NEGOTIATING EXISTENCE

Asylum Seekers in East Anglia, UK

Sophia Corfield

A thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy
Discipline of Anthropology
University of Adelaide

July 2008
DECLARATION

This work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed……………………………………………… Dated…………………………
# CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................... I

ACRONYMS .............................................................................................................. III

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................. IV

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................... V

PREFACE: SILENCE AND TALK: GENERATING MOVEMENT .............................. 1

CHAPTER 1: NEGOTIATING EXISTENCE ................................................................ 5

- Intersubjective Experience .............................................................................. 11
- Place and Space ............................................................................................ 13
- The Liminality of the Immigration System and the Liminaloidity of Experience .. 17
- Speech-Acts .................................................................................................. 19
- Hierarchy of Need ....................................................................................... 25
- Identity .......................................................................................................... 30
- Relational Identity ....................................................................................... 32
- Theoretical Persuasions .............................................................................. 33
- Locating the Field ....................................................................................... 35
- Approaches for Data Collection ................................................................ 39
- The Positioning of the Anthropologist ....................................................... 43
- The Structure of the Thesis ....................................................................... 45

CHAPTER 2: THE PLACE OF REFUGE .................................................................. 48

- Space ............................................................................................................ 49
- Place-Making ............................................................................................. 51
- Geographical Space .................................................................................... 54
- Demographic Space .................................................................................. 57
- Economic Space ........................................................................................ 61
- Cohabitation ................................................................................................ 63
- Solidarity ...................................................................................................... 66
- Sociality ....................................................................................................... 68
- Conclusion ................................................................................................... 71

CHAPTER 3: NEGOTIATING THE CASE MATRIX .................................................. 73

- Liminality .................................................................................................... 75
- What is a Story? .......................................................................................... 78
- What is a Case? ........................................................................................... 81
- Story / Case Interface ................................................................................. 86
- Verbatim ....................................................................................................... 88
- Hegemony and Classification .................................................................... 94
- Truth and Country of Origin Information ............................................... 99
- Conclusion .................................................................................................. 107
CHAPTER 4: SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR CONSTRUCTION OF ASYLUM SEEKER DEPENDENCY

Dependency ................................................................. 112
Sustaining Dependency within the Official Explanation .......... 114
The Decision-Making Process .......................................... 118
Selective Consultation .................................................. 123
Refugee Community Organisations and Integration .............. 128
Community-Derived Support ........................................... 132
Conclusion ...................................................................... 137

CHAPTER 5: (DIS)LOCATING SPEECH-ACTS: THE NEGOTIATION OF RELATIONAL IDENTITIES BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS AND LOCALS ..... 139

Locating (Dis)locating Speech-Acts .................................. 141
Mutual Fears of Violence .................................................. 143
Media and Moral Panic .................................................... 147
Asylum Seekers and the State ........................................... 152
The New Racism ............................................................. 154
Asylum Seekers Responses to the Media ......................... 157
Negotiating Locals ........................................................... 160
Blending in .................................................................... 163
Low Profile .................................................................... 165
Conclusion .................................................................... 167

CHAPTER 6: INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS ............ 169

From We-Relation to Intersubjectivity ................................ 171
Intersubjective Ambiguity ................................................ 173
Distrust ........................................................................ 177
Collaboration .................................................................. 182
Movement and Potentiality ............................................. 186
Conclusion .................................................................... 190

CHAPTER 7: MOVEMENT AND STILLNESS .......................... 193

Speech-Acts of Past Experiences ...................................... 196
Movement ..................................................................... 199
Stillness ........................................................................ 201
The Monologue .................................................................. 207
Heroic Stories .................................................................. 211
The Movement of Place, Identity and Nostalgia ................. 214
Conclusion .................................................................... 218

CHAPTER 8: EPILOGUE: WHITHER REFUGEE? ......................... 220

The Journey’s Conclusions .............................................. 221
Future Journeys ............................................................... 223
Refugeeness ................................................................. 224
Final Remarks .................................................................. 226

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................ 228
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map showing location of field sites in East Anglia in red dots. .......... 37
Figure 2: Photo of Marine Parade, Great Yarmouth (Great Yarmouth Borough Council 2004). .............................................................. 38
Figure 3: Peterborough Red Cross Refugee Project (Photo: Sophia Corfield)...... 39
Figure 5: Map of East Anglia showing field site locations............................ 50
Figure 6: Acle Straight – the road that cuts through the Broads to Great Yarmouth (Photo: Sophia Corfield).............................................. 55
Figure 7: Norwich (Visit Norwich 2007). .................................................... 59
Figure 8: Strangers’ Hall (Photo: Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service 2006). ........................................................................ 60
Figure 9: Photo of Great Yarmouth Arch on Wellington Road. A hotel that houses asylum seekers is located behind the archway (Photo: Woodcock 1995). ...... 64
Figure 10: The role of the drop-in (Wren 2004:30). ........................................ 69
Figure 11: Asylum determination process in the UK (Refugee Arrivals Project 2006). ................................................................................. 76
Figure 12: IND process for considering asylum claims (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006b). ...................................................... 82
Figure 13: SEF – Part C – The basis of your claim – Instructions given to asylum seekers when completing as SEF application. (Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association (ILPA) 2003:102). ................................................................. 85
Figure 14: Excerpt from an interview record sheet. (Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association (ILPA) 2003:129). ........................................... 87
Figure 15: IND Recording of the Substantive Interview (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006c). .................................................. 89
Figure 16: IND The Purpose of the Substantive Interview (Immigration & Nationality Directorate 2006c). .................................................. 91
Figure 17: IND: What Representatives can expect for IND (Home Office 2006a)... 95
Figure 18: IND: Points to be Considered in an Asylum Claim (Home Office 2006c). ................................................................. 97
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYMS</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>Black/Minority Ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDO</td>
<td>Community Derived Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>Certificate of Identity Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELR</td>
<td>Exceptional Leave to Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GYROS</td>
<td>Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach and Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILR</td>
<td>Indefinite Leave to Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>Immigration Nationality Directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASRF</td>
<td>Norwich Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASS</td>
<td>National Asylum Support System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNREC</td>
<td>Norfolk and Norwich Racial Equality Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO</td>
<td>Refugee Community Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEF</td>
<td>Statement of Evidence Form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This ethnographic study of asylum seekers in East Anglia, UK, poses the following questions: how do asylum seekers adapt, cope and adjust to life in the UK when their future is so uncertain? To what extent do people seeking asylum relate to an asylum seeker identity? How do asylum seekers negotiate interactions with others as they await an outcome to their application for asylum? This study explores these questions in an effort to gain insight into the role of identity reconstruction during the process of asylum seeking.

This thesis is based on twelve months of fieldwork in the towns of Norwich and Great Yarmouth, and to a lesser extent in Peterborough and London, where asylum seekers had been dispersed by either the London Boroughs or the Home Office’s NASS (National Asylum Support Service). During 2002 and 2003, I conducted fieldwork amongst asylum seekers, as well as amongst support workers working for various NGOs that offered a number of support services for asylum seekers.

The focus on asylum seekers’ speech-acts is a method to observe the primary form of social action by which asylum seekers articulate a shared place, liminal immigration system and interaction with others. These elements shape asylum seekers’ identity in the UK. Consequently, asylum seekers’ predicament can be understood as a movement through the immigration system, but also an existential movement as each person tries to negotiate their existence.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the asylum seekers and refugees in East Anglia for all their warmth, generosity of spirit and kindness that they bestowed upon me. I cannot convey the depth of admiration and gratitude that I feel to my friends to whom I became “like a sister”.

I also have enormous appreciation to David Nettleship of GYROS, who so kindly granted me entry into the NGO world with such understanding and good humour. Equally, I am indebted to Christina Tarring and the Refugee Council, who provided me with the most invaluable learning through the internship. I must also thank Clearsprings for their enthusiasm to initiate research into service provision in Norwich. I also extend my appreciation to Norwich Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum and Norfolk County Forum, for their acceptance of me and my little notebook. My heartfelt thanks go to Anna Allen, my colleague in Norwich, whose friendship, compassion and true camaraderie I will always hold dear.

Greatest appreciation goes to my supervisors: Prof. John Gray for pushing me that bit further and Dr Andrew Skuse for always finding the time to read what seemed like endless re-writes. I will always be grateful for the discussions and time that you have both given me and your support has always encouraged me to keep going. Thank you so much.

Thanks to Dr Michael Roberts for your advice, particularly at the early stages, and for your interest throughout. Thanks must also go to Dr Arthur Saniotis and Dr Juanita Ellias for their encouragement and for putting up with my anxieties. My gratitude also goes to Dr Patrick Allington for the time and effort he has taken in proofreading the text, which has been of immense help.
My postgraduate colleagues Nadia Butler, Tania Zivkovic, James Lino, Andrew Morley, Christie Lam, Alkan Chipperfield and Margo Johnson whose solidarity has been a strength throughout this journey together. Thanks particularly to Dr Kirrilly Thompson for being a true friend.

Thanks to Christine Loveday and everyone at the Australian Refugee Association (ARA), who have always encouraged and supported me whilst writing my thesis.

To my dear friend and neighbour, Carol, thank you for always being there and for those much-needed coffee breaks. Thanks to Paul, Heidi, Chloe, Sophie, Wilson and Lizzie for their friendship during my stays in England. And a special thanks to Ken and Jen for their kindness, support and for welcoming me into their home.

Thanks also to my family for their understanding and patience and for always believing that I would get there in the end! Thanks to my mum for sustaining me with home-made cake and to my dad and brothers for their often humorous words of encouragement.

Above all my deepest thanks go to my husband and best friend, Mark, for his moral support during my fieldwork, for helping me to know when I need to take a break and for putting up with my thesis obsessions throughout the write-up. His great patience, good humour and unwavering faith in me has made this journey possible.
The exiled knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

Edward Said

From Reflections on Exile (2000:170)