed my research and encouraged people to speak to me if they would like to participate in the research. On one occasion, I was also asked to speak publicly about the research to the congregation at the end of the worship service. Although individuals spoke to me after these worship services and offered some interesting anecdotes, none of them were participants in the in-depth interviews.

I was also invited by clergy and laity to attend and observe meetings other than worship services. On two occasions, I was invited to attend workshops on immigration that were held by churches for members and members' friends and neighbours. Both the workshops were organised in conjunction with Citizens UK. One workshop was organised by an Anglican church and the other by a Catholic church. At the workshop in the Anglican church, solicitors who work voluntarily with Citizens UK offered free, twenty-minute, confidential consultations about immigration issues for any attendees. On six occasions, I was invited to join communal meals that were held after church services that I had attended. I was also invited to a meal on a mid-week evening in the community house that is run by one church. The hospitality of churches was matched by refugee centres where I was similarly invited to stay and eat whenever there was a communal meal.

I carried out observation at six centres that work with refugees, all of which met in premises that are rented from churches. These six centres were open to refugees from any religious tradition; Christian refugees were in the minority at the centres. Five of the centres provided language lessons and help with immigration and

welfare issues for refugees and migrants; these centres were staffed by paid support workers and voluntary staff. The sixth centre was primarily a food bank for refugees although provision was made for refugees to socialise over coffee. The centre that is a food bank is an ecumenical project. Of the five other centres, only one is affiliated to a single church. Four centres were run as independent charities. However, these four independent centres are supported and resourced by churches through the input of volunteers and gifts of material resources. The clergy who work at the churches that let their buildings to the refugee centres were very supportive of the work they were doing. In one case, the church building is let to the refugee centre at ten percent of the normal rate for building hire. A Bible study group for refugees met once a week in one of the refugee centres but this was not run by the centre. I had an open invitation to attend the bible study group which I did on three occasions.

I had previous contact with one refugee centre through research for my Masters degree and I had an open invitation to visit the centre at any time. However, I needed to arrange visits with the other five centre managers or administrators by email and phone calls. In the case of two centres, I found that it took time and persistence to get a response since my request was not a priority for staff who are often overworked with many pressing demands. I managed to get an initial invitation to one centre after a serendipitous meeting with a centre worker. This worker then brokered my visits. Once at the centre, the manager, staff, and volunteers gave generously of their time to assist me with my research. The visit to this centre then opened up a connection to another centre where I had previously also experienced delays in gaining permission to visit.

Through visits to churches and centres, as well as attendance over four years at the quarterly public meetings, seminars and conferences arranged by the London Churches Refugee Network (LCRN), I built up contacts who enabled me to identify and select all the participants who could give in-depth interviews for this study. I also collected important data along the way through observations in churches and centres that I recorded in my fieldwork journal. On one occasion, I also made audio recordings of short conversations at a centre with the consent of the participants and the permission of the centre staff. I always carried with me information leaflets, consent forms and a smartphone as a recording device when visiting churches and refugee centres so that I would be prepared for any such eventualities.

From the outset, the aim of this research was to conduct in-depth interviews with two groups of participants: one group being refugees, and the other group clergy and laity who support refugees. The next section describes the participants who were part of this study.

Participants: refugees, clergy and laity

51 individuals participated in this research through conversations with me during my ethnographic fieldwork in London.²⁹ Of these 51 individuals, I purposively selected 26 participants who gave in-depth interviews during a period of eight months in 2013. These participants included 13 refugees and 13 clergy or laity who supported refugees either in a voluntary role or as salaried employees of the church.

²⁹ A complete list of participants can be found in the Appendix on p. 272.

Of the 13 refugees, six were women and seven were men. Eight of the refugees were from Africa, and five refugees were from the Middle East or Asia. Between them, the refugees represented nine different countries of origin. Out of the 13 refugees, six had been granted leave to remain in the UK by the British Home Office. The remaining seven refugees were at various stages of their applications for asylum, or in the process of appealing against British Home Office decisions to refuse them leave to remain in the UK.

Refugees (pseudonyms)	Gender	Leave to remain in the UK	Current church connections
Elise	F	Y	Catholic
Yolande	F	Y	Catholic
Elizabeth	F	N	Catholic
Simeon	M	N	Catholic, African Pentecostal
Amelie	F	Y	Anglican
Anna	F	Y	Anglican
Amir	M	N	Anglican
Bahman	M	N	Anglican
Karim	M	N	Anglican
Stephan	M	N	Non-conformist
Faiz	M	N	Non-conformist
Abigail	F	Y	Eritrean Orthodox, Anglican
Eli	M	Y	Ethiopians Orthodox

Table 1: Participants who were refugees

At the time of the interviews, the refugees were connected to nine different churches in London which included three Catholic churches, two Anglican churches, two Oriental Orthodox churches, and two Non-conformist churches. I visited one of the Catholic churches, both Anglican churches, and one of the Non-

conformist churches. Although one of the refugees invited me to attend one of the Oriental Orthodox churches this did not materialise into a date to visit.

The second group of participants was comprised of 13 clergy and laity. Of the 13 who participated in in-depth interviews, seven were clergy, and six were members of the laity, two of whom were employed as staff members at centres. This group of participants included seven women and six men.

Clergy & laity (pseudonyms)	Gender	Church affiliation	Role
Erika	F	Catholic	Retired founder and manager of refugee centre
Alice	F	Catholic	Church volunteer worker
Eleanor	F	Anglican	Licensed lay minister. Manager of charity that works with refugees
Susan	F	Anglican	Church volunteer worker
Emma	F	Anglican	Employed staff member at a refugee centre
Esther	F	Non-conformist	Employed staff member at her church centre
Luke	M	Catholic	Priest
Louis	M	Catholic	Priest
Naomi	F	Anglican	Curate
Mick	M	Anglican	Canon
Nathan	M	Anglican	Vicar
Rob	M	Non-conformist	Minister
Isaac	M	African Evangelical	Pastor

Table 2: Participants who were clergy and laity

Two of the clergy were Catholic priests, three were Anglican priests, one was a United Reformed church (URC) minister, and one was the pastor of a BAME

church. Apart from one female Anglican curate, all the clergy were males. Both Catholic priests, the Anglican curate, the BAME pastor, and two members of laity had a personal history of migration in their own lives.

Of the six members of the laity, two were Catholic, three were Anglican, and one was a member of a Non-conformist church and all were females. Two lay members worked in paid employment with centres working with refugees, two were voluntary workers in churches, one had retired from managing a refugee centre that she had founded, and one ran a charity that worked with refugees. During my fieldwork, I also conducted short interviews with one other Anglican parish priest, a Baptist minister and an African Pentecostal church pastor. I recorded these meetings in my fieldwork journal notes.

In five cases, I interviewed refugees and clergy or laity who belonged to the same church. The largest number of participants who were all connected to one single church was five: four refugees and one member of clergy. One of the four refugees at this church had been relocated by the UK Home Office to accommodation in the Midlands prior to the interview. The opportunity to interview him only happened by chance while he was back visiting friends in the London church, something which illustrates the difficulties that can be associated with arranging interviews with refugees.

In this section, I have described the participants in this research who gave in-depth interviews. However, there were many other refugees and individuals in churches and refugee centres who generously gave of their time to speak with me. Following the discussions, I always made notes of their stories, as well as

information about the contributors where it was appropriate. I was careful to ensure compliance with ethical considerations such as consent and anonymity.

Prior to describing the techniques that were used for collection and analysis of data in this study, the next section briefly considers narrative research as it informed my methodological framework.

Narrative research

Narrative research involves the systematic collection, analysis and representation of stories about lived experiences as told to researchers by individuals (Etherington, 2009; Reissman, 2008). However, most theorists of narrative research seem to agree that the practice of narrative research is more nuanced than any one definition can hope fully to explain (Squire *et al*, 2014; Reissman, 2008).

The term 'narrative' refers to 'texts on different levels' each of which can overlap (Reissman, 2008, p, 6). These different levels include the stories told by participants; the interpretive accounts of researchers that are based on interviews and fieldwork; and the readers' interpretation of those same accounts. Stories told by participants are a reconstruction of their experiences which they arrange into stories by selecting sequences that provide the meanings they want the listener to extrapolate from those stories (Reissman, 2008, p. 3). The personal circumstances of individuals at the time they tell their story, their evolving self-understandings about their life experiences, together with their perceptions about, and relationship with the listener will all affect the way a story is told.

Eastmond (2007, p. 248) pointed out that narratives 'reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story' and can never simply be regarded as

‘transparent renditions of ‘truth’’. Moreover, Etherington (2009) argued that in narrative research we need to dispense with notions of ‘absolute truth’ in favour of critical reflection (see also Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 109). Nonetheless, the presence of both teller and listener means that narratives are always ‘*dialogic*, that is, narratives are exchanges through which learning takes place’ (Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 24, italics in original).

Since narratives are co-constructions of the teller and the listener, I gave careful attention to my role, both in the production of narrative data and in the interpretation and representation of the lived experience of the participants (Squire *et al*, 2014; Reissman, 2008; Eastmond, 2007). Researchers bring with them their own set of perceptions, experiences, and circumstances. Moreover, researchers’ interpretations and representations of stories can evolve over time as new layers of understanding and insight emerge, as Andrews (2007, p. 98) found when she listened again to research interviews she had recorded many years previously. Consequently, narratives need always to be understood as ‘never-ending’ stories; the incomplete renderings of life experiences that can be added to over the course of time by different actors.

Squire *et al* (2014, p. 29) have pointed out that ‘personal narratives obtained in social research are socially situated’. Therefore, stories are never only personal. Stories are always situated in relation to other stories, both ‘known and unknown’; such stories may include ‘master narratives’ which take for granted certain norms (Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 34). Therefore, it was important for me to give attention to how cultural and religious master narratives might be interwoven with the

personal stories of refugees, clergy and volunteers; not forgetting, of course, those master narratives that might influence me as the researcher.

Before considering the protocols, procedures and analysis of the data that was collected during fieldwork for this study the next section gives attention to some ethical matters in relation to research in forced migration studies. Included in this section is consideration of the relationship of researcher and participant, as well as issues of trust and respect. This is followed by a section that deals specifically with the ethics of informed consent that arose during my fieldwork.

Ethics of research in forced migration

This section focuses on what Josselson (2007, p. 539) termed the 'implicit contract' which exists in the relationship between researcher and participant. Knowledge that is produced in qualitative research is contingent on the relationship between researcher and participant (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 20). According to Josselson (2007, p. 539), 'narrative research is founded in an encounter embedded in a relationship' between researcher and participant, the ethics of which involve a contract that is both 'explicit and implicit'. The 'explicit contract' relates to ethical protocols such as informed consent and confidentiality (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Squire *et al*, 2014; King and Horrocks, 2010; Reissman, 2008; Josselson, 2007).

Josselson (2007, p. 539) argued that 'the nature of the material disclosed' in narrative research is mostly influenced by the implicit contract, that is 'the trust and rapport the researcher/interviewer is able to build with the participant'. The more rapport and trust between researcher and participant, the greater the degree of revelation and, in turn, the greater the trust with which the researcher treats the

material that has been achieved through respect and compassion (Josselson, 2007 p. 539; see also Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 20).

Therefore, I gave attention as to how trust and rapport might be established with participants in the context of studies that involve refugees. Miller argued (2004, p. 218) that 'entering refugee communities is a complicated process that takes time, negotiation, and a respect for the gradual development of relations based on trust and mutual respect'. In my research, the process was further complicated because I was not entering clearly defined refugee communities but church congregations that represent very mixed communities of whom refugees may represent a small minority. Identifying and gaining access to participants required time to build relationships of trust and respect with clergy and laity, as well as refugees. I was mindful that my personal and professional experience in churches was a factor that might influence trust and access in church communities. Consequently, I gave thought to my position within the research environment including how this might affect power relations in the research.

As a way of reflexively considering their role, qualitative researchers often position themselves as either insiders or outsiders within their research (Breen, 2007). However, I found that my role within this research was neither completely as an insider nor an outsider but was conducted from a hybrid position (Carling, Bivand Erdal, and Ezzati, 2013; Breen, 2007). For instance, in some churches, I was an insider in terms of religious faith but an outsider in terms of culture and language. This was the case when the pastor of a BAME church invited me to join him on the platform at the end of a worship service and, without prior warning, asked me to publicly pray for the church congregation. This demonstrated how

my role as participant observer in church worship services had given clues about my position regarding religious faith to participants who were, in turn, observing me.

Miller (2004) suggested that maintaining a neutral position as a researcher in fieldwork is not always possible when needing to build relationships of trust with participants. Consequently, an ethical question arises as to what is appropriate for the researcher to divulge about themselves in the research relationship with participants. In the first instance, I always introduced myself to participants as an academic researcher. Then as my relationship with participants developed, any personal information I gave them depended on its relevance to the individual and whether this would benefit the research. For instance, I developed a good rapport with an elderly male refugee at a refugee centre after I showed a photo of four generations of my family, whereas prior to this he had seemed reticent to engage in conversation.

I found that decisions about disclosing information about myself had to be made on the way through the stages of narrative research (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 19). However, I was careful to ensure that appropriate and respectful boundaries were always maintained in the relationship between the participants and myself. I took seriously the need for transparency about the interactions between researcher and participants when analysing research outcomes. Since the aim of the research relationship is to hear the stories of participants, I suggest that any personal information given by researchers should be limited to what is beneficial for fostering trust and rapport with participants.

Consideration of rapport and trust led me to a seemingly obvious but nonetheless important question to which I gave thought: why should refugees should agree to be interviewed by me? Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007, p. 290) recommended that, to engage the full cooperation of refugees, researchers need to 'convince them that the research is in their own best interest either because it addresses urgent conditions of survival or because it acknowledges their presence and historicity or both'. However, I felt that telling refugees that their participation in this study was 'in their own best interest' risked raising false expectations for refugees and, in all probability, over-stated the influence that my research would have for them personally. Nonetheless, the notion that refugees' participation in the research acknowledges the presence and historicity of refugees in the UK is important. Refugees in this study brought the perspective of first-hand lived experiences of being refugees in the UK. For refugees, the opportunity to tell their stories meant that their life experiences were acknowledged and recorded. As a researcher, what I could offer was a sincere interest in the participants' stories (Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 92).

Therefore, it was important that refugees in this study knew that the stories they told me were valued and believed, particularly as this contrasted to the 'culture of disbelief' that is often encountered by refugees at official interviews undertaken in the immigration system (Anderson, *et al.*, 2014; Souter, 2011). Sometimes I avoided using the word 'interview' in the initial conversations I had with refugees in order to distance myself from any negative connotations that might be associated with official interviews. Instead, I simply invited refugees to meet with me so that I could hear about their experiences. However, compliance with good

practice for research interviews was maintained in all respects whether I used the word 'interview' or not. I also was aware that endorsement of my research by the university gave the study significance for refugees since it communicated that their stories were important beyond the interest of one individual doing the research.

Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007, p. 291) argued that refugees' participation in research can be 'therapeutic' for them. Recounting stories can be part of the process of making sense of life experiences. The telling of stories about difficult times 'creates order and contains emotions, allowing a search for meaning and enabling connection with others' (Reissman, 2008, p. 10). Moreover, narrating 'difficult and unfamiliar experience is part of the very human need to be understood by others, to be in communication even from the margins' (Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 56; See also Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2008, p. 1). For refugees who experience many difficult and unfamiliar circumstances, and often live on the margins of society, participation in narrative research can provide an opportunity for them to tell their story, and in doing so, to help bring some meaning to their experiences.

However, the recounting of difficult personal stories also has the potential to 're-traumatize' (Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 57). Therefore, as researcher, I was mindful of the effect that the recounting of their story might have on participants. Although it did not become necessary during my fieldwork, should participation in this research have caused problems for any individuals, I proposed to engage the help of pastoral support workers in the church – but only with the permission of the participants concerned.

Some researchers have described the ethical responsibility for the well-being of participants as 'beneficence' (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 107; Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway, 2007). However, I suggest that using this term is problematic since it implies charity and largesse on the part of the researcher, serving to reinforce unequal power relations. Moreover, it seems that generosity in research lies more at the door of the participant who agrees to help the researcher to learn something of benefit to others, as well as to contribute to understanding of human experience (Josselson, 2007, p. 538). An ethics of care which is derived from a mutual trust and respect seems to be central to the relationship between researcher and participants. In the UK, moral responsibility for the well-being of individuals is widely understood among different professions as a 'duty of care'.

Informed consent in the context of research with refugees

Processes of informed consent are part of the ethics of care to which researchers need to give attention. The following discussion can only introduce some of the ethical issues related to the processes of informed consent in forced migration contexts, due to the limits of this research. However, I considered it was important to include some discussion here about obtaining signed consent in research with refugees since it was this study that had raised some concerns for me.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that sometimes there was hesitancy about signing consent forms despite assurances of confidentiality on my part, whereas the information leaflets about the study were always received well. Not only did the information leaflets validate my research, they also provided my participants with contact details of someone at the university they could approach should they have

any concerns. Therefore, the information leaflets were empowering in the sense that they acknowledged the social agency of the participants to make decisions about participating in the research and to take up any concerns with the university should they wish to do so. What, then, were the root causes of hesitancy about signing consent forms?

As I considered the ethics of informed consent I endeavoured to look at signed consent from my participants' perspective. I also searched for academic literature about other researchers' experiences with informed consent in the context of working with refugees or the marginalised.

It has been established previously in this chapter that trust and a rapport between researcher and participant are paramount for narrative research. Having gained trust and a rapport with participants in the initial stages of my research relationships, I felt that some refugees were then puzzled as to why signed consent was necessary. In many cultures consent and agreement are verbal contracts.

Moreover, the action of signing an apparently official document, such as a consent form, could have negative connotations for refugees for different reasons. For instance, those seeking asylum in the UK are required to report and 'sign in' at immigration reporting centres or police stations on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. These occasions are often points of stress for refugees because they face the possibility of being detained and sent to removal centres when they go to sign in. For refugees who are outside the official immigration system either because they have not registered as asylum seekers, or they have overstayed their visas, signing a form could be construed by them as a risk. Further afield, the story of Syrian refugees who refused to give their fingerprints at the detention centre in

Lampedusa because of their fear that personal information could be passed to the Syrian authorities and put their families in Syria at risk, highlights refugees' insecurity and mistrust concerning the use of personal information (Smith *et al*, 2016, p. 110).

All the participants in this study did sign consent forms. Only one participant seemed to be more reticent about what he told me after signing the consent form compared to our conversation prior to this. However, I was left feeling that the acquiescence of some participants had placed me in a position of power which was counterproductive to my aim of demolishing positional power inequalities as far as that is possible.

There is no question that voluntary participation is an essential element of the ethics of any research study. Firstly, it is important that individuals are given 'adequate information about what involvement in the research will entail' to enable them to decide whether to participate in the research (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 107). The critical question that arises here is what constitutes 'adequate information' so that informed consent is achieved? Josselson (2007, p. 540) pointed out that it is not possible for participants in research to be fully informed since some aspects of participation could be unforeseeable.

Furthermore, it is important to question whether obtaining signed consent meaningfully protects participants, and if not, what should be in its place? Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway (2007, p. 306) argued that standard practices of consent are often culturally inappropriate or inadequate for research in most refugee settings. In certain circumstances, it has been argued, signed consent can even compromise anonymity (Josselson, 2007, p. 541; Mackenzie, McDowell, and

Pittaway, 2007, p. 306). Josselson (2007, p. 541) suggested that one alternative to signed consent could be to obtain verbal consent on the audio recording at the beginning of an interview.

My experiences with conducting interviews with refugees would suggest that there is a need for further research into the ethics and processes of informed consent. A good starting point might be Josselson's (2007) suggestion that consent could be better understood as a relational process that derives from an ethics of care rather than of rights.

Interviews are central to narrative research. The next section describes the procedures and protocols that were used in the collection of data as well as the discursive approach to interviews with participants.

Data collection: procedures and protocols

Data was primarily collected from audio recordings of the in-depth interviews that I conducted with 26 participants over an eight-month period in London. I collected additional data from conversations with refugees, clergy and laity during my visits to churches and refugee centres, or from speeches given by refugees at public meetings that I recorded in notes made in my fieldwork journal. I also recorded my ethnographic observations at churches and refugee centres, as well as at seminars and conferences organised by the London Churches Refugees Network in my fieldwork journal. When it was inappropriate to write notes *in situ*, such as at church services, I would take the earliest opportunity to write up notes whilst the experiences and conversations were fresh in my mind.

I was concerned to ensure that all participants' involvement in research interviews was voluntary, and that they did not feel any obligation or pressure, whether

implicit or explicit, to participate in the research. I was especially heedful that refugees who had been referred to me by a third party such as clergy participated in the research of their own volition and not because they felt beholden to those who had asked them. I always had copies of the information leaflets and consent forms with me when I was doing fieldwork.

The information leaflet for participants that I used briefly explained the purposes of this study and the measures that were in place to ensure confidentiality and the anonymity of participants. I used pseudonyms for all participants and churches. I agreed with the participants that the recordings from the interviews would not be shared with anyone else without first asking the permission of the participants. The audio recordings were stored on a computer with password protection. I invited participants to keep a copy of the information leaflet and gave them plenty of time to read both the leaflet and the consent form. I also explained the information about the research verbally to ensure that they had fully understood what they were agreeing to. The interviews proceeded once the participants had signed the consent forms. However, I made it clear that the participants had the right to withdraw from the interview and the research at any time without disadvantage to themselves and without any obligation to give a reason for doing so.

Interview venues included churches, refugee centres, and homes. I reimbursed the travel costs for two participants who needed to make a special journey to the agreed place of the interview. Where possible, I gave thought to the interview environments to ensure they were suitable spaces where participants would be comfortable and at ease. I chose to use a smart phone to record the interviews

because I reasoned that the familiarity of phones might help participants to relax. Moreover, the smart phone produced audio recordings of good quality and was compatible with my computer.

The in-depth interviews typically lasted between forty-five minutes and one and a half hours. All the participants were conversant in English except for two refugees. The opportunity to interview these two refugees was not planned and arose unexpectedly during a visit to the church of a refugee I had previously interviewed at a refugee centre. The interviews were made possible because another refugee at the church who I had also interviewed offered to act as interpreter at the time. The interpreter was fluent in English and a friend of the two refugees. During the interviews, the interpreter would sometimes stop during translation to clarify meanings and ensure I had understood. The interpreter also explained the information leaflets and the consent forms to the two refugees before the interviews started. From my observations of the refugees' relationships, it seemed that the interpreter was concerned for the welfare of the two refugees and that they trusted him. A member of clergy was also in regular contact with the two refugees and the interpreter.

All the in-depth interviews were recorded, except for one which took place in a UK immigration removal centre where recording devices are not allowed due to the security restrictions of the centre. In the case of the interview in the removal centre, I made notes at the earliest opportunity. I also met this participant on subsequent occasions, both in the detention centre and on his release, which gave me further opportunities for hearing this participant's story.

'Discursive approach' to interviews

Before I began my fieldwork, I planned to use a semi-structured approach to interviews and prepared questions accordingly (Patton, 2015; Bryman, 2008, p.447). However, from the outset of my fieldwork, I found that what Mishler called a 'discursive approach' to the interviews was preferable and more efficient for the nature of this study (Reissman, 2008; Mishler, 1991). A discursive approach is conversational, and it 'urges the empowerment of respondents, and proposes methods that respect their way of constructing meaning' (Mishler, 1991, p. 143). The researcher comes to the interview mindful of the particular areas which are related to the theoretical focus of the research but lets the participant lead the way (Reissman, 2008, p. 24). In this way, the discursive approach is collaborative and the narratives are co-constructed.

I saw my role as one of encouraging dialogue that could lead to detailed narratives around the themes under investigation in this study. I began interviews with refugees with an invitational question which asked them to tell me how they came to find the church. The opening invitational question varied in my interviews with clergy and laity depending on the context and their involvement with refugees. I then used further open-ended questions during the interviews to help the flow of conversation around the theoretical focus of the research. I found that keeping in mind the key research questions helped me to guide the conversation. If a participant digressed from the research topics, I let them continue until it was appropriate to guide the conversation back. These digressions were an important aspect of the research since they helped to contextualise the narratives at the interpretative stage of the research as well as to reveal what was important to the participants. For instance, some participants told me stories of their experiences

of being forced to flee from their country and others told me about their personal faith journey.

I was drawn to a discursive approach for the following reasons. Firstly, discursive interviews 'encourage greater equality' in the relationship between researcher and participant so that 'disparity can be diminished', even though never fully removed (Reissman, 2008, p. 24). Secondly, a discursive approach distanced my interviews from the question-and-answer type interviews that refugees experience during their asylum application process with the UKVI. Thirdly, the diversity of my participants, the complexities of their experiences, and the sensitive issues involved could be accommodated through a discursive approach that encouraged participants to lead and expand on their stories rather than to be limited by predetermined questions in a fixed format (Squire *et al*, 2014, p. 92; Mishler, 1991).

The first two reasons for using a discursive or conversational approach to interviews that are stated above were related to ethical issues. However, the third reason is also linked to the aim of this research to prioritise the lived experiences of the participants. I did not come to the interviews assuming knowledge. Had I come to the interviews with predetermined questions this would have assumed to some degree that I already had knowledge about their experiences. By using a discursive or conversational approach I could let my participants lead the way within the broad field of the enquiry – that is, the interactions of refugees and church communities – so that I could collect the stories of their lived experience. The result was a set of data that was rich with understanding and insight. Keeping in mind that the stories I collected through this conversational process were

constructed and that the data would go through further interpretive processes both in my hands as researcher and subsequently with any readers, I sought to analyse the data in a way that was consistent with the ethical aims of the research. How the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed are discussed next in the final section of this chapter.

Thematic analysis

I considered the transcription of recorded interviews as part of the interpretative process of data analysis and not just as a technical task (Reissman, 2008, p. 29). Reissman (2008, p. 29) argued that transcription should not be delegated by the researcher to someone else. During the process of transcribing all the recorded interviews I found that I could immerse myself in the data. Listening again to the voices of the participants brought to my attention afresh the emphasis given to words and phrases, the pauses in speech, and the emotion conveyed through laughter or other expressions. When the transcription was completed, I read and re-read the transcripts alongside the fieldwork notes to familiarise myself with all the data as well as to code the data.

Stories can be analysed in different ways depending on whether attention is given to 'what' was said, to 'how' the story was told, or to the interactive production and performance of the story by teller and listener (Squire *et al*, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Reissman, 2008). In this study, I used a thematic approach to the analysis of the data which mainly focused on 'what' was said (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, as Reissman (2008) points out, the borders of analytical approaches are often blurred. For instance, I also included elements of 'how' a story was told if that added to the thematic analysis approach.

I collated the codes that I had identified from the transcripts into themes by looking for repeated patterns of meaning across the narratives. I gave attention to how the themes related to one another across the narratives; that is, where there were commonalities and where there were differences in the data. I went through a process of refining the themes until I was satisfied with the final set of themes and sub-themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82), 'a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set.' Therefore, as I identified themes in the data I found it was also helpful to refer to the key research questions.

I compiled a document of the themes and sub-themes as headings under which I inserted notes and quotes of extracts from the transcripts that I felt were exemplary in relation to the themes and sub-themes. I also paid attention to the frequency of themes. In this indexed document, I used pseudonyms for participants and noted the page numbers where the extracts could be found in the transcripts. I also included a section of miscellaneous stories that could easily be referred to, either for this research or in the future. Creating this document enabled me to continue familiarising myself with the data. The result was an effective reference tool that I used when writing the findings chapters and that I could keep for future reference.

Each of the following chapters that discuss the data is organised around one of three overall themes that emerged from the data: agency and culture, belief and belonging, and hospitality and solidarity. These three overall themes are also connected to the three sets of research questions which were restated at the

beginning of the chapter. The second half of Chapter 6 on belief and belonging is organised according to some of the themes that emerged from one refugee's succinct summary of the refugee experience in new locations. This approach is in keeping with my aim for this study to be led by the perspectives of refugees. The framework for the themes in the third chapter was inspired by a quote in Hondagneu-Sotelo's book *Religion and social justice for immigrants* (2007, p. 11) which is reproduced at the beginning of that chapter. Throughout the following chapters I have used quotes from participants' narratives when this helped to convey meaning and the depth of emotion about their experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the qualitative research methods and methodology that were used to explore refugees' interactions with church communities in London. The often complex relationship between religious belief and action led to a methodological framework that emphasised the lived experiences of participants and that was informed by a narrative research approach. The choice of research design was also guided by my aim to foreground the perspectives and experiences of refugees as well as by the research questions. Data was collected from in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation in churches and at refugee centres in London.

Throughout the research I was reflexive about my role as researcher and how this might have impacted both the collection and interpretation of data. Furthermore, I was attentive to the methodological challenges and ethical considerations involved in researching 'hidden' populations such as refugees who live on the margins of society. The attention to ethical issues raised some concerns that were associated

with obtaining signed consent in research with refugees and I suggest that this might warrant further attention in forced migration studies, and more generally in the methods used in qualitative research.

Chapter 5

Agency and culture: refugees' choices of church communities

We need to take seriously both the ability of [religious] institutions to produce and enforce patterns of meaning and action and the ability of individuals and collectives to improvise and sustain alternatives. That is, we take both structure and agency as essential elements in any explanation for whether and how religion is present (Ammerman, 2007, p. 13).

Culture is not a hermetic field of singular meanings. It is messy, contested, unstable, always in motion (Orsi, 2010, p. xxxviii).

Introduction

One of the central propositions of this research is that refugees are social agents who have the ability to make rational choices even though this can be severely hampered by external forces beyond their control. In this first of three chapters that discuss the fieldwork data, the themes are related to refugees' choices of church communities, looking at how and why refugees connect to particular church communities and what were the refugees' expectations and experiences of those interactions.

This chapter begins by looking at how refugees crossed denominational borders in their search for the right church community that could meet their needs. It was evident from interviews with refugees and clergy that the theme of culture was an

important consideration in relation to their connections to churches.³⁰ The close relationship between religion and culture means that they often go 'hand in hand, carrying and reinforcing one another' (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007, p. 140).

Therefore, the second section in this chapter looks at some of the differences between Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) churches and mainstream multicultural churches that were highlighted by the research. This is followed by more detailed accounts of the different stories and perspectives of refugees and clergy as well as ethnographic observation conducted during fieldwork to help advance understanding about refugees' lived experiences within church communities. Bearing in mind Portes's (1998, pp. 21-22) entreaty for dispassionate analysis that is attentive to possible downsides of social ties, such as restrictions of individual freedoms for insiders or the exclusion of outsiders, I have been careful to include participants' stories of negative experiences.

Connecting with churches and crossing denominational borders

There is a multiplicity of reasons why refugees choose one church over another, and as mentioned in chapter 2, there are a large number of churches to choose from in the cosmopolitan city of London. If refugees had previous connections with church denominations in their country of origin it might be expected that this could influence their initial choice of church when in the UK. However, I found that this did not stop refugees crossing denominational borders and connecting with churches that were affiliated to different denominations.

³⁰ Since the participants used culture in terms of national or ethnic identity, I have done the same. Although culture is a contested concept it can be defined 'most simply, as the learned and shared behaviour of a community of interacting human beings' (Useem, Useem, and Donoghue, 1963, p. 169).

In this study, of the 13 refugees who participated in in-depth interviews, three refugees had been connected to only one church since they had arrived in London. One of these three refugees, Amir (not his real name - all names are pseudonyms), was a convert to Christianity. The next chapter considers his story and his connection to a multicultural Anglican church in more detail. The other two refugees, Elise and Yolande, had belonged to the same Catholic church in London since 1994 and 1999 respectively. Both Elise and Yolande had previous connections with Catholicism in their countries of origin. Their Catholic church in London had developed from a white majority church to a multicultural church and it perhaps could be argued that this had helped them to stay in this particular church and not to look elsewhere. Moreover, Elise and Yolande had remained living in the same geographical area of the city – unlike many other refugees. Another advantage of Elise’s and Yolande’s church community was its connections to a refugee and migrant centre in the same locality. The founder of the centre, Erika, was a member of the same Catholic church and she was also one of the participants in this study.

Of the remaining 10 refugees who had participated in in-depth interviews, nine had connected to more than one church since they had lived in the UK, often across different denominations, and one did not give this information. Anna, one of the refugees who had connected to more than one church commented, ‘I sort of looked for many churches before I actually got to where I am now’. Even Eli and Abigail, the two refugees who had strong cultural ties to Oriental Orthodox churches in London, had sought out and valued their connections with other churches from different denominations. Eli had received personal support from two Catholic

churches and Abigail had received support from, and continued to stay connected to, an Anglican church. The different accounts of Anna's, Eli's, Abigail's and other refugees' lived experiences of connecting with church communities in London are covered in more detail later in this chapter.

Religion and culture in BAME churches and multicultural mainstream churches

Throughout this research, the importance of culture as well as religion for individuals in church communities was apparent. However, I found that there was a difference in outcomes between BAME churches and multicultural churches in terms of the extent to which their provision for individuals from different cultures helped refugees to thrive and flourish within British society.

For ease of reading, I have used the term BAME churches throughout to denote all churches that have congregations mainly comprised of a single national or ethnic culture that is not British. This includes BMCs and migrant churches. There are ongoing debates about the concept of multiculturalism, but in this study, I have used multicultural[ism] as a description of the lived experience of diversity and not as a political process (Malik, 2010). The participants always spoke about multiculturalism in a positive way during interviews.

BAME churches provided an obvious connection to refugees' cultural backgrounds and met their need for a familiar community. In respect of social networks being drawn from the same cultural background, similarities could be drawn between BAME churches and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). However, BAME churches have the additional benefit of resources that are associated with the spiritual life of the church.

When compared to multicultural churches, BAME churches had less connections with British society and according to Isaac, one of the BAME church pastors who participated in the research, this was even more evident in BAME church communities that were not English-speaking. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, two of the participants who belonged to Orthodox churches that had strong national ties also used their connections to mainstream multicultural churches to develop and maintain social networks within British society.

As might be expected, multicultural churches with affiliations to mainstream Christian denominations had more connections with British society than BAME churches. However, there was a difference between multicultural Catholic churches and multicultural churches in the Protestant tradition, both Anglican and non-conformist churches. Although Anglican and non-conformist churches provided social contexts where cultures were acknowledged and celebrated together, they did not tend to provide the settings for single national or ethnic groups to meet together on a regular basis either socially or for religious services. Whereas Catholic churches, often in collaboration with the Roman Catholic London dioceses, provided contexts for single national or ethnic groups to meet as well as for multicultural services and events.

Isaac and his BAME church

I first met Isaac at the college where he was studying for a Masters degree. Isaac was the pastor of a west African evangelical church where virtually all the congregation were migrants who came from the same French-speaking African

country as Isaac³¹. Isaac originally came to the UK on a student visa and he has since received British citizenship. Before founding and being employed by the church, Isaac worked in London in the caring professions eventually rising to a management position.

Isaac's church is one of the many new BAME churches in London. I visited Isaac's church for Sunday worship services and he also took me to an affiliated church on a separate occasion. Isaac's church met in a large commercial warehouse situated in a densely populated residential area of London. The long, three-storey building had rows of windows covered with metal grills on the ground floor. On my arrival for the church service there was nothing on the outside of the building to give any indication of the activities taking place within, despite the fact I knew several African churches were meeting in the building at the same time.

I followed others who were gaining entry through a side door and asked for directions to Isaac's church service whereupon I was directed to the first floor. In the absence of the usual religious symbols and décor that both help to designate a building as a sacred space and subliminally suggest certain behaviours for those who enter, the stairwell had notices printed on A4 paper fixed to the painted concrete walls, with instructions such as:

No smoking and/or alcohol allowed anywhere in this building as it is
a place of worship. Respect God.

³¹ Isaac was the only participant in my research who told me he was happy for his real name, and the name and location of his church to be included in the research. He saw participating in the research as an opportunity for increasing the profile of his work with refugees and marginalised migrants in the hope that this might be of benefit in the future in terms of statutory or other support. However, I decided to use pseudonyms in line with the university's ethical requirements and to maintain overall consistency within the research.

Treat this building as you treat your homes and do not litter in [*sic*]
the stairs.

At the top of the first flight of stairs plasterboard walls divided what was once one of the large warehouse rooms into a narrow corridor, a meeting hall that could seat approximately 150 people, and a small room that served as an office for Isaac. This internal partitioning within the whole of the warehouse had maximised the space available for rent to several churches affording a greater financial return for the property company that managed the building. Isaac's church paid £2,500 per month in rent in 2013.

Inside the meeting hall the efforts made by the church community to recreate a sacred space for the worship services created a visual transformation that meant I could easily imagine myself in the churches I had experienced in Africa and Asia; the only obvious difference being electrical heaters to warm the room instead of fans to cool it. Behind a stage at the far end of the hall, green and gold fabric had been draped from the back walls and large artificial floral displays were placed at the front alongside two PA speakers that dominated either side of the stage. A group of musicians with electric keyboard, guitars and drums, together with a small choir, played and sang spiritual songs and looked resplendent in matching apparel of black and cerise pink. The church service was Pentecostal in style with the sung worship lasting about an hour followed by a further hour of preaching that was accompanied by enthusiastic responses from the congregation. The service was mostly conducted in French although the worship songs were sung in both French and English. The sermon was in English because the visiting speaker was British and it was translated into French. I sat next to Isaac in the front row of

the seating and when necessary he translated from French to English for my benefit during the service.

Isaac's church and two occasions showing the welcome of strangers

The case of a visitor who had come to the church for the first time highlighted the warm welcome that Isaac's church community extended to newcomers. Toward the end of the worship service, a question was addressed to the congregation as to who was visiting the church for the first time. A man, who looked to be in his twenties, responded by raising his arm and he was invited to the front of the church whereupon the congregation applauded as he walked up the central aisle. Several women, men and children spontaneously got up from their seats to follow him to the stage and crowded around him whereupon one by one they all embraced him as if he were a long-lost family member.

Emotionally moved by the warmth of this welcome, the man who was the visitor addressed the church congregation in French and briefly told his story which was translated for me by Isaac. He had been alone in London for 15 months and had come to the church because of a chance encounter with Isaac whom he had stopped in the street to ask the time of day. The visitor's story became a narrative about the symbolism and significance of 'time' as he interpreted the circumstances of his chance meeting with Isaac as being an indication that it was the right time for him to come to the church. The two church elders stood on the platform with him throughout the relating of his story and both they and the congregation encouraged this interpretation of the symbolism of time. When the man finished his story, he unexpectedly started to sing a song in French that was obviously familiar to this African congregation who enthusiastically joined in the singing

with the keyboard player accompanying them. As the song came to an end he had tears streaming down his face and he fell dramatically to his knees.

As an observer, it seemed to me that such overwhelming support from a church community would have a profound impact on any migrant and perhaps more so for someone who had been alone in the UK. There was no evidence that any of the leaders at Isaac's church had instigated or directed the response by the church congregation toward the visitor. Isaac turned to me afterwards and commented, 'I had no idea that was going to happen'. The church had provided the context for this man to connect with others, to be listened to and to be welcomed into their community. This is not to suggest that every church would be as welcoming and the fact that most people in Isaac's congregation are from the same country of origin as this man, and have experienced a migrant journey, would have increased the likelihood of an empathetic response from the church congregation.

Although I was not able to interview the man after the church service, there was every indication that he would return. However, when I asked after the man at my subsequent meetings with Isaac, he told me that he had not seen the man again. However, it was possible that the reasons he had 'disappeared' were connected to his precarious existence as a refugee or irregular migrant. For instance, the man could have been detained and deported from the UK or dispersed to another location in the UK. The reception of this man by the church community was an unforgettable experience for me. I can only imagine that wherever this man went his experience with Isaac's church would also have been unforgettable.

On another occasion at Isaac's church, when a man who was present for the dedication of the baby of a relative publicly introduced himself as a Muslim, he

received a warm welcome from the church congregation. When an elder of the church then used the opportunity to question the man about how he had felt about the service, the elder was quickly silenced by members of the congregation, including Isaac, who made it clear by comments and body language that this was inappropriate. I was left with the impression that the congregation wanted to respect this man's faith and were concerned he should not feel uncomfortable in any way. During a lunch that was laid on for the church community after the church service, the man who was a Muslim stayed to celebrate the baby's dedication with the family and church community. I observed that the relationship between him and others in the church community was easy and relaxed.

Welcome of strangers: religion or culture or both?

With the overall question of how and why refugees interact with churches in mind, I asked Isaac how individuals usually found out about his church. Isaac's response about African culture showed that his expectation was that refugees who came to the church would be from a similar cultural background as himself and those in the church community.

Isaac: One of the particular thing of an African, is that an African when he goes somewhere, the first thing he does is ask if there's another African around. So, it's like we have what we call family bond so because of that family life you're comfortable where someone from your country or your area is. So, it's people themselves they ask, when they come they will ask, is there any African there? If they are Christian they will ask you, is there any black church around here?

It is perhaps to be expected that refugees and migrants who are alone in a new location would start by enquiring after others from similar cultural backgrounds who could provide community and social networks. Furthermore, a diverse, cosmopolitan city like London might help increase the chances of locating others from similar backgrounds. According to Isaac there was no particular pattern about how refugees connected with the church community and connections would happen in 'many ways'. As an example of one of the 'many ways', Isaac told the story of a woman, alone and crying on the street who was found by someone who knew Isaac was from the same country of origin as this woman. Isaac was contacted, whereupon he picked her up in his car, brought her to his house and gave her refuge for a week until she located a cousin who was living in the UK. Isaac frequently had refugees and migrants who were homeless living temporarily in his home. Members of Isaac's church also housed refugees and other migrants who were homeless without any expectation of reciprocity.

In my interviews with Isaac he usually framed any understanding about the welcome of strangers in terms of his African culture. For instance, when I asked Isaac whether he thought that themes in the Bible such as 'loving your neighbour' and 'giving hospitality to the stranger' served as an inspiration for the responses of his church community toward refugees I had expected him to say 'yes', and that his discourse would continue along these themes. However, Isaac replied with an emphatic 'no'. He reasoned that his actions and the actions of those in his church towards others were primarily the consequence of their common African cultural heritage.

Isaac: For an African – it's part, it's part of our life. For an African, if

you see someone who's suffering you feel it and you want to do something. So, you don't think this is an evangelical [unfinished sentence]. You think about why, how you're feeling. So, that's part of our being. And our parents taught us that, a stranger, you don't send him away – for the Bible says so – but that's why our parents, they taught us that, any stranger you see, you give him drink first. Ask him, 'Where are you going?' 'Where are you coming from? Don't just let him go like that. You don't know if he needs you in this situation. So, for me, as an African community it's part of our being, that's who we are [...] it's a cultural thing. It's part of who we are.

Isaac identified with and appealed to a pan-African culture rather than that of his own country of origin or the geographical region of Africa in which his country is located. In his discourse, Isaac repeatedly used phrases such as, 'it's part of our life', 'it's part of our being', and 'that's who we are'. According to Isaac, belonging to a pan-African culture guided his actions and the actions of the church community.

However, religion was not entirely missing from Isaac's discourse. Isaac espoused a general interpretation of Christian principles – 'for the Bible says so' – rather than any specific Christian teaching. Both the Bible and the teaching by his parents' generation were used in a way that might lend a weight of authority to his narrative. Furthermore, Isaac's unfinished sentence, 'you don't think this is an evangelical [evangelistic opportunity?]', suggested that Isaac wanted to distance himself from any inference that he might support refugees to gain converts to his church. Although Isaac and I had not discussed proselytism up to that point, he

may have been pre-empting possible future discussion along these lines. Isaac returned to this theme in subsequent conversations.

One of the refugees, Elizabeth, also suggested that her African Catholic priest's response to refugees was related to African hospitality.

Elizabeth: Being an African and seeing his fellow-Africans struggling over here, he just automatically, you know, felt compassion in him, compelled to be in a position to help them.

However, generalised discourses about culture fail to acknowledge the nuances that exist within the constructs and concepts of any culture. Many positive aspects can be found within cultures in relation to hospitality as has been previously mentioned in chapter 3. However, the complexity of culture needs to be recognised so that the positive aspects can be studied alongside any downsides. Moreover, it is possible for constructed cultural norms to be drawn on as convenient tropes in the defence of various beliefs and/or practices. For instance, Nedum who was an African pastor of a large Pentecostal church, rationalised that in African culture individuals are very secretive and do not readily share personal information as the reason he did not know if there were any refugees in his church. In Nedum's church of more than 200 Africans from one geographical region in West Africa it was highly unlikely there were no refugees. In a further conversation, Nedum later agreed that some individuals in his church must have come to the UK through the asylum system and then added, 'I don't ask'. Although there was no obvious support of refugees in Nedum's church, it is possible that such support was mobilised through informal social networks within the church community. However, I was unable to test this since no opportunities arose for me

to interview anyone else within the church community.

BAME churches as containers and guardians of culture

Religion and culture have distinct characteristics and they 'cannot be reduced to each other' (Yuval-Davies 2011, p. 115). However, in practice religion and culture are often interwoven and go 'hand in hand, carrying and reinforcing one another' (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, p. 140). Therefore, the blend of religion and culture that can be found in BAME churches provides refugees with a social context that has strong national or ethnic links.

Two participants who belonged to different churches within the Oriental Orthodox tradition, Eli and Abigail, came from different countries of origin. They had both received leave to remain in the UK and were in employment. Abigail was not married but had wider family members who lived outside London. Eli had been granted 'leave to remain in the UK' on grounds of political persecution and had applied for his wife and son to join him in the UK, although this application process had been a lengthy one that had not been resolved when I met him. In the meantime, Eli sent his son to, 'the best school in Ethiopia to prepare him for life in the UK'. However, Eli also wanted his son to continue to grow up with an understanding of Ethiopian culture and for this purpose he relied upon the Orthodox Church both in Ethiopia and in London.

Eli's discourse about the church revealed how religion and national or ethnic culture can mingle one with the other.

Eli: Inside [the church building] everything is Ethiopian [...] incense so much incense.

Such was the closeness of the connection between church and national identity that Eli frequently described his Orthodox church in London as ‘the mini Ethiopia’ or ‘our mini Ethiopia’. The church was effectively both a container and a guardian for religious and national culture in the place of exile. Eli summed up the important role of the church as ‘a kind of protection for the next generation’ that encouraged people to be ‘God-fearing’ as well as ‘teach[ing] our history, our culture’.

Like Eli, Abigail explained her connection with the Orthodox church in terms of cultural tradition. Although she struggled at times with the English language, it is still possible to extract her meaning from this excerpt.

Abigail: Always you go [...] I come from that generation [...] It is how you grow up [...] to go there [Orthodox church]. From back country we are always, in dependence from God’s house. We are afraid always our family will just let grow into be apart from God.

Although Abigail had grown up with a strong sense of allegiance to the Orthodox church which was linked to her country of origin, she also held personal views that were pluralistic and ecumenical: ‘I believe we all prayer [sic] for one God’. For Abigail, being a refugee in the UK had given her the opportunity to concomitantly maintain a connection with an Anglican church outside of her Orthodox tradition. The Anglican church helped to meet the needs that Abigail found lacking in the Orthodox church:

Abigail: To be honest, in our [Orthodox] church, a lot of people coming there for the church but I don’t even know who’s there. We don’t have any communication. We just go inside, prayer, listen

there two, three hours, that's it. Go home straight away. I don't know who's there. I don't even know my priest. We don't talk together. He's doing his job. We go and prayer, that's it. We don't know anything about inside the church [...] we can't complain inside the church because that's not the rule of God [...] it's not open enough.

In contrast, Eli's discourse about his experiences with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church suggested that the church met both his spiritual and social needs. Eli listed his reasons for attending church and numbered his points as he did so: '1) faith, 2) meeting friends, 3) a way to stay in touch with the Ethiopian community, and 4) eating lunch together'. Although Eli's personal religious faith was his primary reason for attending the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, his remaining three reasons all related to community engagement with others from the Ethiopian community in London. However, despite many of Eli's social needs being met by attendance at church, he was also well integrated into wider society particularly through his employment in a social enterprise. One aspect of Eli's employment involved engaging with churches from other denominations as well as other faiths in London.

Although there was a lack of opportunity for community engagement at Abigail's Orthodox church, she had not stopped attending the church for worship services, which was an indication of the strength of religious and cultural links. It is possible that Abigail's status as a single female may have exacerbated her lack of social connectivity within her church with its strong patriarchal and hierarchal social system and that this might have accounted for some of the differences

between Abigail's and Eli's experiences of community engagement in their respective Orthodox church communities.

Both Eli's and Abigail's discourses also revealed some of the underlying tensions for BAME churches. Once the members of these churches experience alternative ways of being, both in church and in society, they may question what had hitherto been religious and cultural norms. Abigail spoke of the relationship between church and society 'back country' as motivation for her attendance, but she also perceptively voiced her own critique about some Orthodox church practices. And despite Eli's strong religious and cultural affiliation with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in a subsequent interview he related his concerns about tensions between the priests who appealed to theocratic authority, and the trustees of the church, many of whom are successful businessmen in the UK and have invested financially in the church, who want a more democratic approach to decision making. Eli had been involved in a reconciliation process between them, but he perspicaciously observed that the priests' expectations of being treated with unquestioning obedience, as they were in Ethiopia, will not be effective in the UK.

Dichotomy of inclusivity and exclusivity in BAME churches

The synthesis of religion and culture in BAME church communities means that they can be at once inclusive and exclusive. For refugees, BAME church communities can provide places where they meet with others with whom they have shared cultural histories, language, traditions and values – and this would perhaps contrast with their experiences of alienation within wider society.

However, access to BAME churches can be difficult for those who do not share the same culture.

Eli offered to arrange for me to visit the Ethiopian Orthodox church. He gave me instructions about the protocol in relation to clothing and offered to obtain a veil for me from one of the women. Eli told me I would be required to sit in the women's section of the church and warned me to expect a very long worship service. However, the invitation did not materialise and it would not have been possible to attend the church without an invitation.

Apart from a short service at a Persian church, the other three BAME church services I visited were African, two of which conducted services in French and one in English.³² Although I was always made welcome, I was aware of being an outsider from a cultural perspective despite having a shared Christian faith. I relied on the goodwill of others to help me to negotiate worship services and language which caused me to reflect how this was a role reversal for refugees and migrants who are often the outsiders in wider society and in need of help from others.

I briefly interviewed one young woman at Isaac's church who was not from the same country of origin as most of the other individuals in the church community. Ruth was a young Nigerian woman who was staying temporarily with her baby in Isaac's house having been deserted by the baby's father. As an undocumented migrant, Ruth had no recourse to public funds but she did not want to return to Nigeria. Ruth was shy and polite and expressed her gratitude for being given hospitality. However, despite her common African heritage my impression was that Ruth was not 'at home' in the church. Ruth moved on a very short time later

³² Although Iranian is more commonly used today, the church I visited during my fieldwork in London still identifies itself as a Persian church. In another context, a man felt it was important that I understood his father was Persian and not Iranian.

so I was unable to follow up this first meeting.

For all Isaac's strong defence of cultural values that underpin the welcome of strangers into his church, Isaac was concerned that church members' dependency and reliance on the church lessened their need to integrate with society in the wider community. For example, some individuals within the church community could not speak English despite being in the UK for many years. Therefore, Isaac was aware that by helping marginalised migrants he might also be contributing to their isolation from wider society. Isaac used his connections to other pastors of BAME churches to encourage them to look for ways to integrate their churches into their local communities.

Isaac: And my fellow-pastors [...] I tell them, that church is not about being African [...] there's a wider community you need to be part of. So, it's a big problem, it's a big, big, our problem is a big problem. The major problem we have is the integration problem [...] So I think we need to start from the pastors, to open-up their minds and know that it's not just coming Sunday that is a church. The church is [in] a community so we should encourage people to be part of that community and be very active.

Isaac argued that the isolation of BAME churches like his own had been further exacerbated by what he saw as the abdication by the UK government of a duty of care for refugees and marginalised migrants. Isaac had witnessed the damaging effect of cuts to statutory services for refugees and migrants in London over several years which had resulted in an increased burden of responsibility being left to others such as church communities but without any access to resources and

without any platform for contributing to policy making decisions.

Isaac: Because the system [UK government] is not taking care of them [refugees and marginalised migrants], then the church has to step in and that's how it's very difficult because black African, speaking French especially, French-speaking churches, it's like we are isolated.

Compared to French-speaking BAME churches, Isaac argued that English-speaking BAME churches were likely to have more high-earning individuals in professional occupations and therefore, more resources than French-speaking BAME churches.

Isaac's analysis agrees with research that shows the importance of English language skills for integration and for employment prospects of migrants (Ager and Strang, 2008). Nedum's English-speaking BAMC church also benefitted from being part of a successful international Pentecostal denomination.

Both Isaac and Nedum spoke of a desire to have individuals from other cultural backgrounds join their churches. Isaac's desire was borne out of a practical need for the involvement of more individuals who could help to resource the work of the church with those on the margins. Isaac recognised that while his church drew on people from the same culture and background it often increased the need for social action in the church. Therefore, the church needed to encourage the involvement of those from other cultures and backgrounds who could be part of the solution rather than a further drain on the already limited resources.

Nedum's reasons for encouraging individuals from other cultures were less obvious and were not connected to increasing social action by the church. Instead, Nedum's goal of attracting individuals from other cultures seemed to be consistent

with his denomination's focus on church growth and particularly for white British individuals to attend their churches. The Union flag was on display outside the building on the Sunday morning that I visited Nedum's church, and during the church service an image of the Union flag was also used as the background of a PowerPoint slide that displayed lyrics of a song of worship that mentioned 'the nations'. However, apart from the services being conducted in English everything else about the church, and especially the genuflecting of the church members whenever the pastor and his wife walked past them, would have been alien to most white British individuals. There was no genuflecting to others in Isaac's church or the other BAME churches I visited.

Using religion to bring cultures together: cross-cultural model

Rob, one of the clergy I interviewed from a non-conformist mainstream church, had an innovative approach to hosting and working with BAME churches that encouraged dialogue and engagement across cultures. Rob had a large, under-used church building that was situated in an inner-city area of London. The church had been built at a time when the congregation was flourishing. However, the number of people attending had declined over the years and the church building had become too big for his small congregation of 20 members that might rise to 30 or 40 worshippers on Sundays.

Rob's solution was to rent out the space in his church and make it a home to different BAME churches that included: Nigerian Apostolic Church, Ghanaian Presbyterian Church, African Charismatic Church, Spanish-speaking Church, African Mentoring Development Through Faith Church, and Seventh Day Adventist Church. Rob intentionally developed cross-cultural relationships between these

BAME churches. According to Rob, there were '250 to 300 walking through here every week now, worshipping God in all our congregations'. Rob described his church as a 'diverse, growing, inner-city church'.

However, Rob did not simply see his role as a 'landlord'. Instead he saw his role as 'pastor to the pastors' of the various BAME churches that met in his church building. Moreover, in Rob's own church community, he was committed to a multicultural model of church and eight nationalities were represented by the 20 members of his church.

'We are one': unity in diversity in multicultural church models

Whereas Rob's cross-cultural model centred on using a church building where different BAME churches could meet on separate occasions, a multicultural model of church provides a context where individuals from different cultures can meet and worship together at the same church services. In multicultural churches individuals form a community around a common religious identity instead of a shared cultural identity. Although common religious identity is based upon a shared Christian faith it is more nuanced than this. Each multicultural church community will identify with different denominational traditions to which their church is affiliated, for example the Roman Catholic tradition or Anglican tradition. I found that English is the usual language for multicultural church services in London.

Not all the churches affiliated to a particular denomination would be multicultural since the composition of church communities would also be affected by the demographics of the geographical area where the church is situated. For instance, an Anglican Church in a rural area of England is likely to have a church

congregation that is comprised mainly of white British individuals whereas an Anglican Church in a cosmopolitan city is likely to have a multicultural church congregation. However, the demographics of an area may not be exactly represented in churches. If churches are known as welcoming communities, this can draw more individuals who do not share the predominant culture of the locality and who are looking for a place where they feel difference is accepted.

For refugees, multicultural church communities provided an alternative to BAME churches which tend to have congregations that are comprised of individuals from one national or ethnic cultural background. When one refugee from Africa said, 'These people speak my language' about the Catholic church that she belonged to, she was not using 'language' in a literal sense but metaphorically to convey the familiarity and acceptance she had experienced within the religious culture of her Catholic church. Similarly, Levitt (2007, p. 110) argued that belonging to religious institutions such as the Catholic church 'engenders a sense of global religious membership that complements, competes with, or supersedes national membership'.

Shared religious identity such as being a Catholic or an Anglican was the most important identity for individuals in multicultural church communities. For instance, when I asked one Anglican vicar about the relationship between older, white British members and those who are new members of what he described as his black majority church, he responded first by talking about their shared church religious identity before explaining the advantages of multiculturalism for churches.

Mick: Well, they're all Anglican. Ok? They just happen to come from

different countries. The Anglican Church is a global organisation so they are Anglicans, they're all Anglicans [...] I think largely your white Anglicans, white indigenous Anglicans in the Church of England who've been in the churches which have been rejuvenated by multiculturalism have welcomed it. Because the story was decline and the story is now growth, and the churches are growing in London for that reason.

Two of the refugees I interviewed repeatedly used the phrase, 'we are one' to sum up the sense of unity that had drawn them to the churches. Elise and Anna were refugees whose two countries of origin were in Africa. Elise had been in the UK for 19 years which was the longest period for any of my participants. Anna did not give specific dates about the length of time she had been in the UK but from the details in her discourse it could be reliably ascertained that it had been for a period of at least five years. Both Elise and Anna have received British citizenship after enduring lengthy asylum application processes.

Elise belonged to a Roman Catholic church and Anna belonged to an Anglican church, and both churches had multicultural congregations. I interviewed Anna and Elise separately and they had never met, yet their descriptions of their churches were very similar.

Anna: It feels like, as if *we are one* [...] it's quite mixed, yeah, quite mixed. We've got different people, from Irish, from Ghana, from Nigeria, we've got from Polish.

Elise: Now my church is very, very mixed, yeah. It is really fun you know [...] There is no 'that one is from there', 'that one from there'.

We are one. This is how my church is.

When Elise first started going to the Catholic church in 1994 it was a majority white church. However, changes in the demographics of the local population are now reflected in the multiculturalism in the church. The fact that Elise and Anna have long-term attachments to their respective churches means it is reasonable to assume that their assessments of these churches have stood the test of time. Moreover, since their status in the UK is secure and they are both in employment, their continued association with the churches is not about dependency on support but about choice.

I did not visit Elise's Catholic church, however my observations in another Catholic church and interviews with two Catholic priests who participated in the research, gave me the opportunity to compare and confirm Elise's experiences. One of the Catholic priests, Luke, worked in a parish where he estimated the population comprised of 90 percent migrants. The historical roots of Luke's Catholic church were in the Irish community who came to London as migrants in the 19th century. However, Luke has witnessed the decline of the Irish community as subsequent generations have increasingly stopped attending the church or moved away from the area. Luke commented wistfully, 'nowadays, faith is not as it used to be'. However, new migrants from a variety backgrounds have reinvigorated the church.

Luke described an annual event that is held in his church where the diversity of cultures in his congregation is celebrated. His enthusiasm for the event was

obvious during the interview which is reflected in the language that he used to describe the event.

Luke: We have here what you would call international Mass, a kind of cultural Mass [...] People are asked to come with anything that they think represents their own country and, of course, many come with their national flag. Always in the last five years, over forty flags are here in the church and it is beautiful, they come dancing, their own kind of thing.

Luke's interpretation of events such as the 'international Mass' demonstrated the importance that is attached to religious identity for bringing together his diverse church community. Luke uses the same phrase, 'we are one' that was used by Elise and Anna.

Luke: Those events help [us] to realise, well, *we are one* in this community [...] we are different but this church unites us, this faith we have unites us like that. So, I think that's what perhaps is the strength of this community.

Anna's Anglican church was one of the churches that I observed during my fieldwork. The vitality and friendliness of the church community seemed to be in direct contrast to the church building where they met for worship: a drab 1960s building that was due to be demolished and re-built as part of the re-generation of the neighbourhood. Nathan was the vicar of Anna's church and he was also one of the research participants in this study. Nathan's description of those in the church's multicultural community added to Anna's description above.

Nathan: Probably majority African, and then we have Eastern European people, we have Indian people, we have Sri Lankans, we have Irish, and [said with a smile] we even have a few English.

In this list Nathan omitted to mention the refugees from the Middle East who had recently started attending the church and who I had the serendipitous opportunity to interview on a visit to the church.

Nathan mentioned his responsibility for 'the cure of the souls' within his local parish as understood in the Anglican Church tradition. In this context, he used a quote from John Wesley to describe the community that lived in his local neighbourhood: 'Was it John Wesley said, "The world is my parish"? Well on this estate the world is my parish, literally'. Nathan also encouraged those who belonged to his church community to be actively involved in the social action done under the auspices of the church whether this was to help others within the church or within the local community. Referring to the diverse cultural backgrounds of those who belonged to the church, Nathan explained the contribution that he believed the church made to the wider local community.

Nathan: It is that [multicultural church] community which functions and which provides hospitality which is one of the charisms [gifts] of this particular fellowship [...] When we [the church community] do what God calls us to do, that shows a different kind of society. We are the only cross-generational, cross-cultural community in this area [...] The only place where people can meet, and where people do meet regularly across cultures, across ages, is the church.

Luke and Nathan both understood their churches in terms of communities. They were welcoming and hospitable to newcomers and they were engaged with their wider local communities. I found that an outward looking focus and connection with the local community was common among the different multicultural churches in this study.

Acknowledgement and celebration of cultures in multicultural churches

Although multicultural church communities were principally formed around common religious identity, I found that the different cultures of individuals who belonged to these churches were not ignored. Cultures were acknowledged as making a positive contribution, and different cultures were regarded as something to be celebrated in multicultural church communities. For refugees, these churches provided social contexts where cultural difference was normalised.

Esther, a participant in this study who helped to run her church centre, described how the involvement of individuals from different cultures was an intentional policy in the church. This non-conformist church owned multipurpose premises that were used for a drop-in centre for the homeless and community living accommodation, as well as for religious purposes.

Esther: We're very much a welcoming community in the church and we've always really wanted to be a church of many nations and we are that. We've got lots of different nations, I don't know, twenty or thirty probably, in our congregation. And that's what we've really wanted. And we don't want to be sort of exclusively white or exclusively British. We really don't want that to be the case. And in

the community upstairs we've got people from different countries living there and a mix of black and white.

However, I identified differences between Protestant churches and Catholic churches where the support of individuals from different cultures was concerned. Whereas, Anglican churches and non-conformist churches in this study only offered multicultural services and events, Catholic churches could draw on the support and resources from the Catholic church London dioceses to facilitate church services and events that catered for individuals from different national or ethnic communities to meet together in their separate groups.

Although Mass in Catholic churches was generally said in English, the Catholic dioceses in London provided 'ethnic chaplains' to say Mass in different languages in churches across London. For instance, in 2015 the Roman Catholic diocese of Westminster listed the contact details of thirty-four ethnic chaplains on their website ³³. The Catholic dioceses also provided London-wide celebrations of religious festivals and pilgrimages that were uniquely associated with particular ethnic groups ³⁴.

Alice, a participant in this study and a voluntary worker for refugees and migrants in the Catholic church that I visited during my fieldwork, was enthusiastic about the range of events available through the Catholic church that celebrated the different cultures within their 'very, very, mixed community'. These events included regional and London-wide meetings for separate cultural communities that were hosted by the Roman Catholic London dioceses. One such London-wide

³³ <http://rcdow.org.uk/diocese/directory/ethnic-chaplaincies/> [Accessed: 9 February 2015]

³⁴ http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/ethnic_home.htm [Accessed: 9 February 2015]

Catholic church event was a Mass on Mothers' Day for the Ghanaian community that was held in a large Catholic church in central London.

Alice: Mothers' Day we have a huge Mass. All the children will come in, all dressed up in their nice costumes, and then, like last year I was the youth coordinator, so I got all the children to give all the mothers roses to say, 'thank you, mum' and all that. And then we get the children also to come and speak prayers in the Ghanaian language so they can feel a part of it.

The large scale of these events can be appreciated when Alice continued to speak of a harvest celebration.

Alice: There's about 1,500 people. And every year we have a harvest, an annual harvest. Everybody comes.

According to Alice, everyone continued to attend their local churches as well as the wider events. Therefore, these regional and London-wide events did not replace the role of the local Catholic church communities in the acknowledgement and celebration of different cultures. Together with multicultural services and events, in Alice's local Catholic church separate cultural community groups met once a month at the church. According to Alice, these cultural community groups included a Nigerian group, Ghanaian group and a Kenyan group. Alice's explanation about the reason for meeting as separate cultural groups suggested that, alongside the mutual support of their members these groups helped with the practical running of the church.

Alice: To encourage, sort of support each other to stay in the church and build the church and do things. Because it is amazing how many

volunteers are needed for the day to day, just sweeping the church, everyday things like that. So, we try to encourage the different communities to sort of support each other within the communities to do that.

For Alice, the acknowledgement and celebration of cultures was an important aspect of the church which communicated to individuals that their language and culture was valued; it was this that made the church 'a very, good church'. Alice's colourful description of cultural events in the church helps to convey the value that she and others placed on the multicultural attributes of the church.

Alice: If we have like a Ghanaian Independence Day, the Ghanaians are all there in their Ghanaian cloth and they sing songs in the Ghanaian language and clap and you see everybody else clapping with us. And the Nigerians do something. They all wear green banners and everybody dance, dance and sing the Nigerian songs and all sorts, and those of us who can, will sing, and those of us who can't, will mime [laughing as she spoke]. So, it's very nice. In fact, last year we had an international evening where all the readings and prayers were all said in different languages. Yeah, different people came in their different costumes, and different prayers in different language, and we all went to the hall. Everybody was supposed to bring something from their different country to share and all that. So, we get that and it makes people happy, they feel their language and their culture is valued, so it's a very good church.

'It didn't fit me': refugees' responses to negative experiences in churches

Most of the refugees in this study focused on the positive experiences of connecting to church communities, however three refugees recounted negative experiences with African Pentecostal churches. It is possible that these three refugees mentioned their negative experiences with African Pentecostal churches because their shared cultural background with those in these churches had heightened both their expectations and their disappointment when they felt unsupported by the church communities. Of course, it cannot be assumed that all African Pentecostal churches would respond in the same way nor that all mainstream denominational churches would respond positively to refugees.

Two of the refugees who had negative experiences with churches, Elizabeth and Anna had participated in in-depth interviews for this study. I heard the third refugee, Esme, recount her story to the audience at a public event that I attended. Esme had been in the UK since 2004 and although I spoke to Esme after the event I did not have the opportunity to interview her at length. All three refugees had left the churches that had not supported them and they subsequently had connected to mainstream multicultural churches.

According to Elizabeth and Esme, the main cause of negative experiences and dissatisfaction with the churches was due to a refusal by those churches to become involved with pastoral issues related to immigration problems. Esme recounted how upon hearing that her application for asylum had been refused the first thing she did was to phone the church office at the African Pentecostal church she attended. She was told the church did not get involved with 'political issues' and she was not given any support. Esme mentioned that the refusal of the church to

help her came at a time when she was ill and undergoing chemotherapy. She has now received leave to remain in the UK and has settled in another church.

Elizabeth's story was similar to Esme's in terms of the lack of support that her church gave her when she got into difficulties after her visa had expired which meant she could no longer work. As a result, Elizabeth and her young daughter became homeless. Elizabeth applied for leave to remain in the UK and approached her African Pentecostal Church to ask for help whereupon she was directed to the Salvation Army or homeless shelters. Elizabeth recounted that, 'There was not much help at all'. The most difficult thing for Elizabeth was that the church actively discouraged her close friend in the church from helping her.

Elizabeth: The church told her [Elizabeth's friend] she should not get too personally into other people's problems. I found that upsetting and I said to her, 'Listen if God have put it on your heart to help people, go ahead and help people [...] And if you listen to somebody else then you are losing your blessing and disobeying God at the same time, so do what you can.' Well she accommodated me for a few days and I found somewhere else. I went away. And I stopped the church at that very instant because I am very, very Catholic [...] I did not completely leave my Catholic faith.

However, Elizabeth did not go to a Catholic church immediately. She stopped attending church for a year and 'pray[ed] that God should show me what to do'. As a child Elizabeth had attended a Catholic school in her country of origin. Elizabeth had what she described as a vision that led her back to the Catholic church where she saw a figure with a rosary, 'and that figure just clearly like Our Lady'. When

Elizabeth eventually went to Mass one morning at her local Catholic church she described it like an emotional home-coming.

Elizabeth: And I didn't even know if anyone noticed me but I was determined not to embarrass myself, I was so full of emotion, just, you know, I was like, why did I stay away so long? You know since then I haven't looked back, and this is about three years ago, I haven't looked back. It has helped me a lot.

When I met Elizabeth, the Catholic church had helped her in the previous twelve months with emergency accommodation and with ongoing support while her appeal for asylum in the UK was still pending.

Elizabeth and Anna also mentioned an over-emphasis on monetary giving and concerns about religious practices as two other reasons for their dissatisfaction with the churches. Although these concerns were not limited to the lived experiences of refugees, Elizabeth, Anna and other refugees could have felt them more acutely because of the precariousness of their circumstances as refugees and the emotional vulnerability resulting from their experiences that were associated with forced migration. For refugees, the emphasis on giving money would highlight their own lack of resources. Giving can be very public in some African Pentecostal churches. At the church worship service that I attended in Nedum's church there were three separate occasions when money offerings were taken, one of which required individuals to dance to the front of the church to give their money.

Moreover, when monetary offerings in churches are framed in terms of being a requirement of God to receive his help and blessing there is an added emotional

pressure for individuals to comply, which could play on the vulnerability of refugees and migrants. This was Elizabeth's experience at her African Pentecostal church with the result that she ended up in severe hardship. Her story is of interest because of the way she connected it to her immigration problems. On one occasion when Elizabeth was still in paid employment, she had felt herself persuaded to give a large amount of money to the church following an appeal for money during a church service that had cited testimonies about sacrificial giving of large amounts of money that had been 'miraculously' rewarded.

Elizabeth: So, I thought, ok let me try this. And I also went ahead and my whole month's salary [cash], I put it in the envelope and put it on the altar. And I prayed, and prayed, and prayed. And in the end, I just starved myself [ironic smile]. I just starved myself. And I was actually doing that because my immigration, because I just put in my application, and I was hoping to get a result because then I wasn't having any reply from the Home Office. But I didn't get nothing [...] I begin to question myself and doubt what they were doing there.

Anna also experienced pressure to give money at the African Pentecostal church that she attended. Anna specifically mentioned that it was not her intention to get anything from the church, rather it was the pressure that she was put under to give money to the church that was the issue.

Anna: I didn't fit in very well with the structure of the church [...] They'd want to get money. I didn't have money to give to offerings and stuff, so I sort of thought that this wasn't the right place for me [...] my intention wasn't to get anything from them [...] I wasn't

being myself because of the structure or the manner which the church, or how everything was being conducted and then I felt, you know, this is not the place for me.

Elizabeth and Anna both used phrases about not fitting in such as, 'it didn't fit me' or 'I didn't fit in' when they summed up their negative experiences with church communities. Anna developed the notion of not fitting and reflected, 'I wasn't being myself' and twice mentioned that the church 'wasn't the right place for me'. These phrases about not fitting in to the churches could reveal the importance that refugees place on fitting in or belonging in church communities. However, by putting the onus on themselves as not fitting in, Elizabeth and Anna also might have thought they were using a respectful way of speaking about the churches.

Elizabeth, Anna and Esme, all showed resourcefulness, exercised agency and demonstrated adaptability as they left unhelpful church situations and sought out, and connected to new church communities where they could belong, flourish, and receive support as they worked towards making their future secure.

These findings suggest that further research is needed to explore why some African Pentecostal churches in the UK distance themselves from refugees and migrants who face immigration problems. Such research could consider to what extent this is related to 1) a mission emphasis that prioritises the use of resources on evangelization and establishing churches in the UK over social action, 2) feelings of precariousness and disadvantage compared to other long-established mainstream denominational institutions in the UK which could be manifested by a greater sensitivity to anything that might suggest they were not complying with

UK immigration laws and, 3) fears they could be overwhelmed by the volume of requests for help.

Conclusion

The interviews with refugees and clergy showed the adaptability and resourcefulness of refugees when choosing church communities in London. Some of the mainstream denominational churches also demonstrated adaptability and resourcefulness through the creation of multicultural expressions of church.

The refugees I interviewed had all found a church community where they felt at home, and they were all positive about their current experiences with church communities. There was no one single reason why refugees chose to interact with church communities and it was evident that interaction was far more complex than simply maximising rewards (Ammerman, 2007, p. 226).

However, culture played an important role in how refugees felt about church communities. In this study refugees were connected to BAME churches associated with single national or ethnic cultures or to multicultural mainstream churches – and sometimes to both at the same time. Refugees were drawn to BAME churches because of the cultural familiarity in the church communities whereas, in multicultural churches refugees felt accepted because difference was normalised. Catholic churches were the only churches where refugees could meet both in multicultural settings and in their separate cultural groups.

Refugees were adept at negotiating the expectations of previous cultural and religious connections and crossed the borders of church denominations to find the place that most resonated with their notions of home. In this way, religion entailed ‘crossing and dwelling’ for refugees (Tweed, 2006). Moreover, the

pluralistic environment of London provided the refugees with more choice for connecting with other denominational expressions of church. The freedom for migrants to choose religious affiliations also has been identified by sociologists as characteristic of life in the United States (Levitt, 2007; Casanova, 1994). However, I am aware that this may not always be the case. For instance, it is possible that refugees living in patriarchal family contexts could be prevented from choosing religious or church connections if this was considered counter to prevailing family cultural norms.

The next chapter looks at the themes of belief and belonging in relation to refugees' everyday lived experience.

Chapter 6

Belief and belonging: refugees' everyday lived religion

Religion is always religion-in-action, religion-in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be (Orsi, 2010, p. xxxviii).

Religions designate where we are *from*, identify whom we are *with*, and prescribe how we move *across*. (Tweed, 2006, p. 79, italics in original).

Introduction

The themes of belief and belonging in this chapter address the question of how refugees mobilise everyday lived religion to help mitigate the effects of forced migration and the challenges associated with settling in new locations. This is not simply about personally held religious beliefs but how refugees' beliefs are lived out through their connections with local church communities; as Tweed (2006, p. 64) pointed out, religious belief is simultaneously both individualistic and collective.

Themes that are associated with belonging were often raised by the refugees in this study in relation to their connections to church communities. Churches also seemed to be very aware of the importance of belonging. For instance, the publicity of a BMC church used the strapline, 'Believe – Belong – Become' under

the name of the church, a BAME church leaflet with information for visitors was entitled, 'Welcome Home!', the Catholic Cardinal told the migrants packed into the London cathedral, 'We want you to know that you belong' (Ivereigh, 2010), and a large banner outside an Anglican church read, 'Making a family out of strangers'. This style of messaging used by London churches was in stark contrast to the vans displaying large 'Go home' posters that were driven around some London boroughs as part of the UK government's campaign to create a hostile environment for immigrants in 2013, as well as to the tabloid press headlines with inaccurate and defamatory statements about refugees and migrants. The difference in these messages seemed to confirm Portes's and DeWind's (2007, p. 20) argument that the logic which guides the core beliefs underlying state policy and the dominant stereotypes held by 'the native population' are mostly at variance with religious interactions and interventions.

This chapter uses the research data to consider the effect that religious belief and practise had on the refugees' capacity to cope with their experiences as refugees in the London and conversely, the effect that experiences of being a refugee had on their religious belief and practise. The second half of the chapter is organised around the themes that emerged from a succinct summary of the refugee experience in London as told to me by Elise, one of the refugee participants in this research. I have used quotes from refugees, clergy and laity to help expound the themes in each section.

Religious belief as a survival strategy

I found that all the refugees who participated in in-depth interviews for this study associated religious belief with their capacity to cope with their experiences as

refugees in the UK. 'Without faith I wouldn't be here' or similar phrases with the same meaning were commonly used by refugees to express their conviction that religious faith had been essential to their survival and they believed it was the primary reason they had not given up. For instance, at a public conference that was organised to promote the support of refugees, one refugee who told her story of the experiences of the asylum process in the UK and of the difficult adjustment to life as a refugee said:

'Faith has taken me through. Without faith, I wouldn't be here today.'

From this refugee's perspective, her religious faith was the main reason she had survived the experiences of forced migration.

Refugees used the term 'faith' to refer to their lived experience of religion.

Therefore, 'faith' incorporated both their personally held religious beliefs and their engagement with church communities. The participants in this research mostly commented on their religious faith in relation to surviving the difficulties and harsh realities of life as a refugee in the UK rather than their journey to the UK. This might be expected since I had framed the research as an enquiry into refugees' experiences and interactions with church communities in the UK.

However, Yolande also related the importance of her religious faith retrospectively to the circumstances of her flight from violent conflict in her country fifteen years previously. Yolande believed that God had helped her escape death and she associated this with her strength of feeling about her religious faith.

Yolande: My faith is stronger yeah. I didn't think one day I can be here and be alive. When I think all these things, God has helped me a

lot [...] Without faith, without God, I won't be here. I got many of my friends, they died and I'm alive, still alive.

The reliance on religious faith as part of a survival strategy in the UK came across when Anna spoke about her treatment by the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) while her application for asylum was being processed. This treatment included two periods of detention in a UK immigration removal centre along with her two young daughters. In her discourse Anna expressed the importance of her religious faith during and since this time. In this extract Anna compared the value of her church community with that of her daughters.

Anna: If it wasn't for my kids I wouldn't be here, and if it wasn't for the church I wouldn't be here, cos at times [...] you want to give up. Anna's religious faith and her commitment to her church community have continued to be strong since receiving leave to remain in the UK.

As a result of her experiences as a refugee Abigail's religious faith had become stronger. She perceived there was a correlation between the strength of her faith and her own ability to be strong in the face of the challenges of life as a refugee.

Abigail: I am very strong belief, very strong. I believe in God [...] It [her belief] makes me stronger. I felt a lot of things but the more I feel sad, the more stronger [I become] because of my God.

Elizabeth's strength of conviction about religious faith also had intensified since living in the UK. Elizabeth was not brought up as a Christian in Africa, although she attended a Catholic school. Nonetheless her narrative described the Catholic church as her 'former love' and her 'first original faith' to explain why she had chosen to attend a Catholic church after a previous connection to an African

Pentecostal church had proved unhelpful for her. When I asked Elizabeth if her faith had become stronger because of her experiences as a refugee she relied emphatically, 'Yes, it has'. Elizabeth associated her religious faith as a 'very, very important part' of her ability to survive the pressures of her precarious immigration status. Elizabeth's application for leave to remain in the UK was still pending appeal when she participated in this research.

Elizabeth: [Without faith] I don't think I would probably, I wouldn't be standing here, because I would be depressed, really, really depressed.

Yaro was another refugee who associated survival with his Christian faith and his connection to his church, 'If it wasn't for the church I wouldn't have survived'. Yaro fled West Africa and came to the UK in 1995 because of his fear of political persecution. However, when his asylum application in the UK was refused four years later, he went into hiding. Although Yaro had done casual work for cash-in-hand, at the time I met him he was homeless and sleeping on the streets, on night buses or in night shelters provided by churches in the winter months. A lawyer from a religious charity had recently taken up his case to appeal against the UK Home Office refusal of asylum. Yaro described himself as 'an occasional church-goer' in his country of origin whereas since connecting to an Anglican church he regarded himself as 'a real Christian'. Yaro's depth of feeling about the difference that his faith and the church had made to his survival was evident when he compared himself with others who also had been destitute but had given up and committed suicide.

Stephan, a teacher from the Cote d'Ivoire whose claim for asylum in the UK had been outstanding for 19 years in 2013 because the UKBA had lost his documents, regarded his Christian faith as 'everything for me'. When Tony Blair was prime minister, Stephan had been invited to No. 10 Downing Street for a meeting to discuss Africa where Tony Blair was present. This added to his sense of frustration about the way his asylum claim had been handled.³⁵ For all the agency of refugees, they cannot change the official processes of the government agencies that control their immigrant status. Stephan's life had been in limbo since he had come to live in the UK but he described his Christian faith as a source of love and hope that helped him to cope.

Stephan: That (Christianity) is everything for me [...] you don't have to be angry against all these. No, no, no. Just you hope in God and think that your life will be better for you and this is how life is.

Mobilising lived religion in new locations

It was a common pattern with the refugees I interviewed that their religious faith had intensified since their arrival in the UK and especially in the earlier stages of adjusting to life as a refugee. Nonetheless, refugees did not seem to abandon their religious faith at later stages and it remained an important aspect in the lives of the participants in this study who had received leave to remain in the UK.

In the early stages of life in the UK the refugees' sense of isolation and loneliness acted as a stimulus to seek out church communities. However, when refugees could not find church communities that met their needs, I found that refugees

³⁵ A few months later I met one of the volunteers at the refugee centre that Stephan attended. I learnt that Stephan's case was being handled by a new legal team and that there was hope that he would be given leave to remain. None of this had happened at the time I met Stephan.

adapted to these circumstances by using religious symbols and liturgy to practice their religious faith in the privacy of their own rooms. In the case of one refugee in this study, a new church began out of the small gathering in 'exile' that started in his room.

In response to my question as to whether experiences of being a refugee had changed how she felt about religion and faith, Elise responded emphatically, 'Yeah, definitely'. By way of explanation she then contextualised this with a description of what it was like to be a refugee after she arrived in the UK in 1994.

Elise: Because being a refugee – very hard [...] To be somebody helpless, to be somebody who don't have anyone around, to be somebody who ignored, being basically somebody who is stateless, you don't have somewhere to go, you don't have a right to say anything.

Elise had looked to religious faith and the church community as a way of counteracting the negative experiences of being a refugee. Therefore, using a summary of Elise's words – helpless, isolated, ignored, stateless, homeless and silenced – and reversing them, we might evaluate what religious faith and her church community had provided for her – support, community, acceptance, a 'home' and a place to be heard. Although other refugees in this study did not sum up their experiences in such a succinct way, the different aspects of Elise's understanding of the experience of being a refugee in the UK were repeated in their accounts and will be considered more fully in this chapter.

In the context of the importance of her faith, Anna also spoke of her experience of isolation when she first came to the UK as a refugee. Of particular concern to Anna

was that she had no-one to speak to about her traumatic experiences that related to being a refugee. During this time, she sought solace in religious books including the Bible. These religious books came from the Catholic tradition since she had been taken to a Catholic church by her grandparents when she was a child. As mentioned in the last chapter Anna eventually found an Anglican church and prior to this she attended an African Pentecostal church. Elizabeth also read and used Catholic prayer books after she left the African Pentecostal church and before she connected to a Catholic church.

Refugees' narrative accounts suggested that religious symbols, ritual, prayers and liturgy were familiar and comforting especially during, often lengthy, times of uncertainty while they were waiting for a decision about their asylum claim. For instance, Simeon's almost daily visits to a Catholic church during his long wait for leave to remain meant the liturgy was so familiar to him that he could say the priest's lines in the liturgy as well as the lines assigned to the congregation. The words of the Catholic liturgy gave him something that was constant while the rest of his life was in limbo.

In the case of Eli, his personal use of religious symbols and prayers in his room evolved into a small gathering of like-minded refugees. Shortly after arriving in the UK, Eli was relocated by the UK Home Office from London to a UK city that was unknown to him. As a consequence, this meant changes to his religious practice because there were no Ethiopian Orthodox churches in the new city. To add to his own account of this difficult time Eli directed me to Martha, a religious sister from a Roman Catholic religious order who had befriended Eli in London and who kept in touch with him by telephone during this time.

Martha: He was lonely, cold and got depressed. I used to phone him on Sunday evenings. The first Sunday he was there, his voice on the phone was barely audible, he was so depressed. He was missing his church community in London and had no church to go to. He told me that he put his icon on the only chair in his room and prayed on his own.

In the absence of an Orthodox church, Eli used the icon as a focal point for his religious practice. Although Eli is not a priest, over a two month period he began to gather others from the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition who were living in that geographical area to meet with him in his one room. When there were six individuals meeting together they sought a room at the local Catholic church. Two years later, 70 Orthodox Christians were gathering each Sunday afternoon for a three-hour worship service in a small hall, followed by a shared meal.

The description of this religious gathering that met in Eli's room is radically different from the norm at worship services within the Ethiopian Orthodox church tradition. There were no priests presiding over the meetings and none of the religious symbols associated with Ethiopian Orthodox church services were mentioned apart from Eli's icon. When Eli recounted the same story, he told me that Ethiopian Orthodox prayers were used in these meetings and the prayers were led, in turn, by different people in the group that included both women and men from Ethiopia. This embryonic religious gathering 'in exile' had evolved as an outcome of the refugees' experiences and was in complete contrast to the usual strictly applied and traditional practices of Ethiopian Orthodox church where women and men are seated in separate areas during worship services and the

priests are all men. Eli's relatively informal religious gathering in his room showed how the lived religion of refugees can be shaped as they adapt to their circumstance in new locations. Perhaps this story is also a comment on the power and unchanging nature of religious institutions since the informal practice of the meetings 'in exile' were short lived and reverted to formal practices once an Ethiopian Orthodox church was established in that vicinity.

Eli was the only refugee in this research who had been involved in creating a new expression of church. However, other research such as Ugba's (2008) study of African Pentecostals in Ireland, has found that refugees find innovative ways of creating collective expressions of their religious tradition and that many new churches are started in this way. For refugees, the alternative to creating a new expression of church in the same religious tradition is to find support from a church community within a different Christian denominational tradition as we have seen in the last chapter. In some cases, those who are from other religious faiths might choose to convert to Christianity.

So far, in both this and the last chapter, all the refugees who connected their religious faith with their ability to survive the challenges and difficulties associated with the experiences of being a refugee in the UK had some previous link to Christianity in their country of origin, even if it had been a tenuous link. The next section considers refugees who had no prior connections to Christianity and who had crossed the borders of religions.

Crossing borders between religions: new religious identities

I encountered refugees from other faiths at the six centres I visited. These centres were all situated in church buildings although five of the centres were run by

independent charities and not the churches. I observed no discrimination about who could attend in any of the refugee centres. Furthermore, my observations showed that refugees who were Christians were in the minority. One possible explanation could be that refugees who are Christians might more readily find support in informal ways through London churches and therefore have less need of refugee centres.

In conversations with refugees at the centres I found that some who were from other faiths also had connections to churches. For instance, Nayana, a Hindu from Sri Lanka told me she also went to a Lutheran church in London. Abena, who was a Muslim, told me that she sometimes went to a friend's church. It seemed that being a Muslim in a Christian church was not an issue either for herself or for the church, and she told me, 'they don't ask about religions'. There was nothing in Abena's apparel such as a hijab that would have been an indicator that she was a Muslim so it is possible that the church did not know this. I only knew about Abena's religious faith because she told me during our conversation. Abena mentioned that she had received some money from the mosque to help her with transport costs. Nderim was a Muslim who had been in the UK for six months. Nderim had been directed to a church through the chance encounter in a London park with someone from his country of origin. He spoke highly of a woman in the church who was helping him to get support such as registration with a GP and dentist.

Of the 13 refugees who participated in in-depth interviews for this research, three had converted to Christianity since coming to the UK – Faiz, Karim and Simeon, and two refugees – Amir and Bahman were already Christian converts who were

fleeing from the fear of religious persecution in their country of origin. Amir and Bahman were friends who had separately come to the UK. All five refugees were males who had converted to Christianity from Islam. Karim, Amir and Bahman were originally from the Middle East, Faiz was originally from Asia, and Simeon was forcibly trafficked from an Islamic region in his country of origin in Africa. Each of these refugees had a different story about how they had converted to Christianity. Karim, Amir and Bahman were connected to Nathan's Anglican church. Faiz was connected to Esther's non-conformist church and was living in one of the church community houses. Simeon was connected to a Catholic church and he also had links with an African Pentecostal church in London.

Although Karim, Faiz, and Simeon converted to Christianity after they had come to the UK, the circumstances that led to their conversions of faith were all different. Karim initially went to prison chapel services to attempt to influence his treatment by the prison authorities, Faiz was first introduced to church by someone in his social networks which were established after he arrived in the UK, and Simeon chose to attend a church that was connected to a refugee centre.

Karim described his connection to the church in a way that mixed choice with fate, 'I made up my mind to choose the church as my fate'. Karim had been alone in the UK after coming from the Middle East. He ended up in prison in the UK where he attended the prison chapel for a short time.³⁶ He described his feelings during this time and how he had first attended the chapel on the advice of a friend as a way of ingratiating himself with the authorities.

³⁶ I did not interrupt the flow of conversation to ask the reason he had been imprisoned since it was not relevant to this research and he clearly found it difficult to speak about this. Besides other more common crimes, refugees can be imprisoned for undertaking any paid employment in the UK while their asylum claim is being processed or for procuring or possessing false documentation.

Karim: In the prison, I was very lonely [...] I had not told any one of my friends and my family members that I was in prison. Only Ramin knew and he used to come. [Ramin was 'one of my countrymen'] Ramin advise me that, go to church [in the prison] and like, announce yourself as a Christian and to this way, and by this means, you may get, you know, you may be freed [...] I was not able to speak good English but I enjoyed the kindness and the affection shown to me. So, I liked the atmosphere and the place. So, the pastor in church, of that church in the prison, baptise me.

Having served an eighteen-month prison sentence, Karim remained in prison in indefinite detention during which time he received a deportation letter from the UK Borders' Agency (now the UKVI). The system of indefinite detention means that once refugees finish their prison sentence, the UK government can continue to keep refugees interred for an indeterminate period whilst decisions are made about their future. Due to inefficiencies in the immigration processes this can go on for years. Karim's description of the emotional pressure during his 'indefinite detention' reveals the trauma of being incarcerated without limit.

I was under such a severe pressure in the prison that I used to go to the gym twice just to be able to sleep at night [...] Within me my soul was ruined and my eyes were closed because of the agony I was going through.

Although he continued to pray, Karim stopped going to the chapel because he 'faced problems with some of the inmate Muslims'. When Karim was released from prison after ten months, he was electronically tagged. Once in the

community he received support from a priest who helped him to secure accommodation in a room and supported him to have the tag removed. Nevertheless, Karim continued to feel lonely until he connected with Edward's church through a chance encounter. Edward's church is in the same Anglican parish as Nathan's church. Although Karim felt his experiences with a mosque were not helpful this does not suggest that would always be the case with mosques nor that all churches would be welcoming.

Karim: One day, just by accident, I walked through the [...] church. Then I saw Edward, pastor Edward there. I begged pastor Edward that I am lonely and desolate and I need someone to help me [...] At that very crucial moment, I decided to choose my way [...] because mosque never appease me or never gave me peace and whenever I used to go that mosque I was looked as a criminal. Then I made up my mind to choose the church as my fate [...] and some sort of love was emerging in my soul again. I was feeling some love and kindness and it was emerging within me. I was given a new birth, a new life. I really came to realise that God loves me.

Although Karim came from the same country of origin as Amir and Bahman, they had not met before Karim arrived at the church. Amir had translated for Karim during the interview and he added his own opinion about the work of churches arguing that the UK government should support the work of churches.

Amir: So, not just from a church point of view but from a political point of view, I think this is a wonderful work that the government should support the church. Yes, of course, I do agree, I agree that

some people, just to get asylum and come here and enjoy their life they say, 'Ah, we are Christian', ok. But there are genuine cases also among them.

Like Karim, Faiz spoke about his conversion to Christianity in terms of both fate and choice. On the one hand Faiz argued that, 'Everything is not my decision, God brought me here and God wanted me to be his child'. On the other Faiz explained, 'So, this is my freedom, I have to choose it'. Comparing his life in the UK with his country of origin, Faiz felt glad to have choice, 'It is not like back home [where] I have to be like what is my background [...] I really enjoy that here [UK]'. However, choice had come at a cost since Faiz has been rejected by his family in his country of origin after he told them in a phone call that he had converted to Christianity and had been baptised.

When Faiz returned to the subject of his refugee journey five years previously in 2008, he again spoke in terms of fate. His journey to the UK had been difficult and his existence in the UK since then has continued to be difficult. Perhaps believing that God had a plan for his life made it easier for him to cope with the precarious nature of his circumstances.

Faiz: That's what my belief is because I don't know why I even came here, sometime I think why I came here?

Mary: Because it's been so hard?

Faiz: Yeah, it is, because in myself I never been to the plane. All the way from here just walk, and crossing the borders, and the truck, and the lorry. And I don't know why. I just think the best way, is just God brought me here.

Faiz was waiting for the outcome of an appeal to stay in the UK. He was pragmatic about having to leave the UK providing he was not sent back to his country of origin where it would be unsafe to return now that it is known that he is a Christian. Faiz received no subsistence support from the UK government and lived in one of the church community houses in London. He had been given a bike and used it to cycle to the church centre to do voluntary work.

Simeon did not speak in detail about the circumstances of his conversion to Christianity. He could be described as devout in his religious practise which I observed was an important aspect of his everyday life and not only about attendance at church services. Simeon was baptised in a non-conformist church that was attached to a refugee centre, but since then Simeon's main connection had been with Catholic churches although he also had a connection with a BMC.

Simeon grew up in a Muslim area in his African country although Christians were predominant in other regions. Simeon's mother was a Christian but after she died when he was three years old, Simeon was brought up as a Muslim. A long period of servitude as a child labourer was followed by being forcibly trafficked to the UK. Following his escape from the traffickers, Simeon applied for asylum in the UK which was initially refused. Although Simeon had already lodged an appeal, he had been detained in removal centres pending deportation on at least two occasions, and each time received a temporary reprieve. Simeon was still waiting for a decision about leave to remain in the UK.

I first met Simeon on the last occasion that he was in detention and I have continued to stay in contact with him. While in detention, Simeon received visits from at least one fellow Catholic church member whose family were from Africa

but not from the same country of origin as Simeon, and from a BMC church pastor. After being released in December 2013, Simeon lived with a church member from his Catholic church. The consequences of not living in government accommodation meant that he received no subsistence support from the UK government. It was the price of choosing to be near his social networks rather than isolated in government accommodation that would most likely be outside of London.³⁷ Like Faiz, Simeon has been given a bike to help with local travel.

Crossing territorial borders because of religion

When Amir came to the UK the first time it was not as a refugee. Although Amir came from a country of origin that restricted the movement of their citizens, his employment had meant he had permission to work abroad and he could travel to the UK on a work visa. His first trip to the UK is significant because it prepared the way both for another refugee from his country of origin to connect to a church, as well as for a time in the future when Amir himself needed to apply for asylum in the UK. Amir's personal reasons for coming to the UK on the first occasion were linked to his interest in Christianity. He had been a Shia Muslim and described how his journey of faith culminated in a dream where he saw himself walking in London.

Amir: I was a Shia Muslim and I was a member of a group called Jihad [...] I was in a sort of dilemma. I knew to be a believer in God, the true God, has something to do with Jesus Christ but, well, I didn't know the details. I just could smuggle one Bible with me to [...] his country of origin] and, ok, it was King James version, old one, and it

³⁷ See Chapter 2, p. 39.

was difficult for me to understand it fully and there was no one to explain it to me [...] So I had a dream. In my dream I saw myself in UK [...] I saw myself going, walking London, I knew it was London [...] In a very miraculous way, I got a visa, a work visa, a work permit and I came to London [in 2008].

Once in London, the way that Amir connected to Nathan's church showed his resourcefulness and determination. Firstly, Amir located a Catholic priest and asked to be baptised by him. When the priest told him that he would have to wait five months because this only happened twice a year in his church, Amir was dissatisfied with the priest's lack of urgency to help him in his religious quest. Next, Amir approached someone in the street and explained that he was looking for a church but he did not want a Catholic church. The man in the street directed Amir to the Anglican church that is associated with Nathan's church. Amir's descriptive account of his first meeting with the vicar of the church, Edward, showed it had been both a welcoming response and one of suspicion.

Amir: And I walked through the door and the pastor [Edward] was sitting there and as soon as he saw me he got on, like, he stood on his feet and received me and said, 'Hello son, how are you?' and, 'What can I do for you?' And I told him, 'I have come to be baptised'. And, frankly speaking, initially the pastor was thinking I am a spy. And he tried, you know, do cross questioning me and then he called Nathan. I told my story and they were amazed. And Nathan told me, 'Ok come to my place' to his house [...] So, the next week, I remember it was a Wednesday, I came to his house and he received me warmly

and said, 'Your story is true'. And I thought, of course. I thought to myself, of course my story is true, so why this man is telling me that your story is true? [jovial laughter]

Nathan and Edward offered to help Amir claim asylum in the UK because of the persecution he could face should it come to light that he had been baptised as a Christian when he returned to his country of origin. Amir was adamant that he wanted to return to his country and did not want to be a refugee.

Amir: And I said, 'No, I don't like to be a refugee and now I have found the truth and I know God'. So, I went back to my country.

When Amir was back in his country he met Bahman and their interaction showed the importance and effectiveness of religious networks. Bahman had converted to Christianity from 'a very strict Muslim background which I was a true believer' and subsequently began to 'experience problems' because of his Christian faith. Amir used his connections to help arrange for Bahman to leave their country and to be smuggled into the UK. What was illegal where the legislation of national borders was concerned, was regarded by them as having the approval of God, and while they were waiting for a plan of escape to materialise they prayed, sure that 'we are being guided by the Holy Spirit'. Amir gave Bahman the vicar's [Edward's] business card with the church address in London and told him, 'Go to Edward and show it to him and tell him that I have sent you'. Amir also signed the back of the card as an indication for Edward and Nathan that he endorsed Bahman.

The plan was successful and Bahman had been in the UK for five months when I met him at Nathan's house. However, following Bahman's departure Amir also started to experience 'some problems myself' with the authorities in his country of

origin which forced him to leave and come to the UK. He did not have to use traffickers to arrange his journey to the UK since he still had permission to travel to the UK on a work visa.

Addressing challenges of being a refugee through lived religion

The second half of this chapter considers how refugees mobilised religious belief to help them to overcome some of the challenges of being a refugee in London. At this point in the chapter I return to Elise's succinct summary of her experiences of being a refugee in London as mentioned earlier in this chapter – helpless, isolated, ignored, stateless, homeless and silenced. I found that the same negative experiences were woven into the discourses of all the other refugees although not as one complete list as with Elise. I suggested previously that it could be possible to arrive at an evaluation of how Elise's interaction with her church community had helped her by considering how church support had counteracted these negative aspects of being a refugee.

Therefore, I have begun each of the following sections with Elise's account of her experiences with her church community in relation to the above themes. I have then used the accounts of other refugees, clergy and laity where it helped to compare their experiences with Elise's experiences or expound the themes further. The quotes were chosen because they helped enrich understanding of the themes by highlighting the perspectives of refugees or those in church communities who support refugees. I was aware that some of the themes could overlap and therefore, the edges between the themes might be blurred at times.

Support within church communities

Elise used 'helpless' as the first term to describe what it felt like to be a refugee in London. To be helpless does not contradict my hypothesis that refugees, as social agents, actively engage in mobilising support for themselves and their families.

Elise's proactive engagement with her church community clearly showed her own agency at work. Instead the notion of being helpless was related to issues that were outside of refugees' control, such as the consequences of immigration policies that limit refugees' access to statutory support to the extent that they are often left in destitution. The British Government Joint Commission on Human Rights report on the treatment of asylum seekers found that the UK Government was 'practising a deliberate policy of destitution' and this has continued (Great Britain. Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2007, p. 41).

Refugees found both non-material and material resources in church communities (Long, 2001, p. 49). Non-material resources were associated with religious practises such as prayer, as well as the emotional and social support of being in community with others. The refugees in this study mainly focused on non-material resources in their narrative accounts in relation to the support they experienced from their interactions with church communities. For instance, Amir's description of the help that Bahman was receiving from the church community showed how moral and spiritual help was regarded as the most important support by him. Amir was older than Bahman and protective of him in a paternal way.

Amir: They (the church community) are supporting him morally because you imagine, young man leaving his family, his children and not to be sure about his future, whether he is going to be accepted or

not, living a lonely life. Oh, my God, you go through trauma [...] and you will be depressed. They are feeding him morally and spiritually because at church there are people who look after him.

Whilst refugees appreciated any material resources they received, this did not feature as their first topic of conversation in relation to church communities, and often not at all unless I asked. However, material resources are important. And in Elizabeth's case the failure of a church to support her when she became homeless was one of the reasons that she left that church. However, when she started going to another church it was for religious reasons, and at that stage she did not seem to know or expect that material resources would be forthcoming.

Further research findings about how church communities support refugees with material resources will be considered at the end of chapter 7. The next sections continue to explore how everyday experiences of lived religion helped refugees to achieve a sense of belonging.

Church community conceptualised as family

Elise raised the issue of her of isolation when she described how she felt as a refugee in London. According to Elise, her church community helped to combat this isolation. It was noticeable that when she talked about the church community Elise tended to use the possessive pronoun 'my' which suggested her strength of feeling about the church as a place where she belonged. Moreover, she frequently referred to the church as her family. When Elise first attended her Catholic church, it was not the multicultural church that it is today; the majority of individuals in the church at that stage were white British.

Elise: The church for me, I can describe my church as a family [...] my church is my family [...] I go to there because they're the one knows me. The church was my family and is still my family.

Elise also used the motif of parent and child to explain how she had felt about the responses of individuals in the church toward her and her children when they first arrived in the UK. Her discourse showed that Elise regarded herself and her family as adopted by the church community. This was likely to have heightened significance for Elise since members of her family had died during the conflict that had forced her to flee.

Elise: They (church members) took me as one of their kids as I had kids on my own. And those kids were really troubled by the situation of the place we came from. We had a bad war. I don't know if I can say it, like genocide. We were experience bad things [...] friends of ours from the church they really took us as their own kids.

When Elise had a baby some years later, she described how the involvement of the church meant that her baby effectively became 'the baby of all the community, [laughter] a community baby'.

Elise explained that her reason for describing the church as her family was linked to how the church had contributed to her being able to settle in her wider community in London.

Elise: I think I can describe [church] as a family because the church was like my foundation to settle where I am today, to settle in a community and to be who I am today.

Yolande, Anna, Elizabeth and Stephan all used the term 'family' to describe their church communities. Yolande belonged to the same Catholic church as Elise.

Yolande: When I'm in church I feel like my family. The church I think is my family.

Anna's church was a multicultural Anglican church yet Anna drew attention to how she did not feel different which suggested that Anna's sense of belonging was associated with a common religious identity rather than national or ethnic cultural difference.

Anna: It feels like you're one, one like one family [...] You don't feel different. You belong.

Elizabeth described her church community both as a family and a network of friends. The impression was that the church provided all her social networks and that before connecting to the church she had felt isolated despite previously attending an African Pentecostal church.

Elizabeth: It's [church is] a network of friends and family that help. If you have a network of friends and family then you'll be a bit comfortable, but if you don't. I didn't have such things until I came into this church. That's how I was able to connect with other people.

Stephan belonged to a non-conformist evangelical church. Stephan worked as a volunteer caretaker at his church. His outstanding asylum claim meant that he was not allowed to work in paid employment. However, being trusted with responsibility by the church had its own reward in terms of his self-worth. Stephan regarded the church both as a community and family.

Stephan: [Church is] a community and a family. Definitely, yeah.

That's the right word I can use for the church because we have some events you can take together, pray together, and do things together.

You see that's [...] a family.

Although the refugees in this study had all found church communities that functioned as their social networks, Elizabeth's previous experience with a church showed that it cannot be assumed this always would be the case. Until Elizabeth found herself in difficulties due to her immigrant status, she described church as 'just a place of worship' for her and it only was when Elizabeth was in difficulty that she needed the church to function as a community of support.

I found that other refugees referred to relationships with individuals in their church communities in a familial way. For instance, a refugee speaking about her relationship with a younger refugee said, 'I am a second mother', and a refugee speaking of an Anglican priest told me, 'I sort of see him as a dad'. One volunteer from an Anglican church, Susan, fulfilled a role that is normally reserved for female family members when, over several years, she was present in the hospital for six deliveries of babies to two refugee women from Asia. Susan acted as a doula and as an advocate for the women while they were in the hospital.³⁸ Although she was not medically trained, Susan was a mother and grandmother. Susan was white British and told me she had felt 'honoured to be allowed to do it' before adding, 'Well, they miss their family, their mums'. Susan's long-term commitment to these

³⁸ Doula: a woman who gives support, help, and advice to another woman during pregnancy and during and after birth.

refugee families began when she taught English to the women. Both families were Muslim.

I was aware that the concept of family for those from communities in the Global South might not be as narrowly defined as the traditional British nuclear family of the 21st century. For instance, in communities in the Global South family names such as mum, dad, aunt and uncle can be generically used as a respectful way to address individuals in the community who are one's elders. Isaac's notion of family went further still. For him, family included all those from Africa.

Isaac: We like living together, we like supporting each other, we like family life. And one of the things also, the cultural things, is that, for an African, if you come from the same country, you are his brother; there is no difference. So sometime, European they are confused. They think when one of you says, this is my brother it is your own brother. No, that is the way we were brought up [...] so it's part of who we are.

In this study, it was not only BAME church communities that provided refugees with a place of belonging and a sense of family. Multicultural church communities also functioned as surrogate families for refugees, and this was usually on the basis on religious affiliation.

Finding acceptance in church communities

Elise's feelings of being ignored and overlooked when she arrived in London as a refugee contrasted with the acceptance that she felt in her church community. Elise described her initial reaction as one of surprise when individuals in the church had welcomed her. Her account of this revealed how individuals had

reached out to her by initiating conversations and had included her in the church community in a way that made her feel accepted by them.

Elise: I was first shocked at how people can talk to me, you know.

Yes, slowly I said, you know, having these people around from the church, and accept me as in the society, it was really for me, it was like a surprise, a surprise to me.

Elise's understanding about why the individuals in the church community should have treated her in a non-prejudicial way was linked by her to religious faith.

Elise: Christian people they look [on] everyone as a child of God [...]

My people from church, they don't see me like somebody who's refugee. They see me like [a] human being.

Erika, a long-term member of the multicultural Catholic church that Elise and Yolande attend, explained the church community's approach to welcoming people, 'We just accept people as they are. That's our philosophy. We don't ask people what happened to them'. When I asked Yolande whether she had felt accepted by the church community she replied in a matter of fact way, 'Of course [...] I've been welcome since the first day I came'.

Anna also spoke about what made her feel accepted by her multicultural Anglican church community.

Anna: You go to church and you don't feel judged, you don't feel different, you belong.

Anna and her family rent a house from the church. They were offered the house after they had been in the church for about six months. Anna interpreted the offer to rent the house as evidence of the trust and unconditional acceptance of her by

the church community.

Anna: Like how I was telling you last time about us getting a house.

[...] And it sort of shows that they don't look because you've been in their congregation for ten years, it doesn't matter you're black, you're white, it doesn't matter where you come from, it is the need that they look at and they see you, what you need at that point and that time. And that is how they treat everybody in the church.

The acceptance of Anna's family in the church was also confirmed in my interview with Nathan, the vicar of the church, as well as by my observations at the church during my fieldwork.

I found that acceptance in church communities for the refugees in this study had not been based on a requirement to divulge their immigrant status first. I also found that clergy and laity were happy to live with ambiguity about the immigrant status of individuals in their church communities. For instance, in a conversation about immigrants in his Catholic church Luke told me, 'some may be undocumented but nobody knows', and then he added, 'some might tell me'.

Evidence suggested that if, or when, the refugees' immigrant status came to light this did not affect their relationship with the church community. For example, when I met Faiz, he was being supported by the church during his appeal process against the UK government's refusal to grant him leave to remain. However, when Faiz first went to his non-conformist church no-one asked him about his immigrant status.

Faiz: The people don't ask me do you have status or not but after a while I'm telling the truth. I said, yes, I don't have anythings [sic].

Borrowing from author Maya Angelo's (1987) concept of home as 'the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned', it is possible to make the case that when church communities function as safe places where refugees can go as they are and not be questioned then these places will feel like home. Not asking questions of strangers was also regarded by Derrida (2001) as one of the defining aspects of unconditional hospitality.

Church community: a place to call home

The concept of church community as home counteracted both statelessness and homelessness for Elise especially during the early stages of being a refugee in London. However, the sense of church as home has continued for Elise since she moved to a new geographical area. Elise still regards the original church which she first attended in London as the church where she belongs. Elise recounted to me how she tells the children they are going to attend her church on any Sunday, 'Ah, let's go home. Go home to our church'.

Home can be literally a roof over one's head but it can also be understood as a place of belonging that is often linked to identity. I found that church communities and individuals within churches had provided accommodation for refugees and this will be explored further in the next chapter. However, in this section, I briefly consider how refugees in this study associated religious belief and church communities with notions of home. Notions of church as home could be linked to a church community's connections with their original 'homeland', to familiar religious practises, or to both.

Eli explained why his Ethiopian Orthodox church in London felt like home for him in terms of its connection to Ethiopia.

Eli: At church, I'm at home. Inside everything is Ethiopian.

For Eli, everything that was Ethiopian inside church and that made him feel at home included the religious ritual and symbolism, the décor inside the church, the white robes worn by the church members, the language that was spoken, and the food in a shared meal that was eaten afterwards. Eli's immigrant status was secure at the time I interviewed him but the church continued to be a place he called home. Eli described his church as a place he can 'be himself' whether he is feeling sad or happy.

The notion of home as a safe place where individuals can go as they are and not be questioned, reflected Luke's practise of unconditional hospitality in the Catholic church where he is the priest. Luke commented that refugees and migrants felt 'at home' in the church because it was a place where they were not afraid that 'somebody will see them, somebody will hear them'.

Luke opened-up his church as a space for migrants to meet after the Sunday morning worship service. Since Luke does not ask the migrants questions about their immigrant status it was not possible to know how many of these migrants were refugees. However, Luke commented that many of the migrants confide in him that they 'struggle with their immigration issue'. Luke's description of these meetings in his church conveys how he acts as a host and provides a safe place to meet. Luke has empowered them by allowing the impetus and the implementation of the meetings to be migrant-led.

After the service they go on praying until five o'clock every Sunday.

So, the whole day, you see, it really serves them quite a lot and that's why, well I don't mind because I really see that those people need a

space. And a lot of, you know, problems somehow can be eased in that way, because many of them come in the morning and they leave here around six o'clock. They have their food here, they bring everything. They sing. They chat. It's mostly, yes, they come to pray. But the socializing, talking with their fellow-citizens and so on of their country, talking their language [...] And it's very healing. They can cry, in fact they cry. It does release them lots and lots. It helps them so much.

One of the Anglican clergy in this study, Mick, explained why he thought Filipinos gathered in his church in terms of a historic connection between Christianity and the Igorot people in the Philippines. He referred to his Anglican church as 'their UK home'.

Mick: They (the Igorot people group) come from the part of the Philippines that was never colonised by the Spanish [...] They kind of congregate in our church. It's their UK home really, for this Igorot, for the Anglican of the Episcopal church of the Philippines.

One non-conformist church minister recounted that when a woman from Zimbabwe visited his church for the first time, she approached him at the end of the church service, and said, 'I've come home'. The church minister suggested that the reason she had felt this was the familiarity of the type of church service with her previous experience of church in Africa.

For Anna, it was neither a connection with others from her 'homeland' or with familiar religious practises that made her Anglican church feel like home. Instead it was the way people in church behaved toward one another. Anna used the

example of a shared lunch that happened each Sunday after the church service – a scene that would be a familiar ritual in the homes of many extended families.

Anna: All the kids will make the sandwiches. It feels like, like home.

[...] It's the caring [...] It doesn't stop when you walk outside the church.

Church community: somewhere to talk and to be heard

The final term that Elise used to describe how she had felt as a refugee in London was 'silenced'. She compared this feeling of being silenced with her experience in her church community. Elise began her account by imagining how she would have felt without the church community. Her imagined scenario illustrated the importance of having someone to talk to who was interested in her. Elise connected this to the impact that the church community had on her sense of wellbeing and her ability to overcome the effects of the distressing events that had forced her to migrate.

Elise: [Without church] For me, I think I will be very, very, frightened, sitting in the house without even having anyone to talk to, without anyone interested in me. Really. For the church [...] was the main reason why I am happy. I feel that life can carry on no matter what happened.

As previously mentioned in the last section, Luke commented on how the refugees and migrants who met together in his church were helped by having a safe place where they could cry. Luke also observed that refugees and migrants visibly relaxed when they sat in the church, and he imagined they could be thinking: 'Ah, I can sit properly and I can talk and somebody can listen to me'.

Eli spoke about his church community as a place where he could 'tell it as it is' and where he could both cry and be happy.

Abigail described the Anglican curate who had supported her as a good listener. At this point in the interview Abigail's eyes welled up with tears.

Abigail: She [Naomi] is, she very good listen[er]. She has a very good heart. She is a good listener.

Amelie, who was a refugee with leave to remain in the UK and a project worker for a charity that helps migrants from her country of origin in Asia, emphasised the importance of church communities as places where migrants can express how they feel and 'release things'.

Isaac told of a conversation with a psychologist who had treated a patient connected to his church. The psychologist told Isaac that he believed the church had a valuable role for refugees and migrants as a place to meet and talk. Isaac also made home visits to individuals in his church who he knew to be isolated 'so they can talk to someone'.

Esther, a founding member of a church with a 'drop-in' centre, explained that they offered one-to-one listening and 'healing prayer' but that this was not compulsory. Esther was aware that 'some of them are not able to express themselves yet' and the decision to avail themselves of the services was up to the individuals.

Agnes's story about her mother's experiences provided a more detailed account of the role of church communities as safe places to talk. I met Agnes at one of the African Pentecostal churches that I visited during this study. Since Agnes's mother belonged to another church, I have relied on Agnes's account. Agnes's mother had

been forced to flee violence in her country of origin; violence that included the killing of family members that was carried out in retribution for her own work with a charity that opposed female genital mutilation (FGM). Agnes was aware that her mother had chosen not to burden her while she worked through her experiences: 'she covers things up and doesn't go into too much depth'. However, the church community was a safe place for her mother to talk and express her feelings. Agnes's mother called people within her church community in London 'her counsellors' and told Agnes that they had done so much for her especially when she had felt suicidal.

Anna also found the church community was a safe place to express her feelings about her experiences. Anna compared this with her experiences of interviews with British Home Office officials and with a counsellor to whom she was referred. Anna found that the requirement to keep repeating the distressing experiences that forced her to migrate in these interviews meant that she had to keep reliving those past events. Anna also found the culture of disbelief in the British Home Office difficult.

Anna: And every time you go they [Home Office officials] say, 'You're not telling the truth' [...] You want to give up because nobody want to, everybody think you are lying. That's really hard because it hurts
[...] I was sick of saying it and saying it.

Counsellors can be beneficial for some refugees. However, Anna did not feel it had helped her.

Anna: When I used to go counselling and they want me to talk I say,
'Do you know what? It's not helping me having to go through all

over and over again about it.' It didn't. You only made it worse because I'd come, I'd talk about it. When I'd go home I'd just sit and it would just come back again. And then I'd say, 'Let me find my own way of sort of dealing with it'.

Anna's experience highlighted how refugees do not get to choose when and to whom they can tell their stories. Moreover, attending appointments meant Anna needed to travel on public transport to unfamiliar geographical locations which can add to the stress of appointments. Like Agnes's mother but in a role reversal, Anna did not want to talk to her mother and burden her mother with details of her experiences, particularly since her mother was undergoing treatment for cancer. Feeling that she had no-one to talk to, Anna initially turned to religious practises such as reading the Bible and prayer. However, once she belonged to the Anglican church which she called 'home' Anna found that this also met her need to talk about her experiences, but in her own time, in her own way and to individuals she had chosen to trust. In the following narrative account, Anna was comparing her experiences in the church community with her experiences with the Home Office interviews.

Anna: When you go and talk about it there [church], nobody will be shocked, nobody will give you that expression [comparison with Home Office officials]. They'll want to come and pray for you, and they'll want to come and comfort you [...] And that is how it feels, it makes you feel better, it makes you able to sort of deal with the day to day, even when you're feeling, sometimes I'll feel sad and I'll feel

horrible, and when I go [to church] I feel [better] cos everybody
there is so lovely.

In the context of refugees having a place to express their feelings, Anna described a practise in her Anglican church that was unique in my research findings. I have included Anna's account of this practise here because it was particularly helpful to her. At the back of the church building, sheets of paper with either happy or sad faces printed on them were available for those in the church community to use to anonymously express their feelings. Anna explained that she could choose a piece of paper with the 'face' that most reflected her feelings and write them down, 'however much you want, whatever you want to say, you express yourself how you want it'. Any completed sheets of paper could be placed on a notice board at the back of the church. During a church service, the sheets would be read out and the congregation would pray accordingly. Anna found the anonymity of this process helpful and twice described how 'you don't feel judged'.

This section has shown how church communities in this study provided safe places where refugees could take the initiative to engage with others and to choose when and to whom they speak. Although it cannot be assumed that this would be the case in all church communities, this research demonstrated that refugees can be resourceful at finding church communities that will be supportive.

Religious belief mobilised to make sense of experiences

Adherents of religion draw on religious traditions, symbols and performance to make sense of life experiences, and refugees are no exception (Geertz, 1973 and 2002; Orsi, 2002; Tweed, 2006). Migrants' use of religion to make sense of their experiences prompted Smith (1978, p. 1175) to suggest that migration can be a

'theologizing experience'. I found that, religious belief had intensified for the refugees in this study which was evidenced in their Christian practises and how they drew on religious concepts and resources to help them make sense of the past, of their everyday lived experiences as refugees, and to help them face the uncertainties of their future. For instance, Simeon constantly applied one Bible verse to his own situation, '... with God nothing is impossible' (Matthew, 19 v. 26), and Elizabeth used Bible verses, Catholic prayers and novenas as an encouragement 'to carry on and not give up'. Both Simeon and Elizabeth were appealing failed asylum claims at the time of this study.

After Elise summed up how it felt to be a refugee living in London – helpless, isolated, ignored, stateless, homeless and silenced – she immediately started to talk about some Christian theological concepts that had helped her to make sense of her own situation. For instance, Elise used a type of redemptive religious narrative to help bring understanding to her own experiences as a refugee. In her narrative Elise used the example of the life of Jesus Christ and applied it to her own experiences. Her interpretation was that neither her life in the present nor in the future had to be defined by being a refugee; she could 'be who she is'. For Elise, as for other Christians, that Jesus Christ was reportedly a refugee in Egypt for about two years (Matthew, 2 v. 13-15) also helped to validate her own experience.

Elise: The church helped me to understand how Jesus put himself down so that anyone can be who he/she is [...] Jesus himself being like a refugee – that was like a sign to show anyone can be.

During a Sunday worship service at Nathan's multicultural Anglican church, my attention was drawn to the lyrics of one worship song because among the four

verses, there were many phrases that would have been as applicable to the experiences of refugees and migrants as to a religious interpretation of the words. The song could be read as a challenge to the status quo in society but with a suggested peaceable solution to the problems through a type of Christian social activism. The full lyrics can be found in the appendix and the following are selected phrases that were particularly pertinent:

Come set our hearts ablaze with hope / [we] refuse to waste our lives / heal our streets and land / win this nation back, change the atmosphere / reaching the far and near / you made us for much more than this.

In a subsequent interview, Nathan mentioned the worship song without any prompting from me during his mostly theological explanation of what he viewed were the defining characteristics of the church.

Nathan: There's a song which is becoming a bit of a theme song for [the church] [...]. It is one of my favourites and one of the songs which speaks into the life of this particular fellowship.

Nathan did not explicitly make a connection between the song and the refugees and migrants in his church and I did not have an opportunity to ask the refugees in the church for their views on the song. Nonetheless, I was left with the impression that this song could function in a way that was not dissimilar to the 'spirituals' created by African slaves in America in that it expressed the refugees' Christian faith and commented on their life experience at the same time. This type of song could help refugees make sense of their experiences, validate their feelings about life in the UK, and provide a narrative where they were part of the solution. Other

research has found that refugees and migrants make sense of their experiences by conceptualising their presence in the UK as part of a reverse mission with themselves as missionaries sent from the Global South to the Global North (Catto, 2012; Ugba, 2008).

Finally, I consider how forgiveness was a way of coming to terms with experiences without having to first make sense of experiences. Elise and Yolande were the only refugees in this study who explicitly spoke about forgiveness in relationship to their religious belief. Yolande's account about forgiveness was less detailed than Elise's account. The focus for Yolande was how forgiveness had enabled her to move on with her life. Desmond Tutu (2015b) argued that 'To forgive is not just to be altruistic, it is the best form of self-interest'.

Yolande: If you forgive something you carry on, just don't want to think about bad things, put it behind, just go forward [...] You feel free, you feel free.

For Elise, forgiveness was a process that happened over time and it was something that she associated with 'being a Christian'. Elise's account of personal tragedy, including the loss of family members at the time she fled her country of origin, was for me one of the most distressing accounts that I heard while interviewing refugees for this research. Elise was honest about her feelings of anger about her experiences when she first arrived in the UK. However, the kindness of others in the church community toward her – 'there are still people who have that love' – as well as how she was included into that community, or what she termed family, helped Elise to come to terms with her loss.

Elise: To see how people just opened their arms, you know, to put me as family [...] gave me the opportunity to see things I was saying the other way [...] to forgive what happened [...] there are still people who have that love.

Elise again used the example of the life of Jesus Christ as the model for her own actions, and drew on accounts in the Bible about Jesus's forgiveness of people who had violently assaulted him and killed him. Elise emphasised the perpetrators were Jesus's 'own people' which had significance for her experiences of ethnic rivalry that had fomented violent clashes between people who had previously been neighbours.

Elise: Jesus was hurt by his own people, and still he came and hugged them, no matter what happened. For me, it give me opportunity to love again, forgive and forget. Yeah. This is where I am today.

Conclusion

The research findings revealed the refugees' strength of feeling about the importance of religion in their everyday lives for helping them to meet the challenges that they faced as refugees. Consequently, as a result of their experiences refugees' religious belief seemed to have intensified. The importance of religious belief did not seem to change when refugees received leave to remain in the UK and they continued to stay connected to church communities. These finding concur with Hagan's (2008) research in the US which also found that migrants' religious belief intensified and remained so after they had settled.

The findings suggest that accounts of refugees' everyday lived religion could be summed up in the notions of 'crossing and dwelling' that were proposed by Tweed (2006) in his theory of religion. Building on the theme of crossing between church denominations in chapter five, in this chapter the theme of crossing included refugees' stories of crossing between religions and crossing territorial borders because of religion. The theme of dwelling was evidenced by refugees' accounts of the way religious belief had helped them to find a place of belonging through their connections to church communities. Refugees' descriptions of church communities as family, as home and as places where they felt accepted and listened to showed the connection between belief and belonging – this was 'religion-in-action' and 'religion-in-relationships between people' (Orsi, 2010, p. xxxviii).

The next chapter considers church communities' responses to refugees.

Chapter 7

Hospitality and solidarity: church communities' responses to refugees

Religion is a multivalent force. It works at the level of belief and theology, sometimes providing the fuel that motivates people to pursue social justice activism, but it also operates as an organizational tool, social network, and resource. (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, p. 11)

Introduction

In this study I have explored the breadth of support that can result from refugees' interactions with church communities. Therefore it is the range of responses of support rather than a progression from one type of support to another that is in view. The research findings in this chapter were related to the final set of questions: why and how do church communities support refugees, and to what extent is this guided by Christian doctrine and traditions of hospitality to the stranger?

The chapter is divided into two parts. The themes in the first half of the chapter use the research data to explore the reasons that clergy and laity supported refugees and include a consideration of the influence of belief and theology as motivations for the pursuit of social justice activism (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, p. 11). The focus of the first half of the chapter is mostly concerned with the question as to *why* individuals in church communities support refugees, whereas the second half is more concerned with *how* church communities do this and is organised

around the themes of 'organizational tool, social network, and resource' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, p. 11). As with the previous two chapters I have selected participants' narrative accounts that I felt encapsulated the evidence and best conveyed meaning about the lived experiences of the participants.

Roles of clergy and laity and the support of refugees

For the purposes of analysis in this thesis I made a distinction between the participants who were clergy and the participants who were laity. This distinction was not a value statement about them as individuals or about their commitment to the support of refugees but an acknowledgement of their different roles. From a religious perspective, clergy are ordained for Christian ministry in recognition by their church denomination that God has called them to this vocation. For refugees, clergy's endorsement and support of them could be construed as divine validation of the justice of their cause whatever the UK state immigration department or popular media might say or do. I also was aware that in certain circumstances the position and status that clergy held within society could help influence how refugees were treated. This is not to say that laity were unable to exert influence on behalf of refugees through their roles as paid employees working in organisations that supported refugees or as volunteers in the churches.

During the fieldwork, I observed that none of the clergy exerted the power of their ecclesiastical positions in a hierarchical fashion in their personal interactions with refugees. Instead, they went out of their way to relate to refugees as equals. For instance, when I interviewed Amir, Bahman, and Karim in a London vicarage they were relaxed in the company of the parish priest, Nathan. They were also at ease in his home and it was evident that this was not their first visit to his house.

Nathan cooked us all an impromptu lunch which was served and eaten part way through the interviews.

However, I found that clergy were conscious that their clerical status could be employed with agencies and statutory bodies to help open doors on behalf of the refugees they supported. This is evidenced later in this chapter in the section on the position and status of clergy and refugee support.

Multivalent rationale behind Christian social activism in support of refugees

Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007, p. 11) argued that religious belief and theology can provide 'the fuel that motivates people to pursue social justice activism'. Since the clergy and laity who participated in this research were already engaged in the support of refugees it is unsurprising that my analysis of interviews and my fieldwork observations showed that they were all committed to helping ameliorate the difficulties that refugees face. In this section, I explore some of the rationale given by the clergy and laity that lay behind their actions in support of refugees.

Any preconceived ideas that I would hear the same arguments from clergy and laity about their reasons for supporting refugees were soon disabused. Instead, clergy and laity drew on various religious beliefs as well as non-religious ideology to frame their social activism on behalf of refugees. The variety of concepts associated with the support of refugees demonstrated how 'religion is a multivalent force' that can be interpreted and applied in different ways in support of social justice activism (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, p. 11).

Apart from Nathan, none of the responses of clergy and laity to my questions about their rationale for supporting refugees involved in-depth theological discourses. The reason for this could be explained by the fact that clergy and laity did not

know my level of understanding about theology, and therefore for my sake, kept it simple. Alternative explanations could be that they had not thought through their actions at an in-depth theological level, or that they regarded the theological themes they did cite as such familiar themes that they were self-explanatory.

When Nathan began to talk about theological concepts for the support of refugees, he paused to ask me if I was familiar with the Charismatic Movement. Since I answered in the affirmative, he proceeded to explain his position on social activism by linking this with what he termed Charismatic Christian spirituality.

Nathan: They (Charismatic theology and social action) rest on the Biblical imperative to bring together faith and works – it's the letter of James with the Holy Spirit.

'The letter of James' is a New Testament book. One of the main themes in James argues that faith is evidenced by 'works' or social action (James 2 v. 14-26). Nathan's addition of 'with the Holy Spirit' emphasised the importance of the Holy Spirit in Charismatic theology. Nathan also pointed out that Charismatic spirituality is a familiar form of Christianity for many refugees and migrants which, he argued, helped them engage with his church.³⁹ Furthermore, Nathan regarded the Christian imperative for social action as inclusive and not only meant for the support of other Christians. Nathan used the example of people living on the housing estate where the church was located. He gave examples of people who had been supported by the church including a Nigerian Muslim and a Hindu

³⁹ According to Anderson (2014, p. 1), Pentecostal, Charismatic and associated movements have become a numerical force in world Christianity and may represent up to a quarter of all Christians... the numbers include at least a hundred million Catholics in the Charismatic renewal and millions in independent churches in Africa and Asia.

woman who, he recalled told him, 'I go to the temple. But when I need help I'll come to the church'.

Rob, a non-conformist church minister, regarded the support of refugees as an imperative for Christians and argued that any social action was an intrinsic part of Church historical tradition.

Rob: Something in the DNA of the church says we must respond [...]

It goes back to our history and our roots.

In this context, Rob used 'church' generically rather than as a reference to any particular denomination. Rob also cited volunteerism in Victorian Britain as an example. Although it could be argued there is a historical continuum of volunteerism of Christians engaged in social activism in England which is still in evidence in the 21st century, there are also differences, particularly around the class status of volunteers. In this study, some contemporary lay volunteers would fit a historical model of volunteerism, such as Susan who was an Anglican from an upper-middle class background. However, other volunteers would not fit this classical model of volunteerism, such as Alice who is a Catholic migrant from West Africa who is living on a local authority housing estate.

Susan's rationale for her support of refugees was that it was an inherent expression of her Christian faith which is demonstrated in her emphatic response to my question as to whether she thought there was a link between her Christian faith and her support of refugees.

Susan: Oh, absolutely. I'm no theologian, but it seems to me, it (supporting refugees) is what it (Christianity) is all about, isn't it?

However, as her discourse continued it was evident that supporting refugees was more than putting her faith into practice so that she fulfilled something that was required of her by God. Susan's involvement also was based on her concern for the reputation of Christianity as perceived by those from other countries and faiths as well as a general humanitarian concern.

Susan: I was very concerned personally, that the image of Christianity which I was projecting to these traumatised, and in a sense, ignorant of Christianity as it should be. I wanted to project the right sort of image. That was my motivation as well as having a lot of fun and teaching English being very practical. But you heard such awful – it was George Bush and all that stuff, you know – it's just such a terrible image of Christianity [...] I was ashamed, basically, by what I saw happening [referring here to treatment of refugees in the UK].

Erika, a Catholic volunteer worker and founder of a refugee centre, also spoke in general terms about her Christian faith as motivation for her support of refugees. However, in Erika's response it was possible to detect a sense of religious duty even though she played down any idea of religious piety on her part.

Erika: I do feel motivated. I feel that God expects me to do this. I feel that.

Mary: So, you feel motivated by your faith?

Erika: Yes. When I've got any [faith]. I don't always have a lot [said jokingly] but when I do have some [faith], I do feel very motivated by it.

Esther who is employed as a staff member at her church centre believed that since the work she was doing was divinely mandated she could expect God's help to fulfil that commission. Esther linked this religious concept to a general humanitarian concern for refugees and a desire to do something that could help.

Esther: I think if God gives you a vision, then he has a way of fulfilling it [...] I just felt my heart went out to them [refugees] so much and I just felt I wanted to do something for them.

Theological concepts about showing hospitality to the stranger

Hospitality toward the stranger was a common theme in the discourses of all the participants who supported refugees. In chapter 5, the welcome of the stranger was considered in the context of why refugees chose to connect to certain churches and the cultural and/or religious connections were discussed as factors that influenced refugees' choices. However, the theological rationale that informs the welcome of strangers in church communities has not previously been discussed in the findings chapters. Therefore, the theme of hospitality to the stranger is taken up again in this chapter to understand further the reasons clergy and laity supported refugees.

In church communities, scriptures from the Bible can 'serve as a collective and normative lived imaginative construct [...] the measure by which reality is gauged' (Jones, 2000, p. 157). Therefore, I have included Christian theological concepts that were used by participants in this study that related to welcoming the stranger, including themes that were only mentioned by one person, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan. I suggest that when something that is as well known in churches as the parable of the Good Samaritan was only used once, that it is a

significant finding as much as discovering themes that are used repeatedly. However, the main aim here was to learn what religious concepts were used, whether sporadically or frequently used, so that all the themes could be incorporated into the discussion of the whole. Any comprehensive study into the frequency with which religious themes were used in the support of refugees would need a much larger cohort of participants than were involved in this research.

From the participants' discourses, I identified three conceptual ideas about the stranger in relation to their reasons for showing hospitality to others, including refugees. The stranger was imagined in three different ways: as an angel, as God, and as oneself.

Luke was the only participant who specifically referred to the theological concept of an angel appearing in the guise of a stranger (Hebrews 13 v. 2). Since this is a religious concept that might be considered well known by those in church communities it is of interest that other participants did not mention it.

Luke: I think basically it is the Christian message [...] which really urges us to welcome, to welcome each other, but welcome especially also the stranger [...]. It will be like as if you have welcomed angels.

Luke also referred to the second of the theological concepts where Jesus Christ is imagined as the stranger in need of help with the implication that strangers should be treated with the highest respect (Matthew 25 v. 31-46).⁴⁰ In the parable that contains this concept, Jesus Christ's complete identification with the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner is the crux of the issue for Christians

⁴⁰ In Christian theology Jesus Christ is understood not only as fully human but also as fully divine.

– ‘whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me [Jesus]’ (Matthew 25 v. 40) – and it is a motivation for Christians to act with mercy towards others.

Luke: People who are committed to their faith very much believe that when they welcome the stranger, even might involve some kind of risk, they’re kind of welcoming God [...] [It is] very much clear in the gospel, in Matthew chapter twenty-five, whatever you do to the little ones, to the people who need, you do it to me [Jesus Christ].

The notion of God coming in the guise of the Other can be related to the doctrine of Imago Dei. Imago Dei proposes that all human beings are made in the image of God. Therefore, to love people is to love God. Naomi used this to explain the rationale for her unconditional support of refugees regardless of whether they were Christians, adherents of other faiths or none: ‘I believe everybody is made in the image of God no matter what their faith’. To illustrate this Naomi described how sometimes her interaction with women in a refugee hostel had been a spiritual experience where she ‘met God’, an epiphany. She recalled the generosity of the refugee women towards her, such as the occasion when they cooked a surprise Christmas lunch for her and a colleague. What added to the poignancy for Naomi was that the women received only a very small income from their statutory support which meant providing the food for the meal was a sacrificial act on their part.

Naomi: We arrived into this banquet in the kitchen where they had all cooked stuff from their own countries, they had made bread, there were mounds of chicken and rice [...]. This really does make

me cry because it was the place I met God, you know, very often and absolutely in the presence of sort of holiness and, just profound occasions.

The third theological idea about welcoming the stranger was associated with imagining the stranger as oneself. Alice described how the priests in her Catholic church [one of whom is Louis] mentioned welcoming strangers in their homilies 'all the time, all the time'.

Alice: The priests always say it in the church [...] love your neighbour as yourself [...] So, they do encourage being nice to each other. Welcome, welcome, put up the welcome signal.

In the same context, Alice related that the parable of the good Samaritan also was a repeated theme in the priest's homilies. The parable of the good Samaritan seemed to have been contextualised by the priests for the Catholic church's predominantly African congregation by making references to tribes. Alternatively, this contextualisation could have been Alice's own interpretation.

Alice: They [the priests] are always going on about the good Samaritan. They're always saying, look the person who helped the good Samaritan was not from the same tribe as the person [who was injured]. The person from the same tribe walked away.

Alice also offered her own opinion about the rationale behind the welcome of refugees which borrowed from another theological idea of imagining oneself in another's place and circumstances: 'do unto others as you would have them do to you' (Luke 6 v. 31). Alice constructed a hypothetical story where someone who had welcomed a migrant subsequently found they needed help when abroad in

that migrant's country. She conjectured that their reputation of giving a welcome to the migrant in the past would result in their own welcome and help when they needed it.

Alice: Open the door, open the door to a migrant, you know, because you never know when you might be a migrant.

Although Erika did not use the Biblical language of loving one's neighbour as oneself, imagining herself in the place of refugees provoked Erika to 'take a step' – a step that led to her founding a refugee centre and giving years of support to refugees.

Erika: You just have to be prepared to take a step [...] and you think what you've got yourself and what you need for your own family. What do these people need coming in? For goodness sake, they've only got a suitcase of stuff. They need everything.

A stranger or one of us?: when religious identities supersede national identities

Refugees as the newcomers will, at least initially, present as the stranger in church communities. However, refugees who are Christians and who have previous connections to church denominations in their country of origin can fit into church communities in much the same way as a long-lost member of a family who suddenly turns up. This is not to say that all church communities would be welcoming since, like the rest of society, it would be expected that some individuals could be xenophobic. However, as suggested previously, refugees are likely to find acceptance in urban multicultural church settings where individuals from different national identities are already part of those church communities.

The stranger as *one of us* because of religious identity can be seen in Mick's response to my question about the rationale for the support of refugees by churches. Mick described the church as 'pan-national [*sic*]' and its members as 'citizens of heaven' who belong to a 'global community'.⁴¹ In his narrative account Mick moved from speaking about the Anglican church to the concept of church that incorporates all who identify themselves as Christians. I suggest that the theological idea of Christians as 'citizens of heaven' is an important one in the context of national territorial borders and government immigration policies. The concept of 'citizenship in heaven' (Philippians 3 v. 20) is found in a Biblical text that is attributed to the apostle Paul. Paul understood the significance of being a citizen since he was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. The Biblical text encourages Christians to live their lives on earth in keeping with their status in heaven.

Mick: Well I think there is that whole business of the Church being pan-national. We are citizens of heaven politically and we are a community, a global community [...] [There is] quite a strong cultural context to be sympathetic to everybody [...] very much a no borders sort of context.

The language of citizenship also occurs in another Biblical text which is also attributed to the apostle Paul. Here the context is the unity and equality of Gentiles and Jews as a result of their common Christian faith:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens [...] (Ephesians 2 v. 19-20).

⁴¹ The term 'pan-national' is used to mean 'transnational' in this context

The corollary is that the religious identity of Christians supersedes national identities. It was of note that Mick referred to being citizens of heaven as a political rather than a spiritual position although claims of heavenly citizenship would hold no sway with nation-state politics. Any application of this theological idea is more relevant to the understanding of the rationale for church communities to welcome refugees who have shared Christian beliefs, rather than to national immigration policies.

Nathan argued that his multicultural Anglican church community was both 'distinctly Christian' and inclusive. He called the church 'a beacon of hope' for the wider community. Nathan mentioned the influence of the British theologian Tom Wright, and of an American evangelical church pastor, Bill Hybels, for his views about local church community.

Nathan: We are a distinctly Christian community and we're a welcoming community [...] The distinctive welcome, the distinctive nature of our Christian witness is one which comes from an understanding that the local church is the hope of the world.

Other rationale for support and solidarity with refugees

So far, the focus has been mainly on the responses of clergy and laity that linked the rationale for the support of refugees in church communities to religious concepts about hospitality to the stranger. This section provides examples from the interviews with clergy and laity of some of the other reasons they give for their support refugees.

Eleanor's quick and emphatic answer in response to my question about her reason for supporting refugees was one word: 'outrage'. Eleanor was outraged at the way

refugees were treated by the UK government. In particular Eleanor mentioned the practice of detaining refugees in a separate wing of a London prison in the 1990s and recounted how refugees who were detained in prisons were often kept in their cells for twenty-three hours a day without the privileges afforded to other prisoners. Eleanor, and others, negotiated with the prison authorities for six months before they were given permission to regularly visit refugees in prison. Her outrage at the UK immigrant policies provoked her to start a voluntary organisation that organises visits to detained refugees. Outrage continues to be the reason for her actions two decades later.

Alice's own opinion about the right of all individuals to travel across national borders contributed to her desire to support refugees. Alice's response was based on humanitarian concern and this prompted her to give unconditional support to anyone regardless of immigrant status. Nonetheless, to help refugees to regularise their immigration status, Alice had to work within the rules of the British immigration system. This was demonstrated by Alice's account of the help she gave to a refugee who had been advised by others not to sign in with the British Home Office for fear he could be detained and sent to a removal centre.

Alice: And this guy was shaking like a leaf, and I held his hand and I took him there. And we were singing all the way [...] We went in and joined the queue. And I went with him to the door and I let him go in on his own. And he came back five minutes later, 'Thank you Jesus' like that [Alice demonstrates with her hands in the air] [...] So now he signs on every two weeks and the council, the Refugee Council, have done all his documents. He submitted everything and

we're just waiting now to see if he's got his leave to remain and that will be the icing on the cake.

Alice also expressed a desire to make a difference to the lives of others saying: 'I want to brighten my corner'. This was given added impetus when a church member recounted to Alice that a friend who had immigration problems had committed suicide. The church member had been previously unaware of the refugee support work undertaken by Alice. It was this account of a refugee committing suicide as a result of receiving no support which led Alice to tell me, 'This is why I'm doing this'.

Although Naomi used theological themes to explain her rationale for supporting refugees, she also reflected on the sense of purpose this gave to her: 'I'm not sure what it is that appeals to me [...] being made useful I suppose.'

The idea of being useful was also mentioned by Susan in response to my question about her reasons for doing voluntary work with refugees. Susan's feelings of usefulness when working with refugees contrasted with, what she described as, her mundane, middle class existence after retirement. However, her middle class social circle of friends did not seem to share her views: 'my friends think I'm completely mad'.

Susan: Because it's much more useful and interesting than anything else that you do [laughed to herself] [...] And it's also, sort of, an annoyance that we're all terribly narrow, particularly when you get older, like me, you don't meet young people [...] and it's dull. What you need is a little bit of, step on the edge of the cliff, come on now, or jump off it actually.

This is not to say that self-fulfilment and needing a purpose in life were the prime factors for Susan's support of refugees. In the context of the whole of her narrative account it was evident that Susan was fully aware of the extreme difficulties that confronted refugees and she did not downplay this but was emotionally moved by it. She expressed an awareness of the complexities of the conflict in Afghanistan that had affected the refugee families she worked with. Susan felt that her 'piece', or part, was to help ameliorate the challenges faced by them once in the UK:

Susan: You can't do anything about it [conflict in Afghanistan]. You can only pick up any piece that comes and lands in your lap.

Susan's humanitarian response was combined with her understanding of such action being an expression of her Christian faith as already mentioned previously.

In this chapter so far, I have used the data from the interviews with clergy and laity to explore themes related to the reasons that clergy and laity support refugees. The second half of this chapter borrows from Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2007, p. 11) concept that religion 'operates as an organizational tool, social network, and resource' to organise the themes that explore church communities' responses to refugees.

Religion as an 'organizational tool'

I have approached the concept of religion as an organisational tool in two ways. Firstly, religion as an organisational tool can be seen in the way individuals in churches, and especially clergy, use position and status conferred on them by their organisation as a means, a tool, for exerting influence both within society and within church communities; this can be to the advantage of others, or to their own advantage. I mentioned previously in this chapter that my observations of clergy

found that they did not use their position and status to exert power over refugees in a hierarchical way. However, clergy in this study seemed to be aware that their position and status might help them to influence the treatment of refugees. This premise is dependent on the perceptions of others about clergy and, whilst there is respect for clergy within UK society, it is possible the symbol of a clerical collar may also be ignored as irrelevant or may provoke a negative reaction from individuals. The clergy's use of position and status in the context of refugee support is explored further in the following section using evidence from the research data.

Secondly, the concept of religion as an organisational tool is applied to the church community itself. From a Durkheimian functionalist position church communities are the result of religious adherents organising themselves into moral communities. I found that individuals within church communities understand the concept of organisation, they are often adept at the practise of organising, and they are well placed to capitalise on organisational structures and mechanisms within their own organisations and in collaboration with other organisations. Levitt's (2007, p. 113) summary of the way that religious organisations, groups and individuals operate is informative in this regard:

In some cases, religious organizations become like transnational corporations, with highly developed, hierarchical institutional architectures. In others, religious groups work more like informal networks, forming partnerships with other groups around specific projects [...] In still others, individual religious practice is driven by

religious social movement [...] and connects members around the globe (Levitt, 2007, p. 113).

Position and status of clergy in the context of refugee support

I found that clergy used the organisational positions and status conferred on them by their church denominations as a tool for refugee support in four ways: to support refugees' immigration applications, to exert influence on local service providers, to influence attitudes within church and other local communities on refugee issues, and to gain the confidence of the refugees themselves.

Firstly, clergy's use of their religious position and status in support of refugees' immigration applications is demonstrated by their letters of support and by their attendance at court hearings. All the clergy I interviewed had written letters to the British Home Office and to solicitors in support of refugees' applications for asylum in the UK. Luke said he had 'written so many letters [of support]', but he seemed to be realistic about the limitations of supporting refugees' applications.

Luke: Once it [an application for leave to remain in the UK] goes wrong, it's very difficult to do anything.

Nevertheless, it could be assumed that letters of support from clergy, at the least, would indicate to Home Office caseworkers and law court judiciary that these refugees had advocates and supporters in British society who were looking out for their welfare and who were willing to vouch for them. The influence and impact of these letters is impossible to ascertain since it would require further research involving Home Office staff together with statistical analysis of immigration outcomes which are beyond the scope and resources of this study. Regardless of

this, these letters of support from clergy seemed to be of great importance to refugees who counted themselves fortunate to have clergy acting on their behalf.

Furthermore, I suggest that the court appearances by clergy went beyond vouching for refugees' authenticity and integrity. These court appearances by clergy were acts of solidarity with refugees and the visual symbol of clerical attire could publicly draw attention to the moral dimensions of judicial decisions. When Louis, the Catholic parish priest, along with members of his church, attended a court hearing for a refugee who had been trafficked from West Africa, he thought the judge had 'seemed impressed' and had also asked who all the people were. This court case was adjourned because of the failure of Home Office legal representatives to attend and the case was postponed to a later date so I did not learn of the eventual outcome of the refugee's appeal for leave to remain in the UK.

The notion of clergy using their presence to draw attention to the moral dimensions of decision-making was also evident in the second way that religious position and status was used with local service providers to obtain support for refugees. Naomi's account of when she accompanied refugees to the local doctors' surgery was an example of this. The refugee women who lived in a hostel had previously encountered difficulties when trying to register with a local doctor's surgery. Naomi volunteered an opinion to me as to why this had been the case which was a view she did not share: 'I think they [the doctors' surgery] thought they were going to be flooded'. When Naomi subsequently went to the surgery with the refugees she succeeded in getting them registered. I asked Naomi if she thought the wearing of a clerical collar had made any difference to the outcome.

Naomi: Oh, I think so. Yes. And that's partly why I was there. I was standing there to make sure, because I saw how difficult it was for them.

Naomi did not have any authority within the doctors' surgery or the health service, but she had calculated that accompanying the refugee women and wearing her clerical collar when she did so would influence those who were responsible for registering patients.

The third way that religious position and status was used to support refugees was through sermons and talks given in churches and in local communities. Clergy and laity have access to church congregations by virtue of their positions within religious organisations. Clergy and laity both mentioned using this as a platform for supporting refugees. All the accounts about church communities were very positive in terms of how the churches responded generously to appeals for practical help and material resources for refugees. Despite this generosity, Naomi, Erika, Eleanor and Susan mentioned that some church members still had negative attitudes about refugees and migrants in the UK. Sermons and talks were used by clergy and laity to help counteract these attitudes and to educate church congregations about the realities of being a refugee. Clergy and laity also gave talks at local community gatherings. One church had a link on their website to the transcript of a public talk on churches and migration that was given at a local community event by their parish priest.

Finally, religious position and status could influence refugees' decisions about whom to trust in their locality. The symbol of a clerical collar which indicated a professional connection to a church seemed to give assurance to most refugees.

Naomi described the circumstances surrounding her initial meeting with refugee women in her locality which was predominantly a white middle class suburb of London. Naomi first noticed the refugee women 'in different dress than you would normally see around here' when she cycled past a large old house that had been acquired for a hostel. She was afraid that the refugee women might receive an adverse reaction from local residents and wanted the refugees to know that there were people who would be supportive of them. Having received no response from ringing the doorbell at the hostel, Naomi attempted a conversation with the refugee women through a kitchen window.

Naomi: In the beginning it was quite hard for me to explain what I had come about. We both found it quite hard to understand each other [...] I had with me a parish magazine [...] and a card with my address as well. And I said, 'If you need any help this is where we are'.

Naomi did not mention whether she was wearing her clerical collar during this encounter. However, wearing a clerical collar was Naomi's normal practise when out in the local community. Nevertheless, the Anglican parish magazine and the business card would have confirmed her identity as a local Anglican curate. Two of the refugee women arrived at Naomi's house the next day which started long-term relationships between Naomi and the women at the hostel. This also demonstrated how refugees exercised individual agency and pursued their own solutions.

There was only one account in this research where the clerical collar was regarded as potentially unhelpful for some refugees. This account arose in an interview

with one of the clergy but no other similar accounts were mentioned in any interviews with refugees, laity or with the other clergy.

Rob felt that the refugees who attended a refugee centre in his church building reacted with uncertainty when he was wearing a collar. In the context of this part of the interview Rob seemed to suggest that the refugees could have been slightly intimidated by the clerical collar because it was a symbol of authority which created uncertainty for them about their relationship with Rob. The association of a clerical collar with the establishment could be an issue for undocumented migrants. Therefore, in this instance, wearing a clerical collar did not invoke trust but it did the reverse, at least in the initial encounter. Rob's account suggested that it was a temporary issue for the refugees at the centre and that he was still able to build trust with the refugees through other ways.

Rob: On a Thursday, I have a collar on because I do a chaplaincy for [...] Council where I look after the staff of [...] Street. And so, I sometimes come here [the church building] after I've done that and when I walk in with the collar on there isn't that kind of, 'hello Pastor'. There's more of a, the eyes drop and, you know, 'are we ok'? Now many of them know we're ok.

Churches' organisational connections and refugee support

Many church communities could be described as organisations within organisations because of their affiliations to national and international religious denominational institutions such as the Catholic church and the Anglican church. In the context of refugee support, it would seem likely that the closer that church communities are connected to other organisations, the more this will benefit

refugees and those involved in refugee agency. In this section I have considered the evidence from the research about church communities' connections and collaborations in relation to the support of refugees.

From interviews with participants and a review of Catholic church websites and printed resources, I found that the Catholic church had a well-defined policy regarding advocacy for refugees and migrants with a clearly stated position on the rights of refugees and migrants that is endorsed at the top level by Pope Francis.⁴² At the ground level, my fieldwork observation and interviews showed that clergy and laity in Catholic Churches who were engaged in the support of refugees and migrants were well informed and resourced from within the Catholic church organisation. Alice, a lay volunteer, was aware that the Catholic church had a bishop for migrants in London and she told me that he was 'very passionate about migrants'.⁴³ Alice's priest, Louis, valued the support of the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the regular seminars and handouts for priests that kept him up to date with British immigration regulations and guidelines. When I first met Louis he had just returned from one such seminar on imminent changes to UK policy on family rules for immigrants.

In contrast to the Catholic church, none of the Anglican clergy or laity referred to a Church of England organisational position or policy on refugees and migrants in the interviews for this research. Nor did I find any obvious examples of resources from the Anglican Church for clergy and laity who were engaged with supporting

⁴² Message from Pope Francis: Day for Migrants and Refugees 17 January 2016. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html (Accessed: 18 November, 2015).

⁴³ Bishop Patrick Lynch is the Chair of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales' Office for Migration Policy and regularly speaks publicly in support of refugees and migrants.

refugees. However, since the fieldwork phase of this research was completed I have found publications on 'Immigration and Asylum' on the Church of England website much of which had been added in the two years since 2013.⁴⁴ One probable reason for the increase in online content was the attention in the British media on refugees coming to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea as well as the plight of Syrian refugees which has generated some public concern and debate. As discussed more fully in the introductory chapter, eighty-four Anglican bishops signed a letter to the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, urging him to increase the number of Syrian refugees being resettled in the UK.⁴⁵

Mick, an Anglican canon, made a reference to Christian publications on migration, one of which was a Biblical reflection on migration. However, in response to my question about how widely these publications had been distributed he said: 'I don't think very widely at all because everyone I've spoken to hasn't heard of it'. I have since found the publications he was referring to through an online search on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website. Apart from Mick, none of the other participants mentioned these resources.

As with the Church of England, Non-conformist church denominations endorsed the support of refugees but there was no evidence of resources to equip their clergy or church communities to do so. Therefore, the evidence from this study suggested that the Catholic church was unique among Christian denominations in that they made available to clergy and churches resources for refugee advocacy

⁴⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/home-and-community-affairs/asylum-and-immigration.aspx> (Accessed: 21 November, 2015).

⁴⁵ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/10/bishops-call-on-prime-minister-to-provide-meaningful-and-substantial-response-to-refugee-crisis.aspx> (Accessed 21 November, 2015).

from within their organisation. Catholic church resources included, a bishop for migrants, ethnic chaplaincies and Masses said in various languages in different Catholic churches across London, an annual 'World Day for Migrants and Refugees' celebrated in all churches worldwide, and information dissemination on UK immigration policy through seminars and written material for priests. These resources were all underpinned and guided by a common doctrine that is drawn from Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and endorsed by Papal messages.

Ecumenical collaborations and refugee support

I found that church communities effectively mobilised resources for community projects that supported refugees through local and city-wide ecumenical collaborations and partnerships. The following were among the examples of this from participants' accounts.

Nathan described his church community as high on motivation but low on resources. Nathan overcame this by collaborating with a large African Pentecostal Church that provided hampers of food that were distributed by Nathan's church in the local community at Christmas.

Erika collected material resources from local churches: 'not just my church [Catholic] but the Anglican church, the Methodist church, the Baptist church'.

Erika described the responses to her appeals as always 'very good'. Likewise, Naomi collected material resources from her Anglican church for the refugee women in the local hostel and she also obtained resources from other churches and harvest festival produce from local schools.

However, Naomi's collaboration with a local Non-conformist church minister was the only story I heard during the research that was not a success. Naomi described how the collaboration came to an end after money for refreshments went missing at the Non-conformist minister's church parent and toddler group. The church minister blamed the refugee women, unfairly in Naomi's opinion who argued there was 'no evidence whatsoever of this'. Prior to this incident Naomi had been 'shocked' when she arrived at the group one day to discover the minister was taking down all the refugee women's details on a 'clip chart'. Unsurprisingly Naomi said the refugee women were very suspicious about his intentions.

London Churches' Refugee Network

The ecumenical organisation, London Churches' Refugee Network (LCRN), held regular meetings in central London where they hosted seminars on UK government immigration policies and the impact of these on refugees. LCRN helped to fill the gap for church communities who were not resourced through their denominational organisations. LCRN meetings were open to both clergy and laity, and my fieldwork observations suggested that LCRN's greatest value was information dissemination and networking. LCRN was occasionally involved in low-key lobbying of politicians. Some of LCRN meetings I attended gave a platform for refugees to tell their stories.

I found that LCRN had a lack of engagement with BMC and BAME church communities. It was not a deliberate policy of LCRN to exclude these churches and this probably reflected the disconnect that exists between established mainstream church denominations and BMC and BAME churches. In conversation with me, one of the organisers of the LCRN expressed his own concern that they did not

have sufficient contacts within these churches. One outcome of this research was that I introduced Isaac, the pastor from a BAME church who participated in this research, to the LCRN. Isaac attended two meetings which I also attended during the fieldwork phase of this study.

LCRN also administered a small charitable fund. Esther, who worked in the centre run by her church, had successfully obtained funding from the LCRN fund for refugees' travel expenses to attend English language classes.

Esther: [LCRN] enabled us to open the door a bit to, you know, paying for asylum seekers and refugees to get to classes which hadn't really been possible up to that point. We really needed funding for that.

Amelie, a refugee who participated in this study and who worked for a migrant organisation expressed her frustration that she did not think LCRN was engaged enough in social action. Mick spoke about the need for a more coordinated effort for campaigning by LCRN that would involve more churches. However, in order to expand the remit of LCRN it would be necessary to commit more resources and personnel to the organisation and, from my observations it was not obvious how that could be achieved since LCRN was run by volunteers.

Collaborations with non-faith based organisations

Church communities also engaged in local partnerships with organisations that were not faith-based, such as refugee centres and migrant support groups. My fieldwork evidence suggested that these collaborations were the result of the actions of clergy or laity as individual protagonists for the support of refugees and migrants, rather than the result of denominational policy and practice. These

collaborative arrangements were often centred around the provision of church buildings. However, Mick's church community was the lead organisation in the formation of a local community migrants' action group.

Mick: The energy for it [the migrants' action group], the driving force for it has been our church [...] I realise that is often the case, that there are quite often church motivated people who are actually at the heart.

One of the mutually beneficial collaborations I observed was the partnership between Citizens UK and local church communities. Citizens UK provided the expertise and the means for social action, whilst church communities provided the ready-made social networks of people who facilitated this and attended meetings. Eleanor spoke in glowing terms about London Citizens, a branch of Citizens UK, and was 'thrilled to bits with what they did and achieved'.

During my fieldwork, Mick's Anglican church community and Louis's Catholic church community were both engaged in joint ventures with Citizens UK to enable refugees and migrants to access good legal advice for their immigration applications and appeals. Workshops were held on the church premises and were staffed by Citizens UK and personnel from a legal firm, while the participants were drawn from church community social networks. I explore the theme of social networks further in the following section.

Church communities as social networks

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 p. 11), social networks are one of the three ways that religion operates.⁴⁶ The fieldwork interviews and observations revealed that refugees, as social actors who were connected to church communities, could effectively access and capitalise on social networks that operated through the churches. The potential of social networks for refugees was twofold. Firstly, social networks can facilitate the rebuilding of communal relationships as the last chapter has already discussed in some detail. Secondly, social networks within church communities can facilitate connections to local services and organisations that are crucial for refugees. Successful participation within society depends on who refugees know and the degree to which those individuals can exert influence on behalf of others. Although what refugees know has value, the opportunity to put any knowledge or skills into practise still can be very contingent on social networks and on gatekeepers who can broker access into society. One story told by Alice illustrated the effectiveness of social networks so well that I have focused a large part of this section to the story.

Hannah and Alice

The story of Hannah, a refugee, stood out because of Alice's 'thick' description of how her Catholic church community operated as a social network and how this had changed the outcome for Hannah and her children who were facing homelessness. I have devoted space to Alice's narrative account here since it told a complete story and demonstrated the reach of social networks into many different

⁴⁶ See quote at the beginning of this chapter.

areas of society – church, cultural groups, school, clergy, statutory groups, NGOs, and solicitors – all of which had a role in responding to this refugee family.

Alice's narrative first described the imminent eviction of Hannah's family and how this only came to light through connections with the children's Catholic church school.

Alice: I got a call from the [Catholic church] school, from the headmistress, saying there's some woman whose children have come to school that morning and they were in tears. And the teacher said, 'What is the matter?' And the children finally said, 'Well we are supposed to move out of our house today and our mum's been crying all day. She didn't want us to come to school but we wanted to come to school, but we don't know where we're going to go when we finish school today.'

So, they [the school] then called the mother and said, 'What's going on?' And she said, 'Oh the landlord is throwing us out today.'

So, they [the school] phone the local authority and all that. And the local authority said they wouldn't help her because she didn't have any documents. So, then they [the school] didn't know what to do.

At this stage in the story Alice explained how she became involved. Her explanation revealed how widespread the influence of the social network within her church community was, and how social actors in the religious community, the cultural community, and the educational community were all connected.

Alice: Eventually, I don't know what happened but I think one of the school governors happened to be [from the same West African

country] so they were phoning them [school governors] to say, 'Can you please, please, please, please, from the goodness of your heart, just dig into your pockets and let's see if we can come up with fifty pounds [each] and pay this month's rent, at least to give her a month while we try and sort something out.'

And one of them [school governors] said, 'Oh but Alice can deal with that'. So, then the headmistress called me [...] I said, 'Ok, give me an hour. I'll see what I can do.'

Alice used her connections with Citizens UK who gave her advice about the steps Hannah should take as well as the contact details for the appropriate local authority department that was responsible for resolving these issues. Despite following the advice from Citizens UK Hannah phoned Alice the next day to say they had been evicted and the local authority department had refused to re-house them. Hannah and her children were left standing outside on the street in the rain. A further telephone exchange followed and an employee of Citizens UK secured a promise of emergency accommodation for Hannah's family starting the following day, but this still left them homeless overnight. At this point the help of the Catholic priest was sought.

Alice: I phoned her [Hannah] and I said, 'Where are you going to go?' And she said, 'I don't know. I don't know where to go.'

So, then I phoned Father [parish priest] and I said, 'Father, I need you to do something for me [...] Father, you need to put Hannah and the children up for tonight, please.' And he said, 'Ok, no problem'.

So, I went and I met them there and took her some food, settled them in, had a chat, comforted her and everything, and she spent the night in the presbytery. And Father is very kind like that.

And then the following morning she took the kids to the local authority and this lady [from Citizens UK] had phoned before she had even got there and given them an earful. So, they actually found her a place. They found her a three-bedroom house in Birmingham.

The story did not end there. Hannah had a solicitor who had failed to do any work on her case for five years which had led to problems with her immigration application. Two members of staff from Citizens UK accompanied Hannah to the solicitor's office to retrieve all her documents from them. Six months later, with new legal help, Hannah received a work permit. She stayed in contact with Alice who recounted the phone call about the work permit with a sense of satisfaction.

Alice: And she phoned me. 'Aunty Alice [Alice spoke in an excited tone] I've got my work permit'. And I'm like, 'Yeah'.

In this account, Alice described how the church community functioned as a well-connected social network. The efficiency and the speed with which the outcome was accomplished were of note. Alice had a crucial role in activating the church social network and coordinating the responses. The evidence from this account strongly suggested that without the social network it was unlikely this refugee family would have been able to access the resources that achieved a successful and secure outcome for them.

I heard repeated accounts in fieldwork interviews of stories like those of Hannah and Alice, where social networks had operated in multifarious ways in, and through, church communities. The outcomes of these social networks for refugees varied across the whole range of needs for surviving and flourishing in UK society. These outcomes included: discounted legal fees negotiated by Isaac with an immigration solicitor; vouchers for a food bank as a result of the church school working with Alice to identify people in need; food and toys for refugee women and children living in a hostel through Naomi's connection to local schools; opportunities to meet other parents because Elise's daughter sang in the church choir; and part time employment in two local churches once Abigail had leave to remain in the UK. It was evident in these stories and the many other stories that I heard while researching for this study, that church communities can operate as effective social networks that connect individuals and organisations to bring about favourable outcomes for refugees.

Church communities as resource hubs: to 'rise again' and to 'recover'

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007, p. 11), religion also operates as a resource as well as an organisational tool and social network. In the last chapter I focused on how refugees drew on their everyday lived experiences of religion as a resource for overcoming the challenges of life as refugees in London. Since I have previously explored religion as a resource, this section extends the idea of religion as a resource to church communities as resource hubs. When considering the

resources that church communities provide for refugees it seems apt that the origin of the word resource means to 'rise again' or to 'recover'.⁴⁷

In fieldwork interviews with refugees, the amount of time they spent talking about the spiritual and emotional support they received from their church communities was overwhelmingly greater than the time they spent talking about any material resources they received from church communities. However, there were still clear examples which demonstrated that church communities were very actively engaged in the provision of material resources for refugees.

Providing homes for refugees

I found that the provision of housing for refugees or the supply of household goods to improve the conditions of refugees' homes were the most commonly mentioned types of material resources that church communities contributed.

Erika was instrumental in providing household goods for Elise and Yolande as well as for many other refugees in her local community. Erika described how she had a good relationship with the local authority who would provide what she termed 'the basics [...] just a bed and a mattress and perhaps chairs and a table'. The local authority gave Erika keys to the houses and she would organise volunteers to prepare the houses and add other household goods and food which were donated by the churches. Yolande recalled that Erika had brought 'a lot of food' and toys for the children.

⁴⁷ The origins of the word *resource* – Early 17th century: from obsolete French *ressource*, feminine past participle (used as noun) of old French dialect *resourdre* 'rise again, recover' (based on Latin *urgere* 'to rise'). Available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/resource> (Accessed: 24 November 2015).

Erika: We'd go in with sheets and blankets and make the beds up, towels, a box of food [...] sometimes sanitary towels if we had them and things like that.

Erika, Naomi, and Susan all referred to the ease with which they could obtain material resources for refugees in response to appeals in church communities. Naomi recalled, 'People were very generous [...] anything I asked for I got'. Erika described how 'people with big houses' stored the goods in their lofts so that there was a ready supply when they heard of a refugee coming to the area. Erika suggested that some Christians find this type of giving easy, perhaps because it means they do not need to get personally involved.

Erika: If you asked somebody for something practical that's easy [...] So gradually people turned up with pots and pans and things they didn't want. It was easy really. And it's the sort of things Christians find, do, that they feel good about themselves [...]. It's not like asking them to get the government to alter legislation which is another thing that we do ask them to do from time to time. And that's not so easy [...] a lot of people think, keep politics out of religion which is a ridiculous argument.

However, other examples from participants' accounts revealed that some Christians were prepared to be very personally involved with extending hospitality to refugees. Isaac frequently had a refugee or vulnerable migrant living in his house and he told me that 'as one leaves, another arrives'. Individuals in Isaac's church community also hosted refugees which, from Isaac's account of this, seemed to be normal practice in the church.

Isaac: So, what we [the church community] do is that we place the person with a family in the church for two, three months [...] Now a boy has spent a year with the family and he is still there.

I asked Isaac if the 'boy' contributed to living expenses and he replied emphatically, 'No, no, no', which is in line with the ethos of unconditional hospitality he spoke of throughout his interviews. However, since I was unable to interview the boy or family he lived with it is not possible to know if this was a purely altruistic arrangement or whether he contributed by doing domestic work in the household.

Louis used the church presbytery for emergency accommodation for refugees, for example hosting Hannah and her children for one night despite the fact he thought the guest accommodation was 'not ideal for children' because it was on the top floor.

Alice shared her three-bedroomed house for several months with Elizabeth and her young daughter after they became homeless and while Elizabeth pursued her immigration application. Since Alice had a teenage son and daughter who needed a bedroom each Alice shared her own bedroom with Elizabeth and her daughter.

Faiz lived in one of the community houses connected to Esther's church. His immigration appeal process had been very protracted and he did not receive any statutory support.

Faiz: I live in the community [church community house] because I don't get any benefit. And I living there, and clothes and food and everythings.

Simeon's immigration appeal had also been a long process over many years and, like Faiz, he did not receive statutory support. He had been given hospitality by different church members.

Eleanor hosted a refugee in her house for 'a number of weeks' after he was released from a removal centre with nowhere to live. According to Eleanor, three volunteers who work in the refugee charity that she co-founded have hosted refugees 'for long periods of time and at no charge'. All the volunteers were Christians from different London churches. One volunteer had three refugees sharing the second bedroom in her two-bedroomed house for 'many years' until they all eventually received leave to remain in the UK and moved out. Eleanor described how the three refugees were so moved by her care for them that now she is 90 years old 'she is being looked after by them'.

Emma, one of the lay participants, was also employed as a support worker at a centre where 85% of the refugees who attended the centre had no statutory support. From a professional perspective, Emma described how homelessness was one of the hardest things she had to deal with since there were very few places where refugees could go when they had no statutory support. According to Emma most of the organisations that had places for refugees which she dealt with were churches or faith-based organisations. She also mentioned how London churches opened their buildings as night shelters for the homeless during the winter. I found from other conversations during my fieldwork that there were often refugees among the homeless who attended the night shelters in London churches.

Some other resources given to refugees by churches

In between the 'arm's length' charitable giving and the 'hands' on' hosting of refugees in their homes, there was a variety of other resources provided by individuals in church communities. Since these resources often can be organised on an informal basis by church members it would be difficult to know the extent to which this happens. However, evidence from conversation during my fieldwork suggests that the following examples were not isolated incidents.

Amir described how Bahman was being helped with English language and given money by individuals in his church community.

Amir: There is this old man and old lady who are very helpful and very kind. They have started teaching him [Bahman] English and they lend him money and he says they are very kind. So, it's [the resources from the church community] both on the spiritual level and practical.

Elise recalled the help of the church community with informal English language learning. Having fled from her country because of conflict, Elise had no time to prepare for life in the UK and she arrived without being able to speak English. Elise described how difficult this was but, also, how the church community gave her confidence to learn English outside of a classroom setting.

Elise: So, for us it was really hard even to talk to people because we didn't have any words in our mouth. The only words we learned was through the churches because they tried to talk slowly, [to] use sometime sign, to ask questions for the words we couldn't

understand. So, I really appreciated the church played a big impact to our life.

Elizabeth relied on the support of her church community for the means to live from day to day. The resources provided by the church community were a lifeline and made the difference between destitution and survival. Although Elizabeth and her daughter were given temporary accommodation by the local authority she was not eligible for any maintenance support from the UK government. Since she was not allowed to work while her asylum application was being considered by the UKVI, she had effectively been made destitute. When I met Elizabeth the decision about her application had been outstanding for just under one year. Elizabeth explained how she survived with the help of the church.

Elizabeth: Father [the priest, Louis] agreed with the secretary that I should help out a bit in the house and then maybe, at the end of the day they just give me something to get by. Sometimes the parishioners who are aware of my situation, they give me money. Some of them have children [...] I help them and then they give me some money. So, that's really how I get by. It's almost been a year now [...] If it wasn't for them I really don't know how I would've coped.

These selected examples of the material resources provided by church communities give an indication of the type of crucial support that refugees receive through their interactions with church communities. There were other examples of help with the English language; gifts of money, food and personal items such as clothing; help with transport costs and, in two cases, the gifts of bikes; unofficial

immigration advice and connections to reliable solicitors; and opportunities to do voluntary work, attend services and social events all of which helped to give refugees structure and purpose to their time during the lengthy wait for the outcome of their asylum applications.

Conclusion

The evidence from the empirical research revealed that church communities went beyond simply filling the gap in state welfare provision. Refugees were shown hospitality by church communities and these acts of hospitality seemed to be unconditional on the part of the 'hosts'; an example of this was Susan's support of two Muslim families from Afghanistan that had continued for more than a decade. Refugee support services run by or in churches were not limited to refugees who were Christians but were open to those of all faiths or none. Christian refugees were in the minority in these refugee centres. However, it could be argued that a shared Christian faith and attendance at church services would be an advantage since it gives refugees a closer connection and access to the church community.

Relationships with individuals from church communities provided refugees with access to social networks and to advocates who could come alongside them and represent them in acts of solidarity. The dynamics in the relationship between recipient and 'helper' vis-à-vis issues of power are important issues in humanitarian responses to refugees (Harrell-Bond, 2002). The evidence from the findings in this study showed that clergy did not use their ecclesiastical position and status in hierarchical ways with refugees. However, they were adept at endeavouring to use their position to influence outcomes for refugees with the UKVI, local service providers, church congregations and community groups. The

interviews with clergy and laity revealed they had multifarious reasons for supporting refugees and that they drew on different theological concepts about hospitality to the stranger as well as on humanitarian concerns. The Catholic church was the only church denomination that regularly provided their priests and local churches with comprehensive and up-to-date information about British immigration policy and legislation.

I suggest that church communities possess 'organisational' capital through their connections within national and transnational church denominations, through their position within society – although this would depend on how established the church is within society – and through their connections with other civil society organisations. It was evident from the different accounts of support for refugees in this research that the closer a church community was connected to other local and national organisations, the more effective their support for refugees. Therefore, church communities' organisational links can be an advantage for refugees whether in terms of advocacy for their asylum claim with the legal system, the championing of their right to state benefits within statutory organisations, or the provision of material and spiritual support.

Importantly, this study has shown that when solidarity with refugees was based on notions of common humanity then hospitality and support was given to the Other as an equal. Perhaps it is solidarity based on equality that is the all-important constituent that helps to avoid the potential pitfalls of a dominant group offering a type of support and hospitality that simply accommodates and tolerates the stranger. Therefore, I suggest that the role of solidarity is an important factor that needs to be considered in conceptualisations of hospitality.

Chapter 8

‘A tale of two cities?’: concluding remarks

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us ... (Dickens, 1859, opening sentence of *A tale of two cities*).

For refugees, the story of life in London is like a tale of two cities within the one city. A cosmopolitan city that can make it easier for refugees to ‘fit in’ and belong. But a city where the British government piloted a ‘Go Home’ campaign in six London boroughs in 2013 urging ‘irregular’ migrants to leave. A city where opportunities for refugees to establish social networks might be easier than elsewhere. But a city where refugees are unlikely to be housed by the UKVI. Should refugees choose to use social networks to find their own accommodation in London they will be forced to exist on an extremely low subsistence-only support from the UK government, and even that will be forfeited should they continue to choose to live in London during any appeal process. For these refugees and the estimated hundreds of thousands of ‘irregular residents’ of London, destitution is a real danger.

There is another ‘tale’ of the city. It is the account of a city where, along with other organisations and charities, churches engage in the support of refugees. It was the

purpose of this study to learn more about this other tale by listening to, collecting and analysing the stories of refugees, clergy and laity in church communities in London in order to learn how everyday lived religion impacted refugees' lives in the city. From the outset, the intention was to hear from the perspectives of the refugees as well as those in churches who support refugees in different ways. This approach raised challenges, particularly in terms of gaining access and building trust with refugees who eventually agreed to participate in the research.

Obtaining the perspectives of clergy and laity added another layer to the insight and enriched the overall understanding of refugees' experiences whilst adding the dimension of clergy's and laity's own experiences and some rationale behind church communities' responses of hospitality to refugees.

The evidence from this research indicated that i) belonging was of high importance to refugees in their choice of churches and the large variety of churches on offer in London helped refugees to find a church/churches where they belonged; ii) church communities in this study were welcoming and supportive to refugees; iii) church communities offered culturally familiar places and spaces for refugees; and iv) church communities provided refugees with effective local and transnational social networks.

The leitmotifs of crossing and dwelling suggested by Tweed's (2006) theory of religion permeated across the research findings. This study suggested that Tweed's theory of religion with its metaphors of movement and of settling is important for understanding the role of religion at a time in history when large numbers of people are crossing territorial borders. I also found Tweed's theory a welcome departure from sociology of religion theories that were situated in 19th

and 20th century European historical and ecclesiastical settings. My experience in this study has shown that Tweed's work is pertinent to how everyday lived religion is practised in an age of migration, both voluntary and forced, and I would recommend it as a valuable resource for future research at the intersection of migration and religion.

This research has highlighted how lived religion that is carried across borders and planted in new locations is both changed and unchanged. Religious practice can be reshaped to fit new cultures yet the essence of that religion can remain unchanged. For instance, an icon on a chair can transform a room into a sacred space without the usual required religious rituals and trappings. However, religion brings with it memories and traces of the past that, when viewed from the lens of the new can sometimes project idyllic and idealised images onto the collective memory, especially when current circumstances are difficult.

Perhaps like the church communities in this study that represented polarised opposites – single culture churches or multicultural churches – religion, when carried across borders and planted in new places, can go one of two ways. Either religion is preserved and protected with all the inherent dangers of fundamentalism, or religion can become more open with adherents discovering and holding onto what is essentially at the heart of that religion but able to adapt, accept difference and embrace new ways of doing things.

In this study, my experience of multicultural London churches suggested that interaction with refugees had provoked individuals in church communities to use their faith to respond to refugees in positive ways; this had been enriching for individuals within the churches and for whole church communities alike. There is

the possibility that some single culture churches might become more entrenched in their religious and cultural traditions and views – and I would include white British churches here. However, I found that there was a growing awareness within BAME churches in this research that they needed to help their church communities to be outward-looking and to connect with the wider community. BAME churches often had less resources to do so than multicultural churches, especially in terms of their social networks.

From the evidence in this study, I share Peggy Levitt's (2007) view that the transnationalisation of religious belief that results from the movement of refugees and migrants is a positive phenomenon. We will need to wait and see if Levitt's (2007, p. 114) conjecture that religion is likely to be the principal stage of any future wave of transnational belonging becomes a reality.

The following three sections highlight and discuss some of the specific findings from the research.

Refugees' agency: crossing borders and redefining borders of belonging

From the outset of the fieldwork it was evident that culture and religion were closely related for refugees. Refugees negotiated a path between culture and religion and drew on both in differing degrees depending on what was most important to them in the contexts that they found themselves in. Therefore, the emphasis could shift between whether cultural or religious identity was the most important depending on their circumstances.

What all the refugees in this study sought from churches was a community where they felt they belonged. The denominational affiliations of the churches often had less significance to refugees than the response of the church community toward

them and how they felt in that community. However, if refugees had previous associations with a church denomination in their country of origin it could have some influence on their choice of churches, especially their initial choice of church. Nonetheless, all the refugees in this study were open in their attitudes toward different church denominations.

Refugees showed resourcefulness and adaptability when choosing church communities. Having crossed national territorial borders, refugees seemed to be adept at crossing denominational borders when that was the right thing for them. Five refugees in this study had also crossed religious borders by converting to Christianity. The borders of church denominations or religious identity seemed to be regarded with less importance by refugees than might be in evidence in the rest of the population.

Refugees in this study were comfortable with belonging to more than one church community with different denominational affiliations at the same time. Again, this is something with which church-goers in the rest of the population might be less comfortable. Different churches could provide refugees with different things. For instance, BAME churches with strong cultural and national ties provided refugees with a link to the past and with ongoing transnational links. Whereas, multicultural mainstream churches might provide better connections into UK society which helped refugees to re-establish their lives in British society. Multicultural mainstream churches did not ignore culture but acknowledged and celebrated cultural difference. Belonging in these multicultural churches was based on religious identity.

Where church communities did not meet refugees' expectations, or where refugees found the church communities were detrimental to them in some way, they moved on and sought out a new church community. The large choice of churches available in a cosmopolitan city such as London helped to make moving between churches more possible. However, when refugees could not find a church that fitted their needs some refugees adapted by practising their religious belief in everyday settings using prayers and religious symbols. Religious practice outside of organised religion can lead to new churches being started. In this way, refugees help to reshape churches in the UK by founding new places of worship and reinvigorating others.

The choices that refugees made about churches, and how and where they practised their faith showed how they acted as social agents and made rational choices about their lives according to their circumstances. Research such as this draws attention to the agency of refugees and helps to counter misconceptions about refugees as simply victims. This is not to ignore the many challenges that refugees face but to highlight the resourcefulness of refugees and the need for them to be involved in creating the solutions to their circumstances.

Refugees' everyday lived religion and re-establishing community and home

When refugees are forced to migrate, they leave behind communities and social networks that have taken their lifetime to build. Therefore, it is crucial for refugees to find ways of re-establishing community and home and to develop social networks in new locations. It may be possible for some refugees to establish connections with others from their country of origin but this is by no means the case for all refugees.

In this study, whether refugees' religious belief had accompanied them across territorial borders or whether they were new to Christianity, religion was an important aspect of everyday life for all the refugees and it was mobilised by them as part of their strategy for survival. The evidence suggested that refugees' religious belief had become more important to them because of their experiences of forced migration including hostility in new locations.

In their narrative accounts, all the refugees spent far more time speaking about the importance of religious belief for helping them with the challenges of life as refugees in London than they did speaking about how they had benefitted from any material resources through their interactions with church communities. Refugees found consolation in their religious belief; felt they benefitted from religious worship services, rituals and practices; and used religion to help them make sense of their experiences and to develop new relationships with others. Some church buildings were open throughout the week which provided a safe place and space where refugees could simply sit and reflect.

The corporate nature of religion brought refugees into contact with church communities. Refugees often formed strong relationships with other individuals in churches. They referred to these relationships in familial terms and spoke of church as home. Sometimes these relationships were with individuals from the same cultural background but this was not always the case. There were many cases of long-term friendships between refugees and individuals in churches who were white British.

Returning to the theme of agency, belonging to church communities meant that refugees could select who they wanted to talk to about different aspects of their

experiences. Church contexts provided a place where refugees could 'be themselves' without feeling under interrogation and where they could release their emotions – a place to laugh and to cry. Moreover, refugees could talk when they were ready to talk and not because of an official appointment. The ability to choose and act in church communities counteracted the disenfranchisement that is often felt by refugees in other areas of life.

'Unconditional' hospitality of churches v. conditional hospitality of the state

Clergy and laity responses of hospitality to refugees were informed by different theological and moral discourses. Theological concepts of hospitality were often framed around welcoming the stranger. In particular the concept of God coming in the guise of the stranger provides Christians with strong religious grounds for showing hospitality to refugees regardless of refugees' legal immigrant status according to the state and without any discrimination, religious or otherwise.

For those who were Christians, ecclesiology was also used to conceptualise belonging in a way that transcended national territorial borders. Many denominations had a good understanding about belonging to international institutions and being part of a global identity through their religious affiliations. For instance, in practice this meant that an Anglican African already belonged in a UK Anglican church in the sense that he had a shared Christian faith and a shared denominational allegiance through the Anglican Communion. However, as has already been discussed, refugees of different denominational persuasions, other faiths or none had also found churches welcoming.

The Catholic Church has a well-developed doctrine on the rights of refugees that, in part, is at odds with territorialised nation-state borders. For Catholic Christians,

this doctrine provides the basis for their social justice activism on behalf of refugees. For refugees, this doctrine and associated practises communicates to them that they will be welcome in Catholic churches. Catholic doctrine on the rights of refugees is universal and it is not limited to refugees who would define themselves as Catholics.

Although the Church of England doctrine about the rights of refugees is similar to Catholic church doctrine it seemed to be less developed or, at least, not disseminated to their churches so efficiently as in the Catholic church network. Religious doctrine about the rights of refugees places the church at variance with the state which could be problematic for the Church of England as the state church. Clergy have spoken up about refugees' rights as with the bishops' letter to David Cameron however the evidence suggests their voices of dissent have been largely ignored by the British government. The concerns I raised in the introductory chapter about the alliance between Lambeth Palace and the Home Office over the scheme for resettlement of Syrian families by community groups, appear to have been grounded. Six months after this agreement only two families have been resettled under the scheme. One of those families lives at Lambeth Palace (Gentleman, 2017).

The degree to which people in church communities became personally engaged with refugees ranged from 'arm's length' charitable giving to 'hands' on' hosting of refugees in their homes. In this study, there was no evidence that refugees were expected to repay hospitality in any way. It could be suggested that churches benefit because refugees join the churches and swell the numbers attending. Although migrants have reinvigorated churches as discussed in Chapter 2,

refugees represent only a very small proportion of all migrants. Figures in a British government briefing paper in 2013 showed that only 4.6% of immigrants coming to the UK that year were refugees (Hawkins, 2015 p. 4). This relatively low numbers of refugees and the fact that not all refugees are Christians means it is unlikely that supporting refugees would be an efficient church growth strategy. A fact that would not be lost on any churches that were only pursuing an agenda of evangelization. To support refugees was sacrificial in terms of resources of all kinds but rewarding in terms of a humane approach that finds satisfaction in seeing the suffering of others relieved.

Further research

Since beginning this research the number of refugees in the world has grown and with it the need for humanitarian responses. At the same time, there has been a rise of separatist politics accompanied by an increase in the hardening of attitudes and responses of nation-states toward refugees. In January 2017, the President of the United States issued an executive order that banned immigrants from seven countries, including refugees from Syria, from entering the US which has set a concerning precedent. The opening words of Dickens' novel, *A tale of two cities*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter also could be a comment on the experiences of individuals in the globalised world of the 21st century rather than only two cities.

Amid this politically charged context it is important to explore the responses of civil society toward refugees as well as refugees' experiences in the nations where they find themselves living, although not necessarily by choice. This study with

refugees and church communities will contribute to other research about civil society responses to refugees and will hopefully stimulate future research.

One of the areas this research has raised relates to research methods with hidden and marginalised urban refugee populations in the Global North. In view of the logistical issues of access to refugee populations that Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) have also highlighted, I suggest future research could include more attention to qualitative research methods with 'hidden' urban refugee populations in the Global North that might help overcome logistical issues of access.

Furthermore, more consideration could be given to whether academic ethical requirements for safeguarding need to be revised in line with the concerns I have raised in this study.

I was aware that this research took place in a cosmopolitan city and that this might have favourably influenced how individuals in London churches responded to refugees. Therefore, future research in other city churches, as well as in suburban and rural churches, would help understanding of refugees' interactions with churches across the UK. It would be of interest to know whether London was unique and how churches respond to refugees in other cities and towns. This could build on Glick Schiller's (2008) city-scale research with refugees that compared two small-scale cities in the United States and in Germany. I suggest that comparisons with other cities in the Global North, as well as, a comparison of cities and town across the UK could be important. Future research could also investigate the responses to refugees of other faith groups in cities and towns.

The relationship between church and state also was raised by this research, especially in relation to how the unconditional hospitality which underpins

Christian doctrine can be hampered by the conditionality and restrictions that the state puts on refugees, both in terms of their admittance into the UK and their permission to stay in the UK. Future research into the relationship between church and state might also consider what conditions might provoke the church to civil disobedience. For instance, what are the similarities and differences with the conditions that inspired such precedents as Liberation Theology which informed the opposition to social injustices in South America, or the Sanctuary Movement in the United States in the 1980s where churches responded to the US government's almost blanket rejection of asylum for refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador (Bau, 1985; Golden and McConnell, 1986)?

The final word should go to Elise whose concise summary of what it was like to be a refugee helped to frame the themes of the second half of Chapter 6. Throughout her narrative Elise spoke of the important role of her church community for overcoming the challenges of life as a refugee and for flourishing as a citizen in the UK. Elise's few words help to convey the value to refugees of their relationships with individuals in church communities summed up by what she tells others in similar situations: 'Don't worry what you lost. You have people'.

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Appendix

Table of participants and main church denominational affiliation

- 51 participants of whom 28 were refugees & 23 clergy or laity. 2 participants were in both groups but counted once.
- Group 1 Refugees: 14 female and 14 male. 9 had refugee status and leave to remain. In-depth interviews took place with 13 refugees.
- Group 2 Clergy and laity: 13 female and 10 male. In-depth interviews took place with 13 in this group.
- Fieldwork observation in nine churches, six centres that use church premises and attendance at meetings of the Churches Refugee Network.

	13 Refugees: In-depth interviews 13 (6 F + 7 M)	Refugee status <i>(6/13)</i>	15 Refugees: 'Short' interviews (8 F + 7 M)	Refugee status <i>(3/15)</i>	5 (+2 refugees) Clergy & laity <i>with</i> personal migration experience: In-depth interviews (2 F + 3M) (1F + 1M)	8 Clergy & laity <i>with no</i> personal migration experience: In-depth interviews (5 F + 3 M)	4 Clergy & laity <i>with</i> personal migration experience (1F + 3M)	6 Clergy & laity <i>with no</i> personal migration experience (5 F + 1 M)
Catholic	Elise	Y	Annette	Y	Alice	Erika		Ellen
	Yolande	Y			Luke			Martha
	Elizabeth	N			Louis			
	Simeon	N						
Anglican	Anna	Y	Sarah	Y	Emma	Nick	Esau	Julie
	Amelie	Y	Yaro	N	<i>(Amelie)</i>	Naomi		
	Amir	N	Noni	N		Eleanor		
	Bahman	N				Susan		
	Karim	N				Nathan		
Non-conformist	Faiz	N	Kim	N		Rob	Neal	Nicola
	Stephan	N	Esme	Y		Esther		Yvette
								Ben
Orthodox	Abigail	Y	Hana	N				
	Eli	Y	Elias	N	<i>(Eli)</i>			
			Hoshea	N				
Pentecostal			Ruth	N	Isaac		Agnes	
			Yusra	N			Nedum	
			Levi	N				
Other faiths			Abena	N				
			Nayana	N				
			Nderim	N				