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The relation between post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being: an exploratory study of the perceptions of highly educated refugees in the U.K.

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To my parents Dimitri and Athina Psoinos, with all my gratitude

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceive the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. A literature review of the migration and psychological health area and the widely-used stress and coping approach revealed that the “vulnerable” and “passive” images have all too often been assigned to refugees when discussing their psychological health, and that the latter have often been approached as beings detached from their social context.

The aim of the research was to explore the participants’ own perceptions (or “lay narratives”) of their experiences and their well-being. These were used to converse with the stress and coping concepts and with the images related to psychological activism, an alternative stress and coping perspective that views people as active agents who try to take control of their life, instead of mere passive recipients of stress. The study is based on constructivism, and accordingly the emphasis is put on the subjective world of experience and the researcher critically reflects on how the social context shapes the participants’ perceptions.

The empirical work consists of two studies. In the first one, semi-structured interviews were carried out with fifteen young and highly educated refugees in the U.K. The findings highlight how the participants used the stress and coping concepts and the images related to psychological activism, so the value of such concepts is reconfirmed. But a deeper critical look reveals that the semi-structured interviewing may have strongly directed how the participants discussed their perceptions and that it was unclear how these perceptions are formed in social interaction. Consequently I conducted additional empirical work to carry the emerging issues further.

In the second study, autobiographical narrative interviews were carried out with another group of fifteen highly educated refugees in the U.K. The findings reveal that they made sense of their experiences and their well-being through three distinctive stories. The stories of *hope* and *survival* presented by two subgroups of participants suggest a more balanced view of refugees, one that is not necessarily “vulnerable” and “passive”. These participants made sense of their experiences and well-being through the elements of “hope, persistence and activism”. But the story of *disappointment* presented by a third subgroup revealed that some participants did *not* perceive their experiences and their well-being through a positive lens. It also highlighted the need to further explore how they formed their perceptions in *social interaction*. Indeed, it was shown how the social context, particularly negative attitudes they received at the community level, was largely responsible for their narrative of disappointment.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in exploring how the participants, through their own narratives, made sense of the concepts of stress and coping. The methodological contribution refers to the bridging of ideas and previous work from other disciplines and to the innovative application of narrative interviewing to this population. A major practical contribution is that this research offered a channel for refugees to talk about their experiences and their well-being in their *own* words. Furthermore, possible explanations emerge on why some refugee groups can indeed seem “vulnerable” and “passive” and this has important implications for those who design and implement interventions aimed at enhancing the well-being of refugees.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

This dissertation does not exceed the word limit set by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences.

Chapter 1: Research issues in the field of migration and psychological health

1.1 Aims and motivation for the present research

This study has been driven by a general interest in how migrant populations perceive their psychological health. Its main aim is to explore how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceive the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. This aim has been triggered by the observation that the “vulnerable” and “passive” images have all too often been and still are assigned to this group when discussing their psychological health, therefore it would be challenging to study how *they* regard the latter. A second aim is to explore not only how the participants perceive the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, but also how the social context influences the shaping of their perceptions. By saying “social context” what is meant is the contemporary British context the interviewees and the researcher find themselves in, as well as the more specific research context, which refers to when and where the interviews take place and the unfolding dynamics between the participants and the researcher. This aim has emerged after noting that in social-psychological research, refugees have often been and still are approached as beings detached from their social context.

The research topic has been derived from a combination of my academic background and particular circumstances. As a researcher, I have been strongly interested in the different ways in which research on migrant populations’ psychological health is carried out and the kind of knowledge that is produced in such cases. My first degree was in clinical psychology, so my academic background has focused mainly on how to treat psychological illness in different clinical populations. Since refugees are amongst the most frequently studied “vulnerable” clinical populations, I have been guided by the desire to understand how *they* perceive their psychological health. In addition, my arrival in the U.K. in 2000-01 for post graduate studies made me aware of more specific issues, such as stereotypes that apply to refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K. and have to do either with their psychological health (e.g. “vulnerable”) or their social status (e.g. “social-economic threats” and/ or “useless welfare scroungers”). The above circumstances and my background played an important role in the formulation of the research question.

In the following pages there is a literature review of the migration and psychological health-area, which starts by describing the origin and the evolution of this field and continues

by presenting its main theoretical approaches. Even though this review refers mainly to research that has been carried out with *migrants*, it is important firstly for understanding the background of this area. Secondly, it is important for introducing the stress and coping approach, which has been one of the most widely used frameworks for studying the psychological health of a subgroup within the migrant population, that is, *refugees*. In the second part of this chapter, by pointing out the main debates in the migration and psychological health area, it is clarified why the research question does not explore refugees' psychological health, but their *perceptions* of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. Finally, by discussing the current characteristics of refugees in the U.K., it is illustrated why highly educated refugees have been chosen as the research population of the study.

1.2 Current importance of the research topic

Several authors have noted that migration is a topic of great relevance to contemporary society, especially in western Europe where almost every city reveals the massive arrival of migrants (Castles, 1993; Thraenhardt, 1992; Solomos & Wrench, 1993). Nowadays, international migration is acknowledged as “inevitable and can be regarded as a diverse international interaction, managed by a set of individuals, agencies and institutions” (Dobson et al., 2001: 1). It is a complex and diverse phenomenon, which affects not only the migrants themselves but also the sending and receiving countries (U.N. Population Fund, 2005). Indeed, migration nowadays is distinguished by its extreme diversification in terms of the many *types* of contemporary migrants, such as permanent settlers, temporary workers, refugees and asylum seekers, people who come for purposes of family reunion, etc (Shuval, 2001).

This diversity influences of course to a large extent migrants' psychological health and adaptation (Rogler, 1994). There are undoubtedly several reasons for studying how migration affects the psychological health of migrants as a distinct group. One of the reasons is the fact that migration represents a “natural experiment” (Dunn & Dyck, 2000) that allows for the investigation of the effects of different social environments on psychological health. Migration and the socio-cultural, economic and psychological changes people experience when they enter a new society provide an appropriate situation to investigate how social

dimensions get incorporated into the psychological make-up of individuals growing up within that society (Lazarus, 1997).

Another reason, more specific and policy-related, refers to migration and its impact on the European labour market. In most E.U. countries, including the U.K., there has been an overall trend of increase in incoming migrants who are at an economically active age, with the inflow in the period 1995-9 almost double that in 1975-9. When compared with the indigenous people, these populations “are less likely to be employed and more likely to be unemployed” (Glover et al., 2001: 31). But even for migrants who are currently employed, the general pattern shows they are more likely to be found in labour-intensive sectors with poor working conditions than indigenous populations, while their qualifications are often undervalued (Bell, 1997; Carter, 2003; Evers & van der Flier, 1998; Shields & Wheatley-Price, 2003). In the U.K., research has found that migrants who possess high educational qualifications acquired abroad and substantial pre-migration labour market experience are generally at a disadvantage in accessing work when compared to native populations in the U.K. (Wheatley Price, 2001).

A similar pattern has been noted for refugees, that is, a particular migrant subgroup. Several studies have found that although there is often a higher proportion of qualifications and skills among them compared to indigenous populations, refugees are consistently the most underemployed group in the U.K. (Anderson, 2005; Bloch, 1999a; Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Duke, 1996; Peabody Trust, 1999; Refugee Council, 1997; Shiferaw & Hagos, 2002).

Thus, migrants and refugees have been assumed to be a group particularly “vulnerable” to distress, as they may have to cope with stressful experiences, not only due to the general problems associated with adjustment to the new society, but also employment-related, like unemployment, job insecurity and experienced social discrimination (Clinton-Davis & Fassil, 1992). Undoubtedly, there is a current interest in policies that will promote the psychological health of migrants and refugees who are in or try to enter the labour market.

This study however did *not* examine whether refugees are healthy or not and which factors could improve their psychological health. But by exploring how this group perceived *themselves* the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being and how the social context influenced the shaping of their perceptions, important practical implications and policy-related suggestions emerge. These issues are discussed in the following sections, where the purposes of the study are made clear.

1.3 Migration and psychological health: a brief literature review

Before starting this section, it should be emphasised that it by no means covers the entire migration and psychological health literature. The main approaches that are described have been selected, in order to give an overview of the research area that is critically discussed. Of course the entire section is interspersed with several references, as needed for the purposes of the study.

Research on migration and psychological health was triggered by questions raised by researchers who were studying extensively ethnic minorities' psychological health: Perhaps the most intriguing question surrounding ethnic minority psychological health was whether there were specific characteristics inherent in ethnic minority status, which could increase the risk of psychological symptoms and disorders. Deterministic links between ethnic statuses and psychological health outcomes had been frequent in the health and "race" literature (Ahmad, 1996). For years it was conjectured that ethnic minority status was *itself* a stressful dimension leading to psychological illness¹ (Fabrega, 1990; Jones & Korchin, 1982; Vega & Rumbaut, 1991; Williams & Fenton, 1994). This assumption was not a mere academic matter, but went straight to the heart of debates about the etiology of psychological health, professional training and the organisation of services (Vega & Murphy, 1990). However, ethnic minority status cannot be easily disentangled from socioeconomic status, since both are indicators of other social-psychological dimensions, such as acculturation² and structural ones, including ethnic discrimination. Therefore there was limited evidence to support the view that minority status could be a proxy for life stress.

¹ For the United States the development of class systems stratified by ethnic statuses has been a central theme of its history, shaped over many generations by the European conquest of indigenous populations and by massive migration waves. After World War I, the Great Depression and World War II, migration to the U.S. declined when compared to the early nineteenth century, and by the 1950s "ethnicity" was seen as a fading phenomenon. But since the 1960s a resurgence of ethnic consciousness among native minorities in the wake of the civil rights movement, followed by mass new migration waves from Asia and Latin America, transformed the American ethnic mosaic (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). In this context, a new question arose: what are the psychological consequences of ethnic minority status? In Western Europe, this upsurge of interest in the psychological health of ethnic minorities started a bit later, i.e. in mid 1970s. It was stimulated by research in other countries (U.S., Canada and Australia) and by the increasing migrant populations (Cochrane, 1983).

² The classical definition of *acculturation* was presented by Redfield et al. (1936: 149): "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups". Originally of primary interest to anthropologists and sociologists, acculturation was first used in reference to group-level phenomena (Berry & Kim, 1988), but it has also been studied by psychologists as an individual-level variable: Graves (1967) distinguished between acculturation as a collective phenomenon, where a change occurs in the *culture* of a group and *psychological acculturation*, where there is a change in the *psychology* of the individual.

Gradually, it was acknowledged that there were two categories of stressful dimensions to which ethnic minorities were subjected that could operate as sources of distress. The first consists of *objective statuses* (that is, ascribed statuses) and *negative life events*, such as unemployment, fragmented social networks and financial hardships. But there are also *subjective* factors (that is, self-assessed), such as perceptions of unfair treatment or blocked opportunity. These two categories are related because perceptions can result from real life experiences and, in turn, perceptions can help shape future life experience (Vega & Rumbaut, 1991).

As more researchers acknowledged the above, they started examining in further detail circumstances specific to ethnic minorities, such as *migration-related experiences*, which combine objective situations as well as subjective dimensions and what they entailed for the psychological health of these populations. Indeed, migration-related experiences are an important characteristic in the lives of many minority populations, and they may strongly influence the level of psychological health problems within these groups (Williams & Harris-Reid, 1999).

There have been three main approaches, which can be identified in the migration and psychological health research area and each one suggests a different level of difficulty for the individual, while he/she tries to adapt in the new environment and attain a satisfactory level of psychological health: 1) social learning models, 2) clinical perspectives and 3) stress and coping approaches.

Social learning models have been derived from social and experimental psychology and have adapted Argyle's (1969) work on social skills and interpersonal behaviours to the domain of acculturation. Argyle identified practice, feedback, demonstration, and guidance as the most important components of the learning process and emphasised the significance of social interaction in facilitating the acquisition of social skills. Cross-cultural researchers have applied this line of enquiry to the migration and psychological health domain and have considered factors, which promote learning of new social skills and facilitate adaptation to an unfamiliar cultural context.

This approach has been referred to variously as "behavioural shifts" by Berry (1980), "culture learning" by Brislin, Landis and Brandt (1983) and "social skills acquisition" by Furnham & Bochner (1986). According to the social learning models, psychological changes are rather easy to accomplish; here, adaptation is considered to be a matter of learning a new range of behaviours that are appropriate for the new cultural context. This also requires some "culture shedding" (Berry, 1992) to occur, that is, the *unlearning* of behaviours that are no

longer adequate; and it may be accompanied by some moderate “culture conflict”, when incompatible behaviours create difficulties for the individual.

When major difficulties are experienced, then the “psychopathology” perspective has been regarded as the most appropriate (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Murphy, 1965). Here, changes in the cultural context exceed the individual’s capacity to cope because of the magnitude, speed, or some other aspect of the change, and they may lead to psychological disorders, such as clinical depression and incapacitating anxiety (Berry & Kim, 1988; Jayasuriya et al., 1992).

This clinical perspective was shaping for a long time the migration and psychological health area. Since it was thought that migration *inevitably* brings social and psychological problems (Malzberg & Lee, 1956), the hardships and adjustment difficulties of migrants and refugees in their receiving society were a major subject of investigation for many decades. Past studies often treated migration as a process of *uprooting*, using this metaphor to highlight the stress involved in leaving one’s native land and the difficulty of adaptation in the new environment. Handlin (1951), for example, called European migrants in the United States at the turn of the century “the uprooted” and described their “shock of alienation” at being wrenched from their traditional communal life. Marris (1980) advanced the concept of “uprooting of meaning” to emphasise the crisis associated with reintegration, while many others supported that excessive stress among migrants and refugees had led to a high prevalence of psychological illness among them (Cohon, 1981; Fittinger & Schwartz, 1981; Hull, 1979; Kuo, 1976; Sue & Morishima, 1982). In the past decade the clinical approach has also been called the “severe mental illness model”. This approach focuses on a group of migrants and/or refugees, which is relatively small in size, but urgently in need of clinical help because of severe disorders, some of which might have started before the migration experience (Bhugra & Jones, 2001; Silove, 1999).

Finally, in cases where serious conflict exists, then the third point of view has emerged as the appropriate one; here individuals may experience “culture shock” (Oberg, 1960) or “acculturative stress” (Berry, 1970, 1984, 1994) if they cannot easily change their behaviours. This view of migration-related experiences as a series of stress-provoking life changes that demand coping responses was shaped by early research on the impact of *life changes* on physical and psychological health (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) and later theorising on mediating factors in *stress and coping* reactions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Although the concept of “culture shock” is older and has had wide popular acceptance, “acculturative stress” is a more encompassing term as the “shock” suggests the

presence of only negative experiences. Berry (1997) selected this term instead of “culture shock” because “acculturative stress” does not focus only on negative outcomes and because it has been closely linked to psychological models of stress (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) as a response to stressful situations and thus has some theoretical foundation. Of course acculturative stress is not the outcome of the process, but rather a stage that individuals go through until they reach different psychological health outcomes, which depend on many dimensions both individual and social.

All the above approaches in the migration and psychological health area talk about affect, behaviour and cognitions, that is, how people feel, behave, think and perceive when they undergo the migration experience and when they are exposed to second-culture influences. Some approaches give more emphasis to one of these elements. For example, the stress and coping approach, which treats socio-cultural adaptation after the migration experience as an active, adaptive response, has emphasised the *affective* component. The social learning approach emphasises the *behavioural* element. Its main message is that for individuals to function effectively in a second-culture setting and have satisfactory levels of psychological health, they have to acquire relevant skills and knowledge specific to the new culture (Bochner, 2003).

Nevertheless, all these approaches use similar ways of assessing the elements they focus on while studying people’s psychological health. For example, the stress and coping approach uses scales adapted from the clinical literature to gauge the amount of physical and psychological health problems that migrants or refugees experience, or in positive terms, the extent of their well-being and satisfaction. The social skills approach also uses scales that measure different types of adaptation to the new culture. “Interaction adjustment” for example, which is defined as the ability to have casual interactions with members of the host society, is measured by scales that include items such as “I have no difficulty in asking strangers for directions”. In general, the typical approaches in the migration and psychological health area have been primarily using questionnaire items or standardised questions in closed interviews, that is, quantitative methods that capture the behavioural, affective or other dimension each approach is mostly interested in.

The social learning perspective has highlighted not so much the psychological but the behavioural dimension of the migration experience. At the same time the clinical or mental illness approach has overemphasised its pathological nature. Rogler et al. (1991), after reviewing the results of 30 studies, which followed this approach, noted that the understanding of the ways in which migration and psychological health are related is still

modest. Searle and Ward (1990) said that clinical research in this domain had not been well-integrated and Roth and Ekblad (1993) concluded that even though many studies have found increased psychopathology among migrants and refugees, the results are still not clear-cut. Indeed, overall investigations have provided no conclusive evidence to support the direct relationship between migration-related dimensions and psychological health problems because there are psychological outcomes known to be highly variable (Berry & Kim, 1988; Jayasuriya et al., 1992; Ward, 1996; Westermeyer, 1986).

Several studies demonstrated that migratory stresses tend to increase rates of psychological illness among migrant and refugee populations (Amaro et al., 1987; Aroian et al., 1998; Bhui et al., 2003; Cooper & David, 1986; Harrison et al., 1997; Jackson et al., 1996; Knipscheer et al., 2000; Kuo, 1995; Lum, 1995). But there have also been numerous investigations providing different results (Burnam et al., 1987; Cochrane & Stopes-Roe, 1977; Escobar et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2001; Fitingier & Schwartz, 1981; Pernice & Brook, 1994; Pernice et al., 2000; Ritsner et al., 2000; Zilber & Lerner, 1996). These studies have suggested that migration-related difficulties may not directly lead to psychological illness and that other sources of psychological illness may operate as well, such as individual differences in motivational factors for migration (Pernice et al., 2000), sense of control (Ward & Kennedy, 1992), received social support (Garcia et al., 2001) and perceived social support (Ager et al., 2002; Ritsner et al., 2000). Indeed, the emergence of several social and psychological dimensions (e.g. social support, sense of control), which combined with environmental constraints may reduce or increase distress or its adverse consequences on psychological health (Kessler et al., 1995) rendered the stress and coping approach as the most useful conceptual framework in the area of migration and psychological health (Shuval, 2001).

1.4 The stress and coping approach

The stress and coping theory proposes that there are several types of stress-generating events and circumstances that people use coping resources in their responses to them. Three major components of this stress and coping process have been identified: stressors, resources and manifestations of stress (Pearlin et al., 1981). “Stressors” refer to any condition having the potential to disrupt people’s adaptive abilities. “Coping resources” have been described as the

social and personal elements upon which people may draw when dealing with stressors (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). These resources can either directly deter distress or mediate/counter the potential adverse consequences of stressors (Ensel & Lin, 1991; Gore, 1985). Finally, the outcomes usually assessed in stress and coping research are subjective distress. The occurrence of stressful life events is linked to distress via the impact of stress upon the resources (Aneshensel, 1996: 118). In general, these components are closely interrelated, so that changes in one result in changes in the others (Pearlin, 1999).

Debates in the area of migration and psychological health

- **Conceptualising stressors and migrants' and/ or refugees' psychological health**

In the expanding research field of migration and psychological health, several problems have been arising, such as the lack of consensus as to the appropriate theoretical approaches for studying the phenomena and the lack of agreement on definitions of key concepts. Of course there has been convergence towards adopting the stress and coping process as a theoretical framework (Berry, 1997; Rogler, 1994; Ward et al., 1996). But there is still confusion with regards to specific conceptualisations (Aneshensel, 1999), especially when various statuses (e.g. ethnicity, SES) are taken into account (Aneshensel et al., 1991).

Indeed, it is not clear how to distinguish between stressors, because many types have been proposed, e.g. socio-cultural, such as racism (Essed, 1991; Williams et al., 1997), demographic, such as SES (Williams, 1996) or post-migration-related, such as social isolation, difficulties involved in acquiring a new language, the challenges of economic survival in the host country (Hovey, 1999; Mavreas & Bebbington, 1989; Pourgourides et al., 1995).

At the same time there is new debate on whether social support should be divided into ethnic and non-ethnic support. On the one hand, it has been assumed that migrants work actively to restore their networks in the new society. Kuo and Tsai (1986) who examined this “social networking hypothesis” in their study of Asian migrants, found indeed that social networks reduced experienced distress. Other studies too suggested that co-ethnic relations are the most powerful source of social support for migrants and /or refugees (Berry et al., 1987; Noh & Avison, 1996; Van Tran, 1987; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). On the other hand,

there has been support for the position that intense involvement and ties confined within ethnic networks can be dysfunctional (Salant & Lauderdale, 2003; Stansfeld & Sproston, 2002).

But the most persistent controversy has concerned the conceptualisation of “psychological health” and which aspects of the latter relate particularly to migrants. One debate refers to whether psychological health is a prerequisite of long-term adaptation and if so, how should adaptation be conceptualised. Several authors (e.g., Berry, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990) have considered psychological health as a part of the multifaceted process of psychological adaptation, which is conceptually distinct but empirically related to socio-cultural and economic adaptation. Others (Moghaddam et al., 1993; Schonpflug, 1997) have argued that adaptation is a multifaceted phenomenon which does not include psychological health as a component.

Another debate has been the conceptualisation of “self-esteem”. The major point of disagreement has been whether self-esteem should be best regarded as a generally positive or negative feeling about the self or as a collection of evaluations about personal assets and liabilities, in which case we are talking more about “self-concept” (Emler, 2001). In the case of migrants and refugees, it has been argued that it might be more appropriate, for understanding these groups’ psychological health, to study self-esteem as a collection of judgements about one’s self because their self-concept might change after the experience of migration. For example, it is likely that after migrating from a sociocentric environment, where people may be sociocentric as well, to a more egocentric society, the self-concept may be challenged to change (Bhugra, 2004). The same, i.e. change in self-concept, might happen if people who had a high SES in their home country, suddenly lose this status after migration (Aycan & Berry, 1996).

Another debate has to do with which aspects of psychological health should be mostly studied, that is, symptoms of distress, such as depression and anxiety or aspects of psychosocial well-being, such as life satisfaction. The term “psychological health” was originally intended to reflect a satisfactory if not optimal state of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). But research on migration and psychological health has tended to focus on the *distress* symptoms developed by migrants and refugees. In addition, research in this area has tended to regard these symptoms as *individual-level* phenomena and to underestimate the social processes that are inherent in these problems. But even when more positive aspects of well-being have been studied, there is disagreement on whether researchers should focus on

individual evaluations of one's life as a whole, or evaluations of satisfaction with life domains (Hird, 2003).

The concept of psychosocial well-being ("a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease" as popularised by the World Health Organisation (1996)) has provided an alternative perspective on psychological health. This is because it refers primarily to positive dimensions of psychological health, while its psychosocial dimension implies that there is a link between socio-cultural factors and psychological well-being (IOM, 2003) and that one can understand the psychological well-being of individuals or groups by looking also at the social factors that surround them.

Psychosocial well-being has been extensively studied during the past 20 years in the general population (Evans, 1994). Some authors have pointed out the need to approach migrants' psychological health from this less negative and less individualistic perspective (e.g. De Vries & Van Heck, 1994; Nicassio, 1985), but the studies examining migrants' or refugees' psychosocial well-being are only few (Birman et al., 2004; Christopher, 2000; Hermansson et al., 1996; Neto, 1995; Takeda, 2000; Young, 2001).

- **Assessing stressors and migrants' and /or refugees' psychological health**

Additional problems have been noted when researchers attempt to assess the stress and coping process in migrant populations (Pernice, 1994). In many studies looking at migration and psychological health it is possible that observed relationships among stress and coping components are due to errors among the measures of distinct constructs (especially due to conceptual problems with the translation of psychometric instruments). Measuring psychological health outcomes has been particularly problematic: historically, psychological disorder and normal functioning have been considered as polar ends of a scale, with self-reported symptoms of distress placed on a continuum with defined psychiatric disorders. However, there has been growing recognition that scales of distress capture qualitatively different phenomena than measures of psychiatric disorder. It has been suggested that psychological distress scales capture *not clinical diagnosis*, but aspects of demoralisation that are likely to be more common at the low end of the SES spectrum (Link & Dohrenwend, 1980; Lopez, 1989). Therefore researchers have been trying to pay more attention to distinctions between distress and disorder in studies of migrants' and refugees' psychological health outcomes (Williams & Harris-Reid, 1999).

There has also been some recognition that more *qualitative* approaches should be used to examine the stress and coping process in migrant populations. The main idea is that qualitative data are crucial for understanding the *meaning* of stressful experiences to the people who are being studied. Indeed, few researchers in the migration and psychological health area have pointed out the importance of using approaches which could elicit the participants' *own* perceptions of stress and coping, without having to answer closed questions and psychometric items set in advance by the researcher (Choudhry, 2001; Halabi, 2005; Herbst, 1992).

In addition, some researchers have argued against the typical way of doing research with migrants and/or refugees, which approaches them as beings detached from their social context. According to Shuval (2001), it is the failure to utilise in this research field a bio-psychosocial model (Engel, 1977) that has resulted in a focus on repairing parts of ill organisms rather than being concerned with the whole person and the socio-cultural context that surrounds him/her. In a similar line of thinking, Summerfield (2004) has pointed out that the traditional approaches to refugees' psychological health (including the stress and coping perspective) have led to this tendency to regard "stress", "trauma" and "PTSD" that is, "post-traumatic stress disorder" as psychiatric symptoms that need to be treated, while the person who actually manifests these symptoms is separated from them. In addition, Ingleby (2005) has noted that even though some clinicians who work with patients with PTSD try to pay attention to "the person in context", when the client is a refugee then it is usually the "trauma symptoms" which are highlighted and the context of their lives left aside.

It is clear from the above that the ongoing debates regarding the conceptualisation and assessment of stressors and psychological health outcomes will continue to trigger the research interest of academics in this area. The above debates derive from a dynamic dialogue, which however seems to unfold exclusively amongst researchers, while the participants' own perceptions of such issues are left aside. Indeed, the participants' voice seems to be missing from these debates. This means that the participants' perceptions, for example on whether they distinguish *themselves* between ethnic and non-ethnic support and between different types of adaptation, have *not* been taken into account in mainstream stress and coping research with migrants and/or refugees. It would be therefore very interesting to see how the participants themselves would make sense of stress and coping while talking about their experiences and their well-being.

It should be noted that there are few empirical studies looking into refugees' psychological health, which have taken into account some of the above critical points.

Birman et al. (2004), Takeda (2000), and Young (2001) have actually examined aspects of refugees' psychosocial well-being instead of negative psychological symptoms. Others (Duke, 1996; Ferguson and Barclay, 2002; Papadopoulos et al., 2004) have implemented qualitative methods, which, as already mentioned, are rather rarely used in this research area. However, none of them have attempted to explore the participants' perceptions with regards to their experiences and their psychological health, *and* also look at how they perceive more positive and psychosocial aspects of the latter. In the following pages these studies are presented and critically discussed, for justifying the research question of this study. In the meantime, it is pertinent to close this section on stress and coping by discussing how this area has shaped negatively the images assigned to refugees.

How the stress and coping research area has contributed to the negative images assigned to refugees

From the previous literature review one can see that stress, migration-related experiences and psychological health have been strongly linked, which has resulted to the assumption that many migrants and especially refugees are vulnerable to stress and even characterised by it for varying periods of time (Antonovksy, 1987; Shuval, 1992). Even though the stress and coping approach has meant to provide a less disorder-oriented outlook on migrants' and refugees' psychological health than the clinical approach, it nevertheless, continues to cultivate the "pathological" image of migrants and refugees³. Indeed, in studies that employed a stress and coping approach, both migrant and refugee statuses have been associated with higher levels of stress-related psychological problems, such as anxiety,

³ It should be noted that the stress and coping research area is not the only "culprit" for the pathological image assigned to refugees. Historically, the first waves of refugees appeared in the 20th century as Europeans were fleeing during a world war and/ or from political persecution into neighbouring countries. The refugee issue however at the end of the same century became a matter of massive flows of destitute people from developing countries seeking asylum in other developing but mainly other western countries (Marx, 1990). In addition, only in the past 25 years has resettlement involved transcontinental moves of people of radically different cultural orientations (Cohen & Joly, 1989). For the first ten or so of those years, service providers in refugee-receiving countries were unfamiliar with the refugees' languages and socio-political backgrounds. Host governments' first health concern was protection of the host population from diseases that refugees could import. Therefore, the *preoccupation with disease* promoted the erroneous impression that a great majority of refugees are fraught with serious disorders (Starr & Roberts, 1982). In turn, this preoccupation pervaded refugee-related policy, program development and research and it had effects that still haunt refugees' health picture today (Muecke, 1992). The consequences include a "focus on pathology" of refugees, such that medical problems became the primary route for refugee recourse when in any kind of pain, whether medical, social or psychological (Watters, 2001).

depression, low self-esteem, psychosomatic illnesses, and post-traumatic stress disorders (Aroian & Norris, 2000; Berry et al., 1987; Furnham & Shiekh, 1993; Lin, 1986; Mavreas & Bebbington, 1990; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990).

Certain subgroups are commonly considered to be at a relatively high risk. These “vulnerable” groups include people migrating on their own, children and adolescents, women, elderly and single parent families. With regards to refugees, those who may have suffered traumas before migrating and adverse experiences during the transition (such as separation from family, legal constraints, limited access to mainstream employment, financial hardship) have been considered to be especially prone to developing psychological and physical distress symptoms (Black, 1994; Hirayama et al., 1993; Rumbaut, 1989, 1991; Shiferaw & Hagos, 2002; Westermeyer et al., 1984).

In the following quote by Ahearn (2000), we can clearly see this “pathology-prone” focus that has been prevalent in the area of refugees’ psychological health: “The study of refugee mental health has been dominated by an orientation toward psychology and psychiatry [...] It is useful to examine the key concepts that are most often utilised in the analysis of refugee mental health in order to understand current approaches to the measurement of the psychological and social consequences of forced migration. These are the concepts of loss, separation, stress and coping, social supports and trauma” (p. 5).

Apart from the above “pathology-prone” focus while studying refugees, it should be noted that they have been frequently approached in the research process as beings, detached from their social context. And indeed, if one looks at the definition of a “stressful condition” (i.e. the state where a person cannot cope with a disturbing situation and thus homeostasis is disrupted (Scott & Howard, 1970)), then it is no surprise that in the migration and psychological health area people have not been regarded as whole entities whose reactions are also influenced by the social context (i.e. the general cultural context where the interviewees and the researchers meet, as well as the time and place of the interview and the unfolding dynamics between researcher and participants). Rather they have been viewed as detached from the social context organisms whose stress and coping reactions and psychological health outcomes can be isolated and merely elicited through an interview or a questionnaire (Das-Munshi, 2005).

Even though the 1990s saw the emergence of some critical views on the pathological and individualistic focus when studying refugees’ psychological health (Kleber et al., 1992; Summerfield, 1999), the negative images assigned to refugees have not faded away. On the contrary, they have been reinforced by the media coverage and seem to have become

stereotypes in contemporary Western societies, including the U.K. (Donnellan, 2002; MORI, 2002). This issue is discussed in the following pages, where the characteristics of the research population are described in detail. Now that the main research trend in the area of refugees' psychological health has been presented, it is relevant to discuss some empirical studies that adopted the stress and coping theory, and addressed indeed either the issue of the pathology-prone focus or the individualistic one while studying refugees' psychological health.

1.5 Empirical studies on the relation between post-migration experiences and psychological health in refugee populations

The following studies are relevant to the present one because they were based on the stress and coping theory and they also looked specifically at refugees and /or asylum seekers. While each study is described, the emphasis is put on its goals, the methodology it used and the main findings.

- **Takeda (2000)** examined the psychological and economic adaptation in a sample of 105 Iraqi male refugees who resettled to the U.S. in the 90's. The main *goal* of the study was to look at what adaptation problems refugees experience, but also what factors affect their adaptation, and in specific whether typically studied predictor variables, such as motivation for migration, English language proficiency, social support and length of residence, affect the participants' adaptation.

The *method* used for measuring psychological adaptation was the Center for Epidemic Studies Depression scale (CES-d), which measures apart from depressive affect and interpersonal problems, also positive affect and somatic activities. For economic adaptation, this study examined income, employment status, occupations in both Iraq and the new country and the utilisation of public assistance.

The *results* showed that with regards to stressors, the participants were struggling for economic self-sufficiency: one out of every five participants was unemployed. In addition, those who were more educated were having more economic problems. Although most educated respondents in this study took low-paid jobs, some could not retain them for long due to experienced distress and in specific because of feelings of embarrassment and frustration. However, their economic adaptation seemed to be improving with time: the longer they stayed in the U.S., the more they engaged in full-time positions, while some who had been in the U.S. for more than a year, had started going to graduate school

to obtain a diploma or licence. The score of the CES-D scale indicated that 75% of the participants were having serious psychological distress. This score correlated significantly with motivation for migration, but not with employment status, income or the length of stay in the country. As far as resources are concerned, social support from family was a significant predictor for refugees' psychological adaptation, while social support from Arabic friends was the stronger predictor for better economic adaptation.

- **Young (2001)** studied the relation between stress and subjective well-being in 60 recently-arrived and 60 established Salvadoran refugees in Canada. The main *goal* of this study was to examine the moderating effects of social and personal resources on the stress and well-being-relationship. Hassles (e.g. finances and work-issues), as well as life events (e.g. serious injury, separation from spouse) and migration-related stressors (e.g. social isolation) were assessed. In addition, locus of control and social support were also assessed while examining the participants' psychosocial resources. Finally, subjective well-being was measured in terms of positive dimensions of psychological health such as quality of life and life satisfaction.

Varying *results* were found for both groups. For recent refugees, personal resources were found to mediate migration-related stress. In particular, locus of control buffered the relationships between migration stress and quality of life and life satisfaction, whereas self-esteem buffered the migration stress-quality of life relation. For established refugees, social support moderated the relationship between life events and life satisfaction and it also buffered the effects of hassles on quality of life. Overall, the results underscored the importance of personal and social resources for the well-being of the participants. It appears that for recently-arrived refugees, who have had little control over significant events in their lives, having an internal locus of control were important resources in dealing with loss of homeland and "culture shock". The fact that social support was less prominent for these recent refugees is perhaps not surprising as they primarily focus on meeting basic needs (e.g. looking for a job, finding schools for their children), leaving little time to develop social networks. In the case of established refugees however, both social and personal resources buffered stress.

- **Birman et al., (2004)** studied the psychosocial and work-related adaptation of 212 adult Vietnamese refugees who had come to the U.S. when they were adults- at least 20 years

old- and lived in the two large communities of resettlement in Maryland. The *research question* referring to psychosocial adaptation addressed the way in which refugees acculturate to the American culture, the extent to which these refugees socialise with Americans and other Asian migrants and also who are the people to whom they can turn for social support.

Psychological adaptation was *measured* in terms of alienation from American culture and symptoms of depression, anxiety and overall distress but also in terms of life satisfaction. Finally, with regards to work-related adaptation, the study examined what the employment trajectories for the refugees in the U.S. are and how their job satisfaction progresses over time.

The *findings* suggested that refugees had encountered many difficulties with the English language and other aspects of acculturation to the U.S. for many years after resettlement. Pre-migration traumatic events experienced in Vietnam also played an important role in their psychological adaptation. Economic adjustment plays a crucial role in the adaptation of refugees to life in the U.S. The percentage of employed refugees was high (85%). However, while socioeconomic job status appeared to grow with each successive job and time in the U.S., over time their job satisfaction remained moderate, while psychological distress increased and life satisfaction decreased with length of residence in the U.S. As far as resources are concerned, it was found that family and other Vietnamese friends were very important for refugees' life satisfaction and also their work-related adaptation (because Vietnamese friends play the most important role in helping refugees to find work).

- **Duke (1996)** studied the resettlement experiences of refugees in the U.K. The main *goal* of the research was to explore the experiences of refugees in gaining access to housing and employment. However, these issues could not be viewed in isolation from other related problems of resettlement such as education, language, health and the experiences in their home countries that led to their flights. Therefore, these areas were also included in the study.

The *methodology* used in this research study entailed interviews with 263 refugees of different nationalities, resident in various locations throughout Britain. The research questions addressed the general problems that refugees had experienced in adapting to their new social and economic environment, such as language difficulties, unemployment, underemployment and difficulties in securing suitable accommodation. The participants

were also asked about availability of social support in the communities where they lived and about psychological health outcomes, such as stress, anxiety and depression.

The *findings* revealed that at the time of the interviews, almost all participants could speak a little English, but one third were still experiencing problems. With regards to employment experiences, there was a high rate of unemployment among the refugees, with only just over one-quarter of the sample being employed. The main barriers to employment identified by the participants themselves were the forced breaks in their careers when they left their home countries, lack of work experience in the U.K., insufficient fluency in English and discrimination. It should be added that those who had been able to get jobs were often underemployed, working at lower levels than those for which they were formally qualified. In addition, the problem of securing suitable accommodation was predominant in the early years of settlement. The participants experienced high levels of stress, anxiety and depression, since their arrival in the U.K. These feelings were attributed to events in their home countries, uncertainty about their future in Britain, unemployment, financial difficulties and housing problems. The participants who did not have access to community groups or informal ethnic networks faced a three to four times higher risk of depression.

- **Ferguson and Barclay (2002)** examined the perspectives that asylum seekers in Glasgow held with regards to psychological health issues, with the ultimate *goal* of understanding the psychological health needs of this group and suggesting new services or changes to existing services to help these individuals cope with the pressures they had experienced.

The research *methodology* entailed seven focus groups that consisted of between four and six participants, as well as nine individual interviews with asylum seekers of different nationalities, resident in Glasgow. The research questions addressed the major factors which the participants identified as impacting on their psychological health and well-being, the main ways in which the participants coped with these pressures, whether they regarded these coping strategies as helpful and finally what new services or alterations to existing services they would like to see to help them cope with the pressures they had experienced.

The *findings* suggested that the participants had experienced several problems, which, according to them, had an impact on their psychological health: verbal and physical racist harassment; the policy of dispersing asylum seekers to Glasgow and other parts of Britain; waiting for a decision from the Home Office on their immigration status; social

isolation and childcare problems. All these “problems in living” experienced by the participants were seen as having a cumulative and damaging effect on their psychological health. The most common response to the psychological health problems with which asylum seekers presented seemed to be medication. While some participants valued these treatments as necessary to enable them to function on a daily basis, several individuals expressed frustration that such a medical response did not address what they saw as their real problems. Finally, the participants strongly emphasised their desire for social integration, both as a goal in itself and also to benefit their psychological health.

- **Papadopoulos et al. (2004)** explored Ethiopian refugees’ and asylum seekers’ experiences of migration, adaptation and settlement in the U.K. and their physical and psychological health beliefs and practices.

The *methodology* used entailed semi-structured, in-depth interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of 106 Ethiopians resident in the U.K.

The *findings* revealed that the majority of the participants had fled Ethiopia due to political reasons. Many of the participants faced difficulties with the immigration system, housing and social services and felt socially isolated. Many also had problems with gaining employment or employment appropriate to their qualifications. Most interviewees believed that happiness was a prerequisite and also an indication of healthiness. On the other hand, the majority believed that sickness was caused by disease and mental illness is caused by supernatural and psychosocial causes. They also believed that the stress of adaptation and settlement affected their mental health and led to depression. Most participants sought the help of their GP in the first instance of illness, although some experienced difficulties accessing health services due to language problems and poor understanding of the primary healthcare system.

Critical points on the empirical studies of refugees’ migration experiences and psychological health

The previous six studies examined the relationship between pre- and post-migration experiences and psychological health and well-being in refugee populations. Their findings enhance our understanding of which dimensions impact on refugees’ psychological health and in which ways, and have important implications regarding the interventions that need to

be made to address the psychological health needs of refugees. They were chosen as being relevant to the present study because they were based on the stress and coping theory and they also looked specifically at refugees. Despite these similarities with my study, there are a number of issues that require critical analysis.

In the previous pages some research points in the area of migration and psychological health were discussed and in particular in the migration and psychological health area through a *stress* and *coping* approach. These points referred to the definition and assessment of stressors and of psychological health and they respectively pointed out the need to: 1) conceptualise psychological health not only in terms of individual pathological symptoms but also along more positive and psychosocial dimensions and 2) use more *qualitative* approaches while studying migrants' or refugees' psychological health, so that the participants can convey their own perceptions, without having to answer closed questions and psychometric items set in advance by the interviewer.

The studies described above have actually taken into account some of these points. For example, Birman et al. (2004) examined not only individual and pathological aspects of psychological health, but also positive and psychosocial aspects of the latter (e.g. depression, anxiety but also life satisfaction). Takeda (2000) examined psychological adaptation through depressive affect and interpersonal problems, but also through positive affect. At the same time, Young (2001) studied only positive and psychosocial dimensions of well-being such as life satisfaction. This consideration of positive and psychosocial dimensions of psychological health signifies an important step in the migration and psychological health-area, which has been focusing on the participants' individual, pathological symptoms.

The second point, that is, using more qualitative approaches, was taken into account in the studies that looked at refugees and/ or asylum seekers in the U.K., i.e. the studies by Duke (1996), Ferguson and Barclay (2002) and Papadopoulos et al., (2004). Indeed they all used qualitative methods such as in-depth and /or semi-structured interviews, as well as focus groups. This certainly gave the opportunity to the participants to identify the stressors that had an impact on their well-being and to point out how they would like these pressures to be alleviated at a personal, local or societal level.

However, none of these studies took *both* issues into account, that is, exploring people's own perceptions *and* looking at more positive and psychosocial outcomes. One could say that these studies did not really counter the negative images assigned to refugees that were already discussed. At the same time, these studies did not explore another crucial issue, which goes beyond qualitative or quantitative methodology, as well as beyond positive

or negative definitions of psychological health. This issue refers to how the social context influenced the participants' perceptions and is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

In the previous pages, most studies in the psychological health and migration-area were criticised for not leaving open the possibility that migration-related stressors would be discussed by the participants, but would *not* be necessarily connected to negative and individual aspects of psychological health such as depression, distress or anxiety. The three studies described above that used qualitative methods in a way were not so much different from the studies that were criticised, since they asked the participants only about negative and individual psychological health aspects. The other studies that used more standardised, quantitative methods apparently avoided the “individual pathology focus”, but they nevertheless directed the participants by asking them again to respond to predefined stress and coping items.

Ferguson and Barclay (2002) clearly discussed why they decided to employ for the purposes of their research study, the stress model of psychological health, which suggests that “episodes of mental disorder or distress occur as a result of stress, enduring vulnerability and coping difficulties” (Onyett, 1992). These authors explained why they chose the stress model rather than an “illness” model, because the former gives a more holistic approach to these individuals' psychological health needs, i.e. it goes beyond medical symptoms and additionally looks at the social and economic problems that may cause the physical symptoms. However, this stress approach still examined *problems* and did not seem to leave space for more positive experiences to emerge. It is important to note that I would certainly not underestimate the pressures that these groups undergo and may impact on their psychological health. Nevertheless, I was interested in exploring whether they would regard themselves as vulnerable/ passive, as they are typically portrayed, while trying to cope with these pressures.

1.6 Framing the research question

- **Research population**

In order to frame the research question it is important to discuss the choice of the research population, that is, highly educated refugees. It is useful first of all to give some definitions of migrant populations.

The concept of “migrant” is not a simple one. Over the years many typologies have been suggested, normally based on distance moved, time spent away or motivation. There is no consensus on what migration is, although most definitions assume a move of home (Dobson et al., 2001). Furthermore, types of migration are not immutable. Individuals classed as one type of migrant may become another and, perhaps, back again. For example, labour migrants move in and out of the labour market, migrants coming for purposes of family reunion go to work and refugees naturalise and settle down thus the permutations are endless (Glover et al., 2001).

Against a background of changing concepts and inadequate statistical sources for the legal definition of “migrant”, some other categories are more clearly described: In the UN Refugee Convention of 1951, Article 1 Paragraph (2), the term *Refugee* is defined as any person: *Who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted of reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to return to it.* (UN, 21 July 1951).

The legal definition of refugee⁴ is quite limited and it has become increasingly difficult to show clearly genuine refugees as distinct to migrants, because reasons for migration are often intertwined. However, a distinction is frequently drawn between these two populations, in terms of their *motivation*, that is, the movement of migrants unlike refugees is triggered by economic push or pull factors. Although their movement may not be absolutely voluntary they are more likely to be able to choose their destinations and can go home without fear of persecution (Bhugra & Jones, 2001).

As this study focuses on refugees in the U.K., the current situation and some of their characteristics are mentioned below:

- **Migration status:** The 1951 Convention and the Bellagio Protocol, together with a number of other conventions, have been subjected to a variety of interpretations, with the result that different types of refugees have been distinguished (Joly & Nettleton, 1990). The first group consists of “quota” refugees, who are admitted under a programme

⁴ The term “refugee” is used in two different senses. Sometimes it includes all displaced persons who have applied for asylum, regardless of the outcome of their application. On other occasions, it refers to those who have been granted refugee status under the U.N. Convention only (Rosenkranz, 2000). In the present study, unless otherwise specified, the second definition of refugees will be used.

specifically designed for them by the international community, and who are automatically granted refugee status under the Convention. The second group (“non-quota” refugees) consists of those who are not admitted as part of a programme, but come individually and apply for asylum in the country of arrival (Duke, 1996). Some of these applicants are granted refugee status, while others fall outside the definition in the Convention, but due to humanitarian reasons such as civil war, famine, economic deprivation or discrimination, would not be forced to return to the country from which they are fleeing (Salt et al., 1994). These groups are granted humanitarian statuses, which are currently reported as “Humanitarian Protection” (HP) and “Discretionary Leave” (DL) (Home Office, 2003).

- **Country of origin:** there is a wide spread of source countries and the largest include Somalia, Iraq, China, Zimbabwe and Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In 2004 the main 5 nationalities of asylum applicants were Iranian (3,455), Somali (2,585), Chinese (2,365), Zimbabwean (2,065) and Pakistani (1,710) (Heath & Jeffries, 2005).
- **Age structure and gender:** The majority of principal applicants in 2004 were under 35 years old (82 per cent), 15 per cent aged between 35 and 49 and just 3 per cent aged 50 or older. 70 per cent of principal applicants in 2004 were male, compared with 69 per cent in 2003 and 74 per cent in 2002 (Heath & Jeffries, 2005)
- **Physical and mental health status:** Refugees present to GPs with a large number of health concerns. Some studies estimated that one in six refugees in the U.K. had a physical health problem severe enough to affect their way of life, such as chronic heart disease, hypertension and psychiatric concerns (Burnet et al., 2001; Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Duke, 1996). Many refugees have also been found to experience psychological health problems, such as stress, depression or anxiety. These may stem from traumatic events in their home countries, such as torture, imprisonment and bereavement, but also from adverse experiences during settlement in the receiving country, such as social and cultural isolation, unemployment, accommodation problems and separation of families (Hargreaves et al., 2000; King’s Fund, 2000).
- **Education and employment:** The majority of refugees are young, and are dominated by those in the most economically active age groups (Dobson et al., 2001; Heath et al., 2003). However, many studies have highlighted the high levels of unemployment among refugees in the U.K., with estimated rates varying from 75% to 90% depending on methodology and geographical area (Africa Educational Trust, 1998; Anderson, 2005;

McFarland & Walsh, 1995; Refugee Council et al., 1999). Several factors have been suggested to explain why refugees have limited access to employment, such as lack of adequate spoken and written English, lack of work experience gained in the U.K., non recognition of qualifications obtained overseas, lack of information about employment and training services, lack of knowledge about the U.K. job search culture, cultural barriers to effective job seeking and ethnic discrimination by employers (Fyvie & Ager, 2003; Refugee Council, 1999).

Underemployment has been acknowledged to be another major problem. The majority of refugees work in informal, short term, low paid, menial jobs, while only a small proportion of refugees has a steady career pattern, usually after an initial short period of unemployment (Bloch, 1997, 1999a; Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Duke, 1996; Lightbody et al., 1997; Peabody Trust, 1999; Refugee Council, 1997; Shiferaw & Hagos, 2002).

This is a serious problem for all refugees in the U.K. but especially for the estimated one third of this population who are graduates or have professional qualifications (Davenport, 2004; Waddington, 2005).

By saying “high levels of education” what is meant is that many refugees have successfully completed in their home countries tertiary education, that is, the non-compulsory educational level following secondary education, which is normally taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education as well as vocational education and training. In the international context, people who have completed tertiary education are qualified from level 5 and above, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 1997), while in the British context highly educated people are qualified from level 4 and above of the National Vocational Qualifications. From the above we can see that one third of refugees who currently live in the U.K. have indeed high levels of education.

Of course refugees’ skills and qualifications must be complemented with additional training, usually in IT, as well as English language lessons, since English language proficiency is crucial to refugees’ labour market participation and the type of employment they have (Bloch, 2002). Nevertheless, this does not reduce in any way the value of their qualifications and consequently the contribution they could make to the host economy.

Therefore by looking at the literature review and the above demographics, it can be easily assumed that highly educated refugees who arrive to the U.K. and face adverse employment experiences are susceptible to developing stress symptoms, psychological illness

etc. So the pathological image of the “vulnerable” and “passive” refugee would seem to apply especially to people with these features.

In the U.K. the above views of refugees have been and still are reinforced by the media coverage, which frequently portrays refugees and asylum seekers as prone to serious mental health problems, but also as a burden in the local community because they will abuse the available social resources (Roberts & Harris, 2002). Bailey (2005) also uses the term “asylum madness” while describing the psychopathological images used by the press to represent refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K.

Moreover, *highly educated* refugees are regarded as being at an especially high-risk, not only of suffering from stress symptoms, but also from lack of motivation. There have been studies showing that status inconsistency (the situation in which refugees have lost the socioeconomic status from their last socioeconomic position/job in their home country to their most recent one in the host country) is a stressful situation that exacerbates the psychological problems of adaptation (Beiser et al., 1993; Hermansson et al., 2002; Iredale, 1994; Starr & Roberts, 1982; Vinokurov et al., 2000). In the case of refugees who face employment related problems, such as unemployment, another negative image –or rather stereotype- has arisen, i.e. that of the “impoverished”, “passive” and thus “useless” refugee who is at best expected to be a grateful victim and at worst considered to be abusing the asylum system (Stubbs, 2005).

It should be noted that the stereotype of the “impoverished” and “useless” refugee has been usually assigned to refugees from war-torn countries such as former-Yugoslavia or to refugee groups from Africa (Gibney, 1999). These people are mainly constituted in terms of their suffering, which has come almost to define them (Malkki, 1996). At the same time, due to a recent increase in anti-Islamic feeling since 9/11, the stereotype of the person who exploits the asylum system is assigned more often to refugees and asylum seekers originating from the Middle East or other Muslim countries, while the stereotype of the “terrorist threat” is currently assigned almost exclusively to men originating from these countries (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Boumediene-Thiery, 2004; Said, 2003; Threadgold, 2002).

The above images, along with other negative representations of displaced persons in the English-speaking press internationally, were examined by Hanyes et al. (2004). These researchers explored the role of the media in excluding refugees and asylum seekers through the production and reproduction of “othering” discourses. Specifically, they deconstructed negative media discourses to demonstrate their basis in notions of “otherness” and “threat”. A main representation within the five key negative frames identified within international media

discourse was that refugees and asylum seekers are indeed represented as a “burden on resources”, that is, as a useless group who will abuse the benefit system (other negative frames referred to these populations as a “threat to national and local integrity”, “criminal elements”, “social deviants” and “illegal aliens”).

Finally, Buchanan et al. (2003) also studied the prevalence of such images in media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K. The analysis of how these populations are portrayed by the print and broadcast media revealed that the asylum and immigration debate has become so confused that terms which do not exist in law, such as “illegal asylum seeker” and “would-be refugee” have turned into common currency, used by journalists and politicians alike, while their portrayal as “lucky groups who live at taxpayers’ expense” was prevalent throughout these media.

It is this combination of features attributed to refugees in the U.K., that is, having high educational background, facing long-term unemployment and/or underemployment and being “vulnerable” and/or “passive” that prompted me to choose this population for the purposes of this research study. At the same time, this group “is almost by definition a select and atypical group, able to plan, pay for and undertake a hazardous and uncertain enterprise” (Ingleby, 2005: 3). Therefore the observation that these are primarily highly motivated people who took the radical decision to leave their countries for improving their lives, made it even more interesting to explore whether they will regard themselves as “vulnerable” and “passive”.

- **Highly educated refugees’ perceptions of the relation between post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being**

In the literature review carried out in the previous pages we can see how the stress and coping approach has influenced the research area of migration and psychological health. In addition, in the above critical discussion we can see the existing debates in this research area. The issues of how to conceptualise and assess stressors and psychological health outcomes highlight the potential value of: 1) examining not only negative and individual aspects of psychological health, but also its positive and psychosocial dimensions and 2) deriving the perceptions that migrants and /or refugees form regarding their experiences and their well-being.

However, one issue still remains: that psychological health is something, which is predefined by us, the researchers, and the participants are asked to respond to predefined items/questions that are supposed to reflect their psychological health outcomes. This is certainly useful for refugee groups who reside in western countries because in order for them to receive psychological treatment, they must be diagnosed according to some standardised criteria. But at the same time, it does not allow for refugees' *own* perceptions of their psychological health to emerge.

Thus by taking into account the above, I believe it would be challenging and potentially valuable to this field to explore how this group would perceive themselves the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being, in terms of stress and coping. By focusing on "psychosocial well-being" I wanted to explore *not* only how they would regard the psychological problems they may have because of difficulties in the host country (which has been already studied in previous research), but on how they would also perceive *positive* and *psychosocial* aspects of psychological health. In addition, by looking at the perceptions these individuals formed regarding the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being, I intended to see the meanings *they* would assign to their experiences and well-being outcomes, instead of assessing these through predefined stress and coping items.

Another important issue explored in this study is the influence that the social context had on the participants' perceptions of their experiences in the U.K. and their well-being. The importance of approaching the participants and exploring their perceptions not as isolated viewpoints, but as sense-making ways embedded in a social context and how this study worked towards this goal is discussed in the third chapter.

Finally, as noted in the previous pages, many types of stressors have been studied in the area of migration and psychological health, such as socio-cultural, demographic and post-migration-related. Even though in this research I will focus on post-migration stressors, I will also look at employment-related ones. It is important then at this point to note why the research question addressed also how refugees perceive the relation between their *employment* experiences in the U.K. and their psychosocial well-being. It has been acknowledged that employment and thus, economic integration to the new society are crucial to migrants' and refugees' adaptation and psychological health (Finnan, 1981; Joly, 1996; Lindley, 2002; Marshall, 1992; Phillips, 1989; Robinson, 1986; Srinivasan, 1994). However, in the "pathology-prone" tradition of research on these populations' psychological health, the focus has been on adverse employment experiences which, considered as powerful stressors,

can exacerbate psychological problems (Beiser et al., 1993; Field, 1985; Lin, 1986; Schwarzer et al., 1994; Stein, 1986). This is why refugees who face employment-related problems are portrayed with a similarly negative image as the “vulnerable” one, i.e. the image of the “passive” refugee.

In order to understand the different connotations of “adverse employment experiences”, it is important to look at the social and economic context of employment and unemployment (Fraser & Burchell, 2001). What is notable in the U.K. context is that the nature of the refugee unemployment problem has been described as a situation with multifaceted obstacles, which impede refugees’ access to the labour market and/ or delay integration into the workforce (Ahipeaud, 1998; Bloch, 1999a; Clark, 1992).

Refugee employment barriers in the U.K. have been classified into two categories, *internal* and *external* (Shiferaw & Hagos, 2002). It is supported that the internal barriers are those for which refugees hold some responsibility, such as inadequate knowledge of spoken and written English, or the issue of *culture* (as many refugees come from countries where the share of the corporate private sector is limited, they are not used to the competitive job search culture of western economies (Marshall, 1989)). An additional internal barrier seems to be the *lack of appropriate skills*. Many refugees may have higher levels of formal educational qualification (per population) than other groups. However, quite often these qualifications must be complemented by other skills (for example, technological, teamwork and communication skills). The fact that refugees tend to remain outside the workforce not only implies that they cannot keep pace with the changing skill demand of the economy, but also that they could lose the knowledge-based skill they have.

There are also external barriers, that is, that are beyond refugees’ influence and which can only be mediated by legislation and appropriate policies. Examples of such barriers are the *lack of accessible information* (Barer, 1999), since advice services are very limited and many people are not even aware of their availability (Audit Commission, 2000; Bloch, 1996) and *racism and discrimination*, which has been frequently mentioned as the main factor preventing access to the labour market (Bach & Carroll-Seguin, 1986; Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Carter, 2003; The Industrial Society, 1999; Salinas, 1997).

The above barriers have been characterised as internal and external but what would be particularly interesting and also challenging, since it has been missing from the existing literature, is to explore how refugees *themselves* would regard them, that is, whether they would attribute these problems to themselves or to others. The challenge then that emerged for this research was to attempt to explore how refugees with these characteristics would

form *themselves* their perceptions with regards to the relation between their post-migration experiences (including employment experiences) and their well-being. The stress and coping approach per se did not provide my theoretical framework (as seen in the next chapter), however I was interested in seeing how the participants would incorporate these concepts into their own understanding of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being. If these participants' perceptions would challenge the stereotypical assumptions of "vulnerability" and "passivity" that stem to a large extent from the stress and coping tradition, then my research findings could have a particular weight and relevance.

- **How the social context influences the shaping of the participants' perceptions**

Of course in order to derive the participants' perceptions it is not sufficient to simply use qualitative methods, that is, open-ended interviews instead of closed ones or standardised questionnaires. What is also crucial is to use a framework, which highlights the importance of deriving subjective perceptions and also to take into consideration the social context and how this affects the way the interviewees shape their perceptions. This requires first of all that the researcher is mindful of the power relations between him/her and the interviewees, which are present in the research process and that he/she critically reflects on how these can influence the research process as well as the research findings. The above issue and how the present study approached the participants not as beings detached from this social context are extensively discussed in the third chapter. The theoretical issues of choosing a framework that supports and promotes people's subjectivity are discussed in detail in the following chapter. In conclusion, the research question of this study addresses how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being and also how the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This chapter introduced the goals and ideas behind this study and elaborated on the development of the research question and the choice of the population, after reviewing some of the main approaches in the migration and psychological health-area, with an emphasis on

the stress and coping approach. Now that the population and the research question have been defined, some important theoretical considerations should be discussed.

Chapter Two presents in detail the framework of stress and coping, which does not provide the theoretical basis of this study but it should be discussed, since the data derived from the empirical parts of the study will dialogue with the stress and coping concepts. The second chapter then presents an alternative stress and coping perspective, i.e. the stress and coping approach where the individual is regarded along the dimension of psychological activism (Thoits, 1994). The presentation of the latter is important because once again the empirical data will dialogue with the ideas of psychological activism in Chapters Four and Six.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology that was adopted in the first empirical part. After discussing the main research paradigms used in social sciences, the positivist paradigm is critically reviewed and then there is an introduction to constructivism, which informed both empirical parts of the study. The use of qualitative methodology is discussed and justified, by presenting the research design. The remaining part of the chapter focuses precisely on this, i.e. the research design, which includes discussions about the background of the study, the way the participants were selected, the interview agenda and the way the interview material was analysed.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings of the first empirical part, which looked at how refugees perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with fifteen highly educated refugees, who at the time of the interview were residing in the U.K. The interview agenda was formed along the stress and coping framework, this is why the participants were asked to discuss their post-migration experiences (with an emphasis on employment related experiences), psychosocial resources and well-being outcomes. The interviews were analysed qualitatively, by the method of thematic networks analysis. Three distinct *subjective theories* emerged that three subgroups of participants held with regards to the relation between their experiences and their psychosocial well-being.

The first empirical part revealed individual perceptions of the relation between post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being, but what was also needed was to explore how the social context shaped these perceptions. This meant that the method used in the second empirical part should stay as close as possible to the interviewees' perceptions, but should also reveal how the social context shaped these perceptions. For these reasons another

method was used, i.e. autobiographical narrative interviewing for gaining further insight into the research questions.

The methodological changes are further discussed and justified in Chapter Five. In particular, the first part of the chapter presents the narrative approach and discusses why autobiographical narrative interviewing was chosen instead of semi-structured interviewing. The second part of the chapter presents in detail the research design (i.e. choice of the interviewees, the interview agenda and the way in which the interview material was analysed).

Chapter Six discusses the findings derived from the second empirical part of this study. The analysis of fifteen autobiographical narrative interviews revealed that the participants made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being by creating different narrative stories. It should also be noted that in the second empirical part, what began to emerge was the influence that the social context had on the construction of these distinctive narrative stories.

In Chapter Seven, it is clarified how the way the participants formed their perceptions of the research question was shaped by the social context. Three levels of the social context are taken into account and how they influenced the participants' perceptions in different ways. These levels refer to the immediate circumstances (that is, the context of the fieldwork, the interview time and setting and the dynamics unfolding between the researcher and the participants), the broader context (that is, public perceptions about refugees in the U.K.) and the community-level context.

In Chapter Eight the findings of both empirical parts are juxtaposed and the theoretical, methodological, practical and ideological contribution of the study are discussed in detail. This chapter also includes a section where the impact of the research is discussed, that is, who was affected as a result of the research and how. The thesis finishes by identifying the study's limitations and making suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical considerations

2.1 Sociological approaches to psychological health

There are three general approaches to psychological health that can be broadly characterised according to where they locate the primary cause of psychological health and illness. The *biological or medical approach* which views psychological health and illness as located in the brain or body (Andreasen, 1984; Andreasen & Black, 1995). The *psychological approach* that treats them as personality or behavioural elements (Persons, 1986; Peterson, 1996) and, the *sociological approach* that regards them as outcomes in the face of overwhelming environmental stress (Thoits, 1999). The key distinction between the biological and psychological perspectives, on the one hand, and the sociological perspective, on the other, has been the location of the primary cause of psychological health and illness. According to the first two approaches, the determinants of psychological health and illness are internal (in the physical body or in the personality). From a sociological approach the cause is external (in the environment or in the person's social situation) (Thoits, 1999: 121).

As already mentioned in the first chapter, the research question explores how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being, in terms of stress and coping, and how the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions. In this chapter more emphasis is given to the sociological approaches to psychological health since the stress and coping perspective stems from this approach. It is important to note that the traditional stress and coping theory did *not* provide the theoretical framework of this study. As it is clarified in the following sections, the participants' perceptions derived from the empirical parts of the study are of a *different* epistemological status to the kinds of claims made by the stress and coping theory. Nevertheless, the findings can indeed contribute to/critique the stress and coping literature, in ways, which are discussed below.

Within the sociological framework there have been three main theories regarding the etiology of psychological illness: the structural strain theory, the labeling theory and the stress and coping theory.

The structural strain theory locates the origins of distress/disorder in the broader organisation of society (and especially its economic organisation) where some groups are

disadvantaged in comparison to others (Braginsky et al., 1969; Brenner, 1973; Catalano et al., 1981; Dooley & Catalano, 1984; Merton, 1956; Pierce, 1967).

Like structural strain theory, labeling theory offers a uniquely sociological explanation of the causes of psychological illness, and is based on one key idea: that people who are labeled and treated as deviant become deviant. “Deviance” refers to rule breaking or violation of norms. In the case of psychological illness, symptoms of psychiatric disorder are themselves viewed as normative violations (Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1961; Link, 1987; Rosenhan, 1973).

Finally, there is the stress and coping theory, which as noted in the previous chapter, supports the existence of various types of stress-generating events and circumstances that individuals use coping resources in their responses to them. Most sociologists have implicitly adopted a fairly straightforward model of the stress and coping process, whose main points are: 1) Individuals’ locations in the social structure differentially expose them to stressors, which in turn can damage their physical and/or psychological health. 2) This damage is generally moderated or lessened by individuals’ personal and social resources. 3) The possession of resources is socially patterned in ways which at least potentially may leave members of disadvantaged groups more vulnerable to the harmful effects of stress (Thoits, 1995).

It should be noted that according to the theory, although stressors do not actually *cause* psychological illness, exposure to them increases the relative risk of experiencing psychological health problems. Thus, stress does not cause disorder in the deterministic understanding of this term (Little, 1991) since stress is neither necessary nor sufficient to produce disorder (Aneshensel, 1999: 212). The relationship is rather probabilistic: exposure to stress elevates the relative risk of experiencing psychological problems, even though this risk remains low in an absolute sense. The theory becomes clearer in the next section, as the stress and coping approach is presented in detail.

2.2 Introducing the stress and coping framework

Hans Selye, a physiological researcher, introduced the term “stress” into scientific discourse in the mid-1930s. By stress or stressors he referred to noxious environmental stimuli. Because laboratory studies convincingly showed a relationship between prolonged or repeated stress exposure and disease in animals (Cannon, 1929; Selye, 1956), speculation

turned to the effects of stress on human beings. Researchers began to focus on life events, which are major changes in people's lives that require extensive behavioural readjustments (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). The hypothesis was that extensive readjustment of behaviour could overtax a person's ability to cope or adapt, thus leaving the person more vulnerable to physical illness, injury, or even death. Literally thousands of studies showed a significant relationship between the amount of life change that one experienced and illness, including heart attacks, strokes, ulcers and tuberculosis (Cohen, 1996). For psychological health researchers what was interesting was that major life events were significantly associated with the onset of anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and generalised states of psychological distress. So it was derived that an accumulation of stressors could precipitate psychological health problems. Indeed several researchers showed that severe life events and ongoing difficulties (also called "chronic strains") predicted the onset of schizophrenia, anxiety attacks and milder states of depression and distress (Aneshensel, 1992; Avison & Turner, 1988; Brown & Harris, 1978; Pearlin et al., 1981; Ross & Mirowsky, 1979; Turner, 1995).

As findings on the psychological effects of stress mounted, researchers began to turn their attention to a related problem: although there is clearly a relationship between exposure to stressors and the subsequent development of psychological problems, this relationship is not strong. In other words, many people who experience severe stressors do *not* become disturbed, while others who experience few or minor stressors do (Thoits, 1999). Researchers have explained this modest correlation, by suggesting that because many people have extensive resources and use effective coping strategies when handling stressful demands, the negative psychological impacts of those demands are buffered (Lazarus, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin, 1989).

Of crucial importance to sociologists of psychological health has been the finding that life events and chronic strains, as well as coping resources, are *unequally distributed* in the population, leaving some groups of people (e.g. women, the elderly, the unmarried, ethnic minority group members) both more likely to experience certain stressors and more vulnerable to the effects of stressors in general (Kessler & Cleary, 1980; Turner, 1995; Turner & Marino, 1994; Turner & Roszell, 1994; Ulbrich et al., 1989). This sociological interest in studying the psychological health of "disadvantaged or vulnerable groups" was triggered by findings of an inverse relationship between psychological illness and socioeconomic status (Scheid & Horwitz, 1999). In this field, the issue of why people with certain "disadvantaged" social statuses had high rates of psychological distress became the main research question. These key observations pointed clearly to the important role that

social factors can play in the etiology of psychological illness, an observation, which was first made by Durkheim (1950).

Durkheim, who produced one kind of sociological theory which was relevant to psychological health, emphasised the importance of social processes, norms and values external to individuals that integrated them into the larger society and shaped their behaviour. In particular, Durkheim's (1951) work was important for recognising that macro-level social events can affect health in a variety of ways through stress and that the effects of stress can be mitigated through social support (Cockerham, 1998; Thoits, 1995). Sociologists gradually started realising that the study of stress and coping presented an excellent opportunity to observe how deeply psychological health is affected by the structured arrangements of people's lives (Pearlin, 1999). At the same time, others -primarily psychologists- became interested in examining the psychosocial resources that might enhance an individual's ability to cope with the adverse effects of stressful factors. Although such approaches have tended to place greater emphasis on these mediating or moderating psychosocial variables, they do not differ from approaches presented by sociologists in the range of variables considered (Kaplan, 1996: 6).

In general, most conceptual approaches distinguish between similar components: life events, explanations of the occurrence of life events, psychosocial resources and psychological health outcomes. The majority of theoretical perspectives (more or less explicitly) specify quasi-causal relationships among these components and other psychosocial factors that are said to mediate or moderate these relationships. However, investigators are highly variable according to which of the components they focus on. This is why there have been ongoing debates on how to conceptualise and consequently assess stressors, resources and outcomes and how to enrich the stress and coping theory with further distinctions within these three groups of components (Elder et al., 1996).

In the following pages there is a discussion on the different ongoing debates with regards to the conceptualisation and assessment of the stress and coping components. In the first chapter there was a similar section, but the discussion regarding the conceptualisation and assessment of stressors, resources and psychological health outcomes referred specifically to debates in the migration and psychological health area.

2.3 Current debates on the conceptualisation and assessment of the components of the stress and coping process

Three major forms of stressors have been investigated in the literature, life events, chronic strains and daily hassles (Pearlin, 1999). Life events are defined as acute changes, which require major behavioural readjustments within a relatively short period of time (e.g. accident or injury, divorce). Chronic strains are usually rooted in social structures, roles and relationships and require readjustments over prolonged periods of time (e.g. poverty, family problems¹). Hassles are small events (e.g. misplacing or losing things, having to wait, traffic problems), that require minor behavioural alterations during the course of a day.

Sociological studies of stress have often emphasised life events, and have often supported that one or more major negative life events experienced during a 6 to 12 month period strongly predict symptoms of psychological distress, as well as psychiatric disorder (Cohen & Williamson, 1991; Coyne & Downey, 1991; Creed, 1985; Tausig, 1986; Thoits, 1983). Chronic strains have been less frequently examined than life events, but most studies have consistently shown that they are also damaging to psychological health (e.g. Avison & Turner, 1988; Brown & Harris, 1978,1989; Newmann, 1986; Wheaton, 1991).

But even though, as noted above, many researchers have supposed that disadvantaged groups experience more negative life events and chronic strains in their lives, there is evidence indicating that these events are not consistently and inversely distributed by social status (e.g. McLeod & Kessler, 1990; Turner et al., 1995). The relationship between social status and life changes often depends on the types of events examined in a particular study and therefore contrasting findings and ongoing debates may be due to the ways in which stressors have been conceptualised and assessed across studies (Aneshensel, 1992; Wheaton, 1999).

Another reason why there has been confusion in conceptualising and assessing stressors is that chronic stressors have been frequently and misleadingly treated as life events. This can be seen in virtually all lists of life events; for example, increased conflicts with spouses or job supervisors are treated as events rather than as changes in the intensity of

¹ Three classes of chronic stressors have been identified, in further analysis: status strains, role strains and contextual strains. Status strains are stressors that result from one's position in social systems having unequal distributions of power, and opportunities. Examples include economic classes, occupational statuses, gender and age, race and ethnicity. Role strains are stressors that arise within the context of institutionalised social roles: family and occupational roles are prominent among them. Finally contextual strains refer to the hardships and problems that derive from one's proximal environments, such as neighbourhood and community (Pearlin, 1999).

ongoing stressors. This kind of slippage is not simply a definitional problem; rather, it represents a conceptual confusion that stands in the way both of accurately identifying and assessing the social sources of the stressors and of the attribution of their observed effects (Pearlin, 1999: 164). This is why what should be clarified is the *meaning* that people themselves attribute to the stressors they experience (Thoits, 1995). Erera-Weatherly (1996) highlighted the importance of exploring the nature of stressful encounters and coping through people's *own* perceptions, instead of using closed questions to elicit stress and coping states.

As far as psychosocial resources are concerned: amongst the most frequently studied personal resources have been a sense of control over life, which refers to individuals' sense of control over the dimensions shaping their lives and the attributions they make with regards to these dimensions (Lefcourt et al., 1984). Social support has been the most frequently studied social resource and refers to the functions performed for the individual by significant others, such as family, friends and colleagues. Significant others can give instrumental, informational, and/or emotional assistance (House et al., 1986; House et al., 1988; Pearlin & Aneshensel, 1986). These various types of social support are considered to form a single underlying dimension summarised as perceived or received social support (Wethington & Kessler, 1986).

Stress and coping research has been criticised for emphasising the conditions under which people succumb to stress rather than the ones under which they successfully cope (Thoits, 1994, 1995). Many researchers who focus on studying coping resources have presumed that the latter promote effective coping with stress and they have shown that they do buffer the damaging consequences of stress exposure on psychological health (Kessler et al., 1988; Mirowsky & Ross, 1990; Turner & Roszell, 1994).

But the goal of many stress-buffering analyses has ultimately been to demonstrate that individuals who *lack* coping resources, especially "lower-status" individuals, are particularly vulnerable to stress (e.g. Lin & Ensel, 1989; Ross & Mirowsky, 1989; Roxburgh, 1996; Wheaton, 1983, 1985). This is why it has been suggested to include in the resources category personal resources such as 1) "internal (and not necessarily external) locus of control", which implicates that people attribute their stressors to internal reasons and consequently believe they can activate *themselves* resources for overcoming stressors' negative effects and 2) less often resources such as "resilience" (Cicchetti & Garnezy, 1993; Flach, 1988) and "sense of coherence" (Antonovsky, 1987; Geyer, 1997; Holahan & Moos, 1994), which suggest that people with these characteristics can cope successfully with stress and overcome its consequences.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the beneficial side of social support should be examined more critically. A well-established social network² is typically considered to be a structural prerequisite of feeling socially integrated and emotionally accepted (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Laireiter & Baumann, 1992; Thoits, 1992; Veiel & Baumann, 1992). However, despite the positive connotations of social support, many studies have shown that social ties are not always or even necessarily beneficial for psychological well-being. For example, some evidence indicates that *obligatory* social ties (e.g. spouse, parent, worker) can produce stressful demands, which may cancel or outweigh these roles' positive consequences for well-being (Berbrier & Schulte, 1993; Rook, 1992; Umberson & Gove, 1989). In contrast, *voluntary* ties (e.g. friend, group member) have more manageable demands, allowing those roles' benefits to exceed their costs and bring positive psychological health outcomes.

Given the observation that social support has the potential for adverse as well as benign outcomes for the experience of stress and its consequences, and that people's resources may help them to actively cope with stress, but also succumb to it when they are not sufficient, it has been suggested to examine people's *subjective evaluations* on which type of support is better for them (Gottlieb, 1992). It has also been suggested to study people's *own* perceptions of which resources they would consider as better to mobilise for coping with stress (Dewe, 1992; Oakland & Ostell, 1996).

Finally, as far as psychological health outcomes are concerned: as mentioned in the previous paragraph, stress and coping research has been criticised for focusing on resources that people do *not* have, rather than those, which facilitate overcoming adverse events. A similar critique has been addressed towards the conceptualisation of psychological health outcomes: the majority of studies have typically examined individual psychological *problems* (e.g. distress, depression, anxiety), through a count of symptoms of depression and anxiety experienced over a specific period of time (Kaplan, 1996). However, only few studies have examined positive and psychosocial aspects of well-being such as life satisfaction (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Folkman, 1997; Grob, 1995; Piquart & Sörensen, 2003). It is undoubtedly useful to study how stressors can lead to disorder, but it is also necessary to explore more positive and psychosocial dimensions of psychological health and thus expand the typical stress and coping research that focuses on individual pathology.

² A *social network* can be defined as the web of social relationships that surround an individual and the characteristics of those ties (Fischer, 1982).

It is certainly important to agree on the conceptualisation of the stress and coping components and to resolve the question of relative importance, that is, whether life events or chronic stressors can influence more psychological health and which resources counteract better their negative effects. But in the above debates one can see that it is also necessary to look at resources that people *have* instead of those they lack and at *positive* and *psychosocial* outcomes, instead of only pathological symptoms. Moreover, it is important to derive people's *own* perceptions of the stress and coping process and not only standardised stress and coping states.

The stress and coping process where individuals are examined in terms of their *psychological activism* is one approach that incorporates these dimensions, that is, attempting to understand the stress and coping process through people's own perceptions of the latter, and also looking at people's resources and well-being outcomes in a more positive and psychosocial way. This perspective has emerged mainly as an answer to the criticism towards the stress and coping approach that focuses only on resources, which individuals are unable to activate and on the negative symptoms they develop. It has also emerged as an answer to the need to look at how people perceive *themselves* the stressors they experience and the resources that are available (Thoits, 1994).

2.4 The theory of psychological activism

The typical stress and coping study has implicitly portrayed people as vulnerable beings who are determined by external forces, rather than as subjects in control of their lives. Individuals have been described as "exposed to", "at risk of", "faced with" or "overwhelmed by" various adverse life events (Thoits, 1983). This negativistic language may have been inspired by the goal of demonstrating that there are external causes of psychological disorder. Indeed, some researchers examined the influence only of events that are uncontrollable to demonstrate more convincingly that situational stressors affect psychological health (Dohrenwend, 1970; Shrout et al., 1989).

In contrast, researchers who have taken into account people's coping resources (such as social support and sense of control) presume that these resources promote effective coping with stress and have shown that they do buffer the damaging consequences of stress exposure (Turner & Roszell, 1994). However, as already mentioned, the goal of many of these stress-buffering analyses has been to demonstrate that individuals who *lack* these or other coping

resources are particularly vulnerable to stress. It seems that even when researchers consider people as “activists”³ on behalf of their own well-being, their emphasis has been on the conditions under which persons succumb to stress rather than on the ones under which they cope successfully. Therefore, what has been missing from much stress and coping research is a more balanced image of individuals as dynamically constructing and reconstructing their life circumstances and resources to protect their self esteem and well-being.

The main assumptions behind the theory of psychological activism are that 1) people derive their self evaluations, at least in part, from the adequacy of the social roles they value as important and 2) when these roles are threatened they will be motivated to try to protect or restore them in order to protect their self-images and psychological well-being (Thoits, 1994).

This view of the individual as a psychological activist has been derived from symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionists objected to the views firstly set by Durkheim, where individuals held relatively passive roles in large social systems and pointed out the ability of people to think and define situations and construct their behaviour according to these definitions.

The symbolic interactionist perspective, based largely on the work of Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969), maintained that social reality is constructed on a micro-level by individuals who interact with one another on the basis of shared symbolic meanings. Human beings were seen to possess the capacity to think, define situations and construct their behaviour on the basis of their definitions and interpretations. Social life was therefore produced by interacting agents choosing their own behaviour and acting accordingly, not by social processes channeling behaviour down option-less pathways (Cockerham, 2001).

Even though, as Norman Denzin (1991) has pointed out, in the previous decades symbolic interactionists were under attack on several methodological and substantive issues, nevertheless symbolic interaction theory nowadays persists as an important theoretical approach to the study and explanation of social behaviour among small groups of people interacting in ways that are relevant for health (Cockerham, 2001). It is important to clarify that even though the view of individuals as psychological activists has been derived from the symbolic interactionist perspective, the supporters of the theory of psychological activism have *not* adopted this perspective or constructivism, which is the broader paradigm encompassing also symbolic interactionism. This means that they have not accepted that

³ An activist is an individual who is motivated to try to reverse or escape from problems in his/her life, in order to protect his/her self-images and well-being. The image of the activist is of an agent making and shaping his/her life, rather than primarily of a passive subject overwhelmed by stress (Thoits, 1994).

social reality is constructed and constantly reformulated as individuals interact with one another. Rather they have adopted positivist or post-positivist perspectives, according to which there is “an objective reality out there” which is not constructed but has to be discovered. In this study, as discussed in the next chapter, I have adopted a constructivist paradigm, which is why I have not tested in any way the assumptions of psychological activism, but after deriving the data I explore whether and how the participants used the images related to psychological activism while making sense of their experiences and their well-being.

The supporters of psychological activism paid particular attention to the symbolic interactionist approaches which assume that, through taking the role of specific and generalised others, people come to conceive of themselves in terms of important social roles (e.g. parent, spouse, worker) and to derive their self-evaluations, at least in part, from the adequacy of their role performances (Burke, 1991; Rosenberg, 1979; Stryker, 1980; Thoits, 1992). Because social roles are key sources of self-evaluation, individuals should be motivated to protect their self-images and/or self-esteem (Griffin, 1993; Kiecolt, 1992) by different subtypes of problem-solving actions, such as “reversals”, “extrications” and “compensatory activities”. With regards to the first type, in the face of negative events or chronic difficulties, which may threaten aspects of self-conception in a particular role domain, people can act to reverse or convert a negative situation to a positive one, or minimally, to a less negative one. For example, major failures at work can be reversed by improvements in one’s job performance.

Alternatively, people may extricate themselves from a negative situation by voluntarily relinquishing the problematic role, when, for example, one extracts oneself from ongoing marital difficulties through separation and divorce.

Finally, individuals can compensate for unsolved problems in one domain by deliberately increasing their involvement in other roles or by acquiring additional roles (Gecas & Seff, 1990). If a person remains in a difficult job situation, for example, he/ she may devote more time and energy to family or friends, begin volunteering or return to education part-time. Purposefully engaging in rewarding activities in other role domains should help counterbalance the distressing impacts of unsolved situations. It should be noted that these are not problem-solving efforts per se, since they do not reverse or eliminate a difficult situation directly. However, compensations are still purposive, deliberate acts, which indicate activism (Thoits, 1994: 155).

Of course social dimensions may prevent the ultimate success of these actions, because individuals' social and interpersonal behaviours, including the above coping strategies, are affected by the structure and functions of social networks (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987 a,b; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). The theory of psychological activism acknowledges that the social context can influence people's behaviours and actions, but has *not* looked into detail into how this occurs and moreover, it has not explored how people perceive *themselves* this influence of the social context.

Indeed the above problem-solving attempts are not always successful. Solved problems are acts of reversal, extrication and/ or compensation that result in lower difficulties than one was initially experiencing in a given role. Unsolved problems are role difficulties, which persist or increase over time, regardless of one's problem-solving efforts. One might argue that the crucial distinction for psychological health lies in attempting, versus not attempting, to solve difficulties, regardless of success or failure. Simply taking action may be sufficient to bolster a sense of control or self-esteem and thus to reduce psychological symptoms. However, Thoits (1991, 1994) has suggested that successes and failures have clearer implications for one's confidence and thus should have a greater impact on well-being than mere attempt. One implication of this argument is that highly distressed individuals are those who are unable to cope effectively with problems in their lives. In other words, differences in coping outcomes and thus in psychological outcomes might also be explained by *individual dimensions*, such as sense of control (Cohen & Edwards, 1989; Turner & Roszell, 1994). It is interesting that through this noted implication, individual qualities have *not* been ruled out, but are assumed to be operating in the entire stress and coping process, along with social dimensions.

It should be noted that those who presented this theoretical perspective have only illustrated the feasibility of the above questions, instead of testing them definitively (Thoits, 1995; Turner & Roszell, 1994). This is because they acknowledge that in order to identify solved and unsolved problems and people's psychological health through the lens of psychological activism one must examine the *sequence* of experiences within a life domain, that is, the person's role history (Wheaton, 1990). This implies that for testing the above assumptions detailed *qualitative accounts of meaning and purpose* should be collected from the participants preferably over an extended period of time (Kaplan, 1996).

The present study collected indeed refugees' accounts of meaning and purpose and in specific, their subjective theories, as well as their autobiographical narratives, with regards to the research issues (the terms "subjective theories" and "narratives" are discussed in detail in

the following chapters). Overall, the theory of psychological activism, with its emphasis on *positive* outcomes through *qualitative accounts of meaning*, seemed relevant to the purposes of this study for the reasons which are elaborated in the following paragraph.

2.5 Selecting “psychological activism” as relevant to the purposes of this study

The traditional stress and coping research area has been criticised for typically portraying individuals as vulnerable recipients of stress, instead of active agents who control their lives. The present study attempted to go beyond this dimension, that is, the focus on people’s pathology. The two assumptions of the theory of psychological activism seemed useful for this purpose. In particular, the assumption that people will derive their self- evaluations, at least in part, from the adequacy of their important social roles suggested a different image, other than the “vulnerable” one. “Vulnerable” refugees have been typically viewed as suffering from stress-related symptoms such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. But if these individuals would emerge as perceiving themselves in terms of valued social roles, then support would be given to the viewpoint that the perspective of “vulnerability” is *not* the only way to look at them. At the same time, the assumption that they will actively try to protect or restore these valued roles when they are threatened, could suggest a different portrayal, not necessarily that of the “passive” refugee.

In addition, psychological activism seemed to be relevant to the research population of this study, that is, highly educated refugees. According to the theory, people who held a valued social role would be more likely to perceive a bigger threat to the social roles they held before migration. And indeed previous research carried out in the U.K. has found that highly educated refugees are subjected to loss of employment status or to status inconsistency (Bloch, 1997, 1999a; Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Duke, 1996; Lightbody et al., 1997; Peabody Trust, 1999; Refugee Council, 1997; Shiferaw & Hagos, 2002). Therefore, the theory also seemed to fit the research population, which had been purposefully defined from the outset of this study.

Another reason why psychological activism seemed useful for the purposes of this study had to do with its other aim, i.e. that of eliciting the participants’ own perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, instead of deriving standardised states of stress, coping and well-being. This implied that I was looking at their

perceptions and by reconstructing them, I would try to understand how they made sense of the research issues. There are different ways of attempting to reconstruct people's perceptions: one is in the form of *subjective theories*, used by people to explain the world- or at least an area of objects as part of this world- for themselves (Scheele & Groeben, 1988). Another is in the form of *autobiographical narratives*, i.e. biographical trajectories that are reconstructed from the narrators' perspective (Flick, 2002: 18). Of course there are also other ways of attempting to reconstruct people's perceptions such as social representations (Moscovici, 1984) and lay theories (Furnham, 1988) but in this study the emphasis is put on subjective theories and narratives.

The starting point for reconstructing subjective theories is that individuals in everyday life develop theories on how the world and their own activities operate. They apply these theories in their activities and revise them if necessary. Assumptions in such theories are organised in an interdependent way and with an argumentative structure (Flick, 1993; Groeben, 1990). This implies that the *meanings* they assign to experiences and lived events are crucial for understanding their perceptions. As mentioned above, the supporters of psychological activism have suggested that this process of activism can be examined only through qualitative accounts of meaning and purpose. Although these authors have not adopted constructivism, the emphasis they put on deriving people's own perceptions fitted well with my own focus.

It is relevant to note that one other approach, which has also regarded individuals as actively shaping their psychological well-being, instead of succumbing to stress is the *stress and identity* approach. The main argument connecting important role identities with psychological well-being has been that because roles are sets of behavioural expectations, which are attached to positions in the social structure, identities based on such roles should provide the individual with a sense of who he or she is (in the existential sense) and how he or she ought to behave. Roles that are socioculturally appropriate and prestigious in view of the individual's characteristics are likely to be more important in someone's identity hierarchy than less normative or non-prestigious roles. Because the expectations attached to role identities are *normative* expectations, the adequacy of an individual's identity performance has implications for his/her psychological well-being, that is, failure to meet normative expectations in identity performance should decrease self-esteem. Thus the more important the role identity, the more its loss should negatively influence psychological well-being (Brewer, 1991; Burke, 1991,1996; Pearlin, 1989; Schönplflug, 1997; Schönplflug et al., 1996; Thoits, 1991).

What rendered the theory of psychological activism more relevant to the present study than the general stress and identity theory was that the former approach looks at both positive and negative identity-relevant experiences and in addition it explores not only negative psychological symptoms, such as depression or anxiety, but also psychological *well-being*. Stressors that are exclusively perceived as identity threats may be depressing or upsetting, especially if psychosocial resources do not reduce the identity-threat, whereas events perceived as identity-enhancing should promote, along with the appropriate resources, positive affect, life satisfaction and well-being (Thoits, 1991) and this positive dimension should also be explored, which the stress and identity approach does not do. Therefore, since in this study I wanted to go beyond refugees' "pathology", the approach of psychological activism was relevant since it does not predefine individuals as being vulnerable or at serious risk of developing distress.

Finally, a seemingly similar perspective to psychological activism has been adopted by Taylor (1983), whose theory of cognitive adaptation has conceptualised people as *active agents* in restoring psychological balance in the aftermath of a stressful life event. According to this theory (Taylor, 1983; Taylor et al., 1991) stressful life events initially take their toll by challenging people's sense of meaning, their sense of control and their self esteem. As a result, people are motivated to restore their self-esteem and sense of meaning and control by producing self-enhancing thoughts. For example, a sense of meaning can be regained by understanding why a stressful event or situation occurred and what its role in a person's life will be, and a sense of meaning is typically produced by trying to find reasons, by rethinking attitudes and life priorities or by focusing on aspects in which one's self-image has been relatively unaffected or improved.

Because this theory regards individuals as active agents who are motivated to restore their views of themselves and the world, it appeared similar to the theory of psychological activism. However, the cognitive adaptation theory focuses only on the mechanisms that people may activate to restore their self-images when they experience a stressful event or situation. Therefore this theory does not acknowledge that *social dimensions* (e.g. one's social networks) may intervene and affect the triggering of such mechanisms. But as already discussed, the social context plays its own role in the theory of psychological activism, which supports that self-images are created not in isolation, i.e. in the individual's mind, but in a social context, as the person interacts with others and accordingly evaluates which social roles are important for him/her or not. Taylor's theory seems to reduce people's dynamic adaptive ability to a personality-trait, and to leave the social context aside. Therefore, for all

the above reasons, the theory of psychological activism seemed most relevant for the purposes of the present study.

It is important to note again that I never meant to test either the stress and coping theory or the theory of psychological activism to see if they were in accordance or not with the participants' own experience. Rather I revisited these theories after deriving the data in order to open a dialogue with the concepts of stress and coping and psychological activism and consequently explore whether and how the participants would incorporate them while talking about their perceptions of their post-migration experiences and their well-being. The way the theories of stress and coping and of psychological activism were used in this study is clarified in the following section.

2.6 Exploring stress, coping and psychological activism through people's lay or subjective knowledge

In the previous sections, the stress and coping theory has been extensively described, as well as an alternative stress and coping approach, that is, the theory of psychological activism. The reason for carrying out this literature review was first, because it was the reading of this literature that triggered the formulation of the research question and second, for setting the background for explaining *how* the theories of stress and coping and psychological activism were used in this study.

A typical study based on the traditional stress and coping approach would pick the theory and test through the elicited data whether its assumptions are confirmed or not. In this study I did *not* try to confirm or refute the assumptions of the theories of stress and coping or psychological activism with the participants' perceptions of their experiences and their well-being. In particular: as discussed in the next chapter, the epistemological question asks what is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known. So if, for example, an objective reality is assumed, then the knower (or researcher) must remain detached from what or whom he/she investigates, in order to discover this underlying reality and its laws. The theories of stress and coping and psychological activism make claims that correspond to an objective reality. This means that the researchers remain detached from their participants and examine the stressors these individuals experience, the resources they use and their psychological health outcomes. In this study I do not accept that the researcher

should confine himself/herself to the domain of an objective reality, in which refugees are only subjects under the researcher's investigative lens. For me what the participants perceive is much more interesting and worthwhile studying, even if it is subjective. The second issue is that I did not and cannot pretend to have "kept a distance" from the participants; rather, I too was involved in the construction and production of their subjective theories and narratives, i.e. the two ways in which the participants expressed their perceptions of their experiences and their well-being. Therefore this essential epistemological difference between what stress and coping researchers have derived and what I tried to elicit meant that I would not aim to directly test these assumptions. Yet at the same time, the emerging findings *can* contribute to and criticise this body of literature.

The main goal of this study is the exploration of the participants' perceptions per se, that is, the exploration of "lay or subjective knowledge": the meanings that people attach to their experience (Popay et al., 1998). But it is also interesting and important to compare lay knowledge and expert knowledge and see whether the former could possibly *challenge* aspects of the established one. By "challenge" I do not mean that it is possible to confirm or refute the stress and coping assumptions through the meanings the participants attach to their experiences. But one aspect of expert knowledge that *can* be challenged is the *images* or *stereotypes* that have emerged as a consequence of the prevalence of the stress and coping approach in the area of migration and psychological health.

As already discussed in the first chapter, the research carried out in the area of refugee behaviour and psychological health, along with certain historical circumstances, host governments' health policies towards refugees, and the recent influence of the popular media have played an important role in the formulation of the stereotypes of the "vulnerable" and "passive" refugee. It is *this* level of expert knowledge that this research has the possibility to challenge. This means that I do not touch upon the level of stress and coping *assumptions* that typically await confirmation or refutation. Instead, I focus on the level of stress and coping-related *images* (in this case the images of the "vulnerable" and "passive" refugee) that may be reproduced or challenged through the participants' words, as well as the stress and coping *concepts* that can be evaluated (by the participants) as useful or not.

The importance of exploring the usefulness of the stress and coping concepts and the applicability of its images through the participants' own words becomes evident when we regard stress and coping as a "conceptual narrative"⁴. Somers (1994) describes conceptual

⁴ Somers (1994) identifies four dimensions of narrative: ontological, public, conceptual and "meta". Ontological narratives, she argues, are used to define who we are and are the basis for knowing what to do. Public narratives

narratives as those that researchers construct by drawing on both ontological narratives (i.e. the narratives that signify what is the “proper thing to do” (Finch, 1989) and public ones (i.e. those that transcend the individual and are usually diffused by the media).

And indeed as discussed in the previous pages, the term “stress” has been a constructed concept, first introduced by Hans Selye into scientific discourse in the mid-1930s in order to define adverse environmental stimuli. In addition, “stress” and “coping” have been identified as two of the key concepts regarding refugee behaviour and psychological health, along with the concepts of “loss” and “trauma” (Ahearn, 2000). And the fact that several researchers have strongly criticised the origin and current status of “post-traumatic stress” as a syndrome (Marsella et al., 1996) and have voiced doubts about the universality and relevance of “stress related disorders” and in general “stress” in refugees (Eastmond, 2000; Ingleby, 2005; Kleber et al., 1995; Summerfield, 1999, 2004) reaffirms the prevalence of such concepts. Therefore one would be justified to say that “stress and coping” appears at the present moment, in the West as a “conceptual narrative” constructed by researchers.

The above suggest that the meanings the participants assign to their post-migration experiences and their well-being could emerge and stand not just as another kind of lay knowledge, but as knowledge that takes issue with how most researchers in the West have characterised the relationship between these experiences and psychological health in the first place. This is why neither the stress and coping approach nor the theory of psychological activism were directly tested, but instead the derived data was used to open a dialogue with these theories.

Finally, it should be noted that there is great value in exploring and finding out what these theories mean in refugees’ own terms, not merely for the theoretical reasons outlined above (i.e. lay knowledge potentially challenging certain aspects of expert knowledge), but also for practical reasons (i.e. implementing interventions that will seem logical to refugees, because they are framed in their terms). These theoretical and practical implications emerge in the discussion-sections of both empirical parts and are synthesised and discussed in further detail in the end of the study.

are those attached to cultural or institutional formations, such as families or workplaces, often by the mass media that transcend the individual. Metanarratives are “master” narratives of progress, decline, crisis which transcend the immediate context and are often used politically to construct a particular ideological position. Finally, conceptual narratives are those which researchers construct, using concepts that lie outside both ontological and public narratives, drawing on them both but introducing concepts such as social class, behaviour-change etc which might not be found in either ontological or public narratives.

2.7 Synopsis

In the previous chapter, in the section that briefly reviewed the migration and psychological health area, the stress and coping approach was introduced as the prevalent perspective through which most researchers have been looking at migrants' and refugees' psychological health. In this chapter the stress and coping approach, as it has been tested in the general population, was extensively discussed, as well as the theory of psychological activism, which is an alternative stress and coping approach.

The theory of psychological activism seemed more relevant to the purposes of this study because it endorses the critical points I raised towards the typical way that stress and coping researchers have looked at refugees' psychological health, that is, their focus on individual pathology and the exclusion of the participants' own perspectives on the stress and coping process. The present study attempted to go beyond this dimension of the stress and coping approach, i.e. the focus on people's pathology. The two assumptions of the theory of psychological activism seemed useful for this purpose. The theoretical assumption that people will evaluate themselves, at least in part, from the adequacy of their important social roles could provide a different image to the "vulnerable" one. At the same time, the assumption that they will actively try to protect or restore these valued roles when they are threatened could suggest a different portrayal, not necessarily that of "passive". Thus the theory seemed to be relevant to the purposes of this study that attempts to regard refugees in a more balanced and holistic way. At the same time, the supporters of psychological activism have suggested that this process of activism can be examined only through qualitative accounts of meaning and purpose. Therefore since I wanted to elicit the participants' own perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, instead of deriving standardised states of stress, coping and well-being, psychological activism emerged as a relevant framework for the purposes of this study.

However, it was also important to explain *how* the theories of stress and coping and of psychological activism were used in this study. It was crucial to clarify that their theoretical assumptions were *not* tested, as it has been typically done in the traditional stress and coping area. Rather the derived data, that is, the participants' own perceptions were used to converse with the theories of stress and coping and psychological activism.

Of course it is important that no previous empirical study has examined this specific research question, that is, perceptions of the relation between post-migration experiences and

well-being, of highly educated refugees in the U.K. The majority of studies have looked at *ethnic minorities* and/or *economic migrants* in the U.K. (Cochrane & Bal, 1987; Cochrane & Stopes-Roe, 1981; Mavreas & Bebbington, 1990; Williams & Hunt, 1997) while the few studies that *did* examine refugees in the U.K. (Duke, 1996; Ferguson & Barclay, 2002; Papadopoulos et al., 2004)) did not challenge both important critical issues, i.e. the focus on individual pathology and the examination of psychological health through standardised stress and coping items. As discussed in the first chapter, exploring this research question emerged as an original research initiative, but in the previous paragraphs the study's potential contribution also in terms of *theory* has been highlighted.

Now that the theoretical considerations have been presented, the study's research methodology is described in detail. The next chapter discusses the research design and also the main paradigm, whose guidelines formed the way in which the issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology were approached.

Chapter 3: Research methodology of the first empirical part

Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, because both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 105). Therefore, the first part of this chapter includes a discussion on the nature of paradigms and then a brief presentation of four paradigms that are competing, or have until recently competed, for acceptance as the paradigm of choice in guiding social research: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Positivism is first discussed, since this paradigm has informed earlier versions of the traditional stress and coping approach. One of the alternative paradigms in social-psychological research is constructivism, that is, the paradigm that informed the empirical parts of this study, so the next section presents this paradigm in detail.

The present study includes two empirical parts for examining how highly educated refugees perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. Semi-structured interviewing and autobiographical narrative interviewing have been used in the first and second empirical parts respectively. Both these methods belong to the field of qualitative research and specifically to the tradition of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on studying subjective meanings and individual ascriptions of sense (Flick, 2002: 16). Nevertheless they differ because they elicit different types of data (that is, in this study, the semi-structured interviews elicited subjective theories, while the narrative interviews derived autobiographical trajectories). In addition, they reveal different dimensions with regards to the research question (i.e. semi-structured interviews reveal how people provide explanations about their social-psychological world, while narrative interviews reveal how they form their perceptions of the latter and how the social context influences the shaping of these perceptions).

This chapter also presents the method of semi-structured interviewing, which was applied in the first empirical part as well as the research design and the analytical technique along which the interview data were interpreted are presented.

3.1 The nature of paradigms

Every study is based on a paradigm, which represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it and the range of possible relationships to

that world and its parts. Paradigms define for inquirers/ researchers what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry. The basic beliefs that define paradigms can be summarised by the responses given to the three interconnected questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In more detail:

The *ontological question* refers to the form and nature of reality and thus what there is that can be known about it. For example, if a “real” world is assumed, then what can be known about it is “how things really are and work”. Then only those questions that relate to matters of “real” existence and action are admissible; other questions, such as those concerning matters of moral significance, fall outside the realm of legitimate scientific inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The *epistemological question* asks what is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known. The answer that can be given to this question is constrained by the answer already given to the ontological question. So if, for example, a “real” reality is assumed, then the posture of the knower must be one of objective detachment in order to be able to find out the covering laws of how things really are (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Finally, the *methodological question* asks how can the inquirer find out whatever he or she believes can be known. Again, the answer that can be given to this question is constrained by answers already given to the first two questions; that is, not just *any* methodology is appropriate. For example, a “real” reality pursued by an “objective” inquirer mandates control of possible confounding factors, whether the methods are qualitative (e.g. observational) or quantitative (e.g. analysis of covariance).

In summary, this net that contains the researcher’s ontological, epistemological and methodological premises may be termed a *paradigm*, or interpretive framework, a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990: 17). Of course all research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some of these beliefs may be taken for granted, only assumed; others are highly controversial. However, each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions that are asked and the interpretations that are brought to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

3.2 The basic beliefs of four main paradigms

Table 3.1 displays brief descriptions of the responses that proponents of each paradigm would make to the three questions outlined above. The three rows correspond to the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions, and the columns correspond to the four paradigms to be presented.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Post-positivism</i>	<i>Critical theory et al.</i>	<i>Constructivism/Interpretivism</i>
Ontology	Naïve realism- real reality but apprehensible	Critical realism- real reality but only imperfectly apprehensible	Historical realism- virtual reality shaped by social, political, economic, cultural and gender values; crystallised over time	Relativism-multiple and sometimes conflicting social realities
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/objectivist; findings probably true	Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings	Transactional/subjectivist; created findings
Methodology	Experimental; verification of hypotheses; mainly quantitative methods	Modified experimental; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/ dialectical	Hermeneutic/ dialectical

Table 3.1: Basic beliefs of paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

The term *positivism* denotes the accepted view that has dominated the formal discourse in the physical and social sciences for some 400 years, whereas *post-positivism* represents efforts of the past few decades to respond to the most problematic criticisms of positivism, which are presented below. The term *critical theory* can be seen as a general term including a set of several alternative paradigms, such as post-structuralism and post-modernism. Whatever their differences, the common assumption of these positions of critical theory is that of the value-determined nature of inquiry- an epistemological difference. Critical researchers or theorists accept a certain assumption, that is, that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted. The term *constructivism* (where interpretivism is also included) denotes an alternative paradigm whose breakaway assumption is the move from ontological realism to ontological relativism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In recent years internal criticism to the conventional paradigm (that is, in terms of the assumptions defining positivism's nature) has emerged and suggests not only a reconsideration of the utility of qualitative data, but questions even the basic assumptions of positivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The criticism of the accepted view can be justified on a number of grounds (Bernstein, 1988; Guba, 1990; Hesse, 1980), but the main ones are the following:

1) *Neglecting the context* (i.e. precise quantitative approaches that focus on selected dimensions, neglect other existing dimensions in the context that might, if allowed to exert their effects, greatly alter findings. In addition, such exclusionary designs, while increasing the theoretical rigor of a study, detract from its *relevance*, that is, its applicability because their outcomes can be properly applied only in other similar settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). 2) *Exclusion of meaning and purpose* (i.e. human behaviour, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities. It has been suggested that qualitative data with their emphasis on people's lived experience are well suited for capturing the *meanings* people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives (van Manen, 1977). 3) *Disjunction of grand theories with local contexts- the etic/emic dilemma* (the etic (outsider) theory brought to bear on an inquiry by a researcher may have little or no meaning within the emic (insider) view of studied individuals, groups, societies or cultures. It has been acknowledged that qualitative data are useful for uncovering emic views; theories, in order to be "valid", should be qualitatively grounded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)). Such grounding is particularly crucial in view of the mounting criticism of social science as failing to provide adequate accounts of non-mainstream lives or to provide the material for a criticism of the western culture (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). 4) *Inapplicability of general data to individual cases* (this issue is sometimes described as the nomothetic/ idiographic disjunction. Generalisations, although perhaps statistically meaningful, have no applicability in the individual case).

A result of the above criticisms has been, first of all, the application of post-positivism to social sciences, as well as the emergence of the alternative paradigms mentioned above. Positivism and post-positivism are not substantially different, in the way other paradigms stand out (for example it is the ontological position that mostly differentiates constructivism from the other three paradigms). Nevertheless they *do* differ, as post-positivism represents an attempt to transform positivism in ways that will make the latter less deterministic with regards to ontology, and less dualist and "manipulative" with regards to epistemology and methodology respectively.

What is important in post-positivism is its *critical dimension* towards human inquiry; this can be seen especially in its ontological position, which is labeled as “critical realism” (Cook & Campbell, 1979) because claims about reality must be subjected to the widest possible critical examination to facilitate apprehending reality as closely as possible (but never perfectly). The critical dimension can also be seen in its epistemological position, where dualism is largely abandoned as not possible to maintain. It can also be seen in the methodological emphasis on “critical multiplism”, which tries to determine the meanings and purposes that people ascribe to their actions, in order to falsify (rather than verify) hypotheses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

3.3 The basic principles of constructivist thought

The critical dimension in post-positivism is rather abandoned in constructivism for a more radical approach towards human inquiry: proponents of the constructivist and interpretivist persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. “Constructivists or interpretivists believe that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it, since the world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors” (Schwandt, 1998: 221).

Although constructivism is a complex paradigm consisting of tightly interwoven explanations for phenomena, explanations that resist categorisation, analysis of existent research and theories reveals five principles of constructivist thought:

1. **The active construction of meaning.** A key tenet of constructivism is that meaning is actively constructed by individuals (Mahoney, 1995; Sexton & Griffin, 1997; von Glaserfeld, 1989, 1995). Active agency, likely the single most influential and widely held belief among constructivist thinkers, is centered around Piaget’s (1952, 1965) concept of equilibration. All people organise their experiences into cognitive structures called schemata, which adapt and constantly change with mental development. Experiences or concepts that are encountered for the first time undergo one of two processes: assimilation, subsuming a new idea into an existing schema, or accommodation, creating new schema to contain novel information. This organisation and reorganisation takes place constantly within the human mind, thus learning and development create more complex cognitive structures. Constructivism holds that people are aware when their

expectations are not confirmed by experience. This cognitive conflict results in disequilibrium and to return to equilibrium individuals must act on their environment. Therefore, people's *actions* are both the cause of disequilibrium and the means to restore cognitive balance. Equilibration makes up what constructivists have termed the self-righting mechanism, the idea that the direction in which individuals choose to concentrate their efforts will influence their ability to adapt to their surroundings.

2. **Social influences on construction.** A second tenet of constructivism is that learning and development are socially situated activities that are enhanced in meaningful contexts. Constructivism emphasises the role of the other in the learning process. People may learn at different rates due both to individual qualities (i.e. personal experiences) and to the external factors that affect them (i.e. other people). But in general all people create meaning from the interaction between their existing knowledge or beliefs and the new ideas and situations that they encounter- ideas and situations that can only be effectively found in social settings.
3. **Importance of self-regulatory practices.** Another principle of constructivism is that learning and development are self-regulated processes (Anderson, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). The *self* has an overall influence over the behaviour people choose, their motivation and their emotional reaction to the environment. The environment influences behaviours, feelings and motivations but it does not exert a complete influence over individuals. After constant bombardment from the environment, people fall out of cognitive equilibrium. The self would not be able to regulate the actions if it were not first able to identify that a state of disequilibrium has been reached. Once people are aware of cognitive conflict, they must decide how much, and in what ways, to expend their efforts to return to balance. Finally, after these actions have been taken, the self analyses the outcome of the situation, concluding if those actions were sufficient to return to equilibrium, or if more actions are necessary.
4. **The role of mental operations.** Another principle of constructivism is that people are capable of formalised operations and abstract thought (Piaget, 1952). The concept of formal operations includes an emphasis on hypothesis building and scientific reasoning, as well as a highly developed understanding of causation. Individuals who have obtained formal operations can operate on the logic of a problem independent of its content; these operations serve to motivate individuals toward future goals.
5. **Reality as a personal interpretation.** The fifth tenet of constructivism, which is the most controversial, is that reality represents an interpretation, so truth is assessed for viability,

not validity. Every individual's knowledge of reality is always under construction, dependent on how individuals perceive their experiences (Gruender, 1996; vonGlaserfeld, 1995). In the following paragraphs, I discuss where I have situated this research study and its findings in terms of their truth and correspondence or not to reality.

It should be noted that constructivists are concerned with related but somewhat different issues from those of their interpretivist counterparts: constructivists resonate with the interpretivists' emphasis on the world of experience as it is lived and undergone by social actors. Yet, their particular foils are the notions of objectivism, objective truth and essentialism. Knorr-Cetina (1981) explains that "to the objectivist, the world is composed of facts and the goal of knowledge is to provide a literal account of what the world is like" (p.1). And Gergen (1991) adds: "Modernism was deeply committed to the view that facts of the world are essentially *there* for study. They exist independently of us as observers, and if we are rational we will come to know the facts as they are" (p. 91).

Constructivists are deeply committed to the view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind. They endorse the claim that, "contrary to common sense, there is no unique real world that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language" (Bruner, 1986: 95).

Constructivists are also antiessentialists. They assume that what we take to be self-evident kinds (e.g. man, self, truth) are actually the product of complicated discursive practices. Accordingly, as Fuss (1989) explains, "Constructivists are concerned with the production and organisation of differences, and they therefore reject the idea that any essential or natural givens precede the process of social determination" (p.3.).

Interpretivists are less absolute regarding their view towards reality, since they do not reject the option of an independent world out there (Steier, 1991). And indeed, one need not be an antirealist to be a constructivist. One can reasonably hold that concepts and ideas are invented, yet maintain that these inventions correspond to something in the real world. The logical empiricist picture of theory described by Feigl -a set of human constructs that have meaning by virtue of their relation to the "soil of experience"- is just such a view (Schwandt, 1998: 237). Likewise, the notion that knowledge is invented may cohabit with a belief in a real world independent of human knowledge (Schwandt, 1998). From the above we can see that there are variations in the way the term constructivism has been used and in what exactly it entails with regards to truth and reality.

At this point it would be useful to mention the two most comprehensive and best known brands of constructivism, that is radical and social constructivism. Von Glaserfeld is a leading proponent of radical constructivism. His work (von Glaserfeld, 1991, 1995) set forth several principles, which describe knowing and knowledge in their development, nature, function and purpose. Gergen (1985, 1995) and Shotter (1995) are leading proponents of social constructivism. These two brands of constructivism share much in common, even though critics use a strict dichotomy to drive a wedge between the two (Staver, 1998). First, they both support that knowledge is actively built up from within by each member of a community and by a community itself. Second, social interactions between and among individuals in a variety of community, societal, and cultural settings are central to the building of knowledge by individuals as well as the building of knowledge by communities, societies and cultures. Language, of course, is the means of this social interaction. Third, the character of cognition and a language, which is employed to express cognition is functional and adaptive and not ontological in character. Fourth, the purpose of cognition and language is to bring coherency to an individual's world of experience and a community's knowledge base, respectively. The primary differences between radical and social constructivism lie in their foci of study. In radical constructivism, the focus is cognition and the individual; in social constructivism, the focus is language and the group.

In the present study I have adopted rather the social constructivist paradigm, as the research question explored refugees' perceptions of their post-migration experiences and their well-being but also how the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions. This importance that I gave to the influence of the social context on the construction of meanings meant that social constructivism would be the most relevant brand of constructivism to adopt for the purposes of this study.

In the previous pages the four paradigms, which inform research studies in the social sciences, were presented, while the emphasis was initially put on positivism and post-positivism, because these two have guided social research for a long time. After mentioning the criticism addressed towards positivism, the paradigm of post-positivism, whose emergence was due to this criticism, was further discussed. Because these paradigm shifts occurred in the general area of social sciences, similar changes happened in more specific fields, such as in stress research: the predominant positivistic stress model has received criticism from several researchers (Donnelly & Long, 2003; Erera-Weatherly, 1996; Gottlieb, 1992; Oakland & Ostell, 1996). In the following pages this criticism towards stress research in general and towards stress research with migrants and refugees in particular, are further

discussed. In this way the choice of principles, which informed the first empirical part of this study, is justified and the research design is eventually presented.

3.4 Paradigm of the traditional stress and coping approach

As mentioned in the second chapter, stress and coping research has typically regarded people as vulnerable beings who are overwhelmed by various stressors (Thoits, 1983), thus it is based on the premise that significant life changes accumulate and increase the risk of negative health outcomes. At the same time, it has acknowledged that these health-effects are moderated by psychosocial resources and coping behaviours of the individuals who are under stress. Therefore, the components that are usually under examination are the so-called stressors, the resources and the health outcomes. Traditional stress and coping research has adopted a) realism as its ontological position, because it supports that there is an objective social reality, which affects people's psychological health. b) a dualist epistemology, that is, the researcher and the researched "object" are assumed to be independent entities and c) quantitative methods, which empirically test certain stress, coping and health hypotheses. Therefore, it is justified to say that the predominant stress and coping paradigm has been primarily *positivist*.

Stress and coping research has been indeed viewed as a subspecialty within another positivist perspective, that is, medical sociology. This situation has arisen, at least in part, because researchers have adopted ways of organising theory and research more relevant to medicine than social sciences. For example, much of stress and coping research used to be concerned less with the origins of stressors than with their psychological health consequences (Aneshensel, 1992).

The purpose of this section is neither to describe in detail the positivistic aspects of the stress and coping approach, nor to attempt explaining why such a clinically oriented model has strongly influenced this research area for many years (Abbott, 1990). However, it should be noted that this positivist version of the model has lasted even longer in stress and coping research with *refugee populations*.

As already discussed in Chapter One phenomena such as a) the change in refugee populations at the end of the 20th century (i.e. only in the past 25 years resettlement has involved massive flows of people of radically different cultural orientations) b) host governments' health policies that targeted diseases that refugees could "import" and c) this

preoccupation with disease that pervaded refugee-related policies, program development and research have led to a focus on refugees' pathology. Medical problems have therefore become the primary route for refugee recourse when in any kind of pain, whether medical, social or psychological (Watters, 2001).

But at the same time, medicine and psychiatry have not taken into account the depth and complexity of refugees' psychological health issues because they are both grounded in the assumptions of the primacy of the individual and of the necessity of treating exclusively the patient and ignore the environments that may constrain people (Ingleby, 2005). Due to these assumptions refugees have been approached more as beings detached from their social environment. Some scholars from disciplines such as medical anthropology (Eastmond, 2000; Kleinman, 1988) and transcultural psychiatry (Manson, 1995; Marsella & Kameoka, 1989; Loring & Powell, 1988) have pointed out the need to approach refugees not just as vulnerable groups, but also as people who can have control over their lives. The main issue they refer to (apart from the importance of using qualitative methods and more positive and psychosocial dimensions of psychological health, as discussed in the previous chapters), is the need to take into account the *social context* when doing research on refugees' psychological health.

The above highlight the need for a more open-ended research strategy. The issue here is not just methodological, that is, the importance of using open-ended interviews instead of standardised questionnaires or interviews. Rather it underlines how important it is that the researcher 1) is mindful of the power differentials between him/her and the participants, which are inherent in the research process and influence the way the research is carried out 2) critically reflects on how his/her social and cultural features, as well as the broader context the participants and the researcher live in influence the emerging findings (Francis, 1992; Muecke, 1992; Powles, 2004).

The above suggest that an enhanced understanding of how refugees perceive the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being requires a move beyond the traditional positivist way of examining the stress and coping process to more alternative approaches. The need to include the perceptions that people themselves form with regards to their experiences and their well-being and the need to make the academic inquiry more relevant and useful to those being studied, thus take into account the *social context* that shapes these perceptions, become evident and pressing.

By now, there are some studies, which have actually addressed some of these needs (for example, use of qualitative methods, and assessing also positive and psychosocial dimensions of psychological health). Some of these studies were analytically described in the

second chapter, because they adopted the stress and coping framework and also looked specifically at refugee populations. Some of the other issues that are an integral part of qualitative research studying refugees' psychological health (that is, the need for the researcher to critically reflect on how his/her features and identities and the socio-cultural context affect the findings) have been taken into account only in anthropological studies that explored how several specific refugee populations make sense of their suffering and distress (Eastmond, 1989, 1998; Eisenbruch, 1991; Hume & Summerfield, 1994; Jenkins, 1991).

I, as a researcher, became also convinced of the emerging needs that call for moving away from a positivist approach to another one. Moreover, I became convinced of the need to derive not only subjective perceptions on stress and coping, with an emphasis on positive and psychosocial well-being outcomes, but also to explore how these perceptions are formed in a specific social context (which the previously reviewed studies have not done). From all the above the constructivist paradigm emerged as a valuable perspective for the purposes of this research study.

3.5 Research paradigm of the present study

Given that researchers are constantly speculating on which paradigm is most prominent in the social and psychological sciences and that the boundaries between paradigms can be sometimes blurred, it may be impractical to try to break down a paradigm into its constituent parts (Robins et al., 1999). And indeed, the paradigm I adopted, that is, constructivism, consists of tightly interwoven explanations for phenomena, explanations that resist categorisation. Nevertheless the perspectives I adopted in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology can be described as follows:

Ontology:

As mentioned in the previous pages, for radical and social constructivists the character of cognition and language is functional and adaptive and *not* ontological and the purpose of cognition and language is to bring coherency to an individual's world of experience and a community's knowledge base, respectively. One might ask why, within constructivism, the purpose of knowledge is not to discover the actual state of affairs, to discover objective

ontological reality. To answer this, it is important to go back in the history of philosophy as far as the Greeks. The ancient Greek skeptics proposed a paradox that has thus far not been resolved. This so-called root paradox holds that we humans, individually or collectively, possess but a single lens, that of *experience*, with which we can learn about the world around us. To independently check any knowledge claim we must check it through a lens independent of experience but to date, several thousand years after the root paradox was proposed, no one has resolved it. Considering truth as internal coherence allows constructivists to render this paradox irrelevant, but this does not resolve it (Staver, 1998). To satisfy this skeptical stance, then, any paradigm founded on a correspondence and not a coherence theory of truth, must be able to independently check its knowledge claims through and independent of experience. Because this has not been accomplished, many constructivists choose to remain silent on the issue of knowledge as correspondence with the facts of reality and rather choose to consider it as an internally coherent system that we actively build up from within for our own purposes, coping with the world of our individual experience and participating in building a collective, coherent knowledge base.

In this study, I also do not touch upon the issue of ontological reality and I rather focus on the functional and instrumental purpose of language and cognition and not on their ontological character. So for example, in the first chapter, demographics and other features of refugees in the U.K. were discussed in detail. Characteristics like their country of origin, age structure, gender, migration status and employment experiences, were presented in order to give an approximate picture of the social world of refugees in the U.K. Marx (1990) used the term “social world” as the sum of all the refugees’ relationships and of the forces impinging on them at any moment. According to my non-ontological focus, what interested me in this social world was not whether it corresponded to a “real world out there”, but how the participants would make sense of it.

Epistemology:

The epistemological question refers mainly to “the relationship between the inquirer and the known” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 26). Constructivists support that knowledge is not a particular kind of product that exists independent of the knower, but an activity or process (von Glaserfeld, 1991). Therefore they assume a subjectivist epistemology according to

which, the researcher and the participant interact and shape one another and together form understandings.

In this study I fully acknowledged that the interviewees and I interacted and together shaped understandings. It is crucial from a constructivist point of view to recognise the important role that *the other* plays in constructing ideas and communicating them, as discussed in the five principles of constructivist thought. Particularly in social constructivism, the symbolic nature and social negotiation of knowledge are emphasised (Driver et al., 1996), as well as the construction of such knowledge for instrumental purposes and not just, as von Glaserfeld says, “for the fun of it” (1995, p. 113).

In summary, I did not treat people’s verbal accounts as behaviours in their own right, which should be analysed in accordance with their activities (which is what a realist would do). Rather I was concerned with exploring how somebody thinks and makes sense of his/her experiences and at the same time how the social context around him/her shaped the construction of these sense-making ways.

Methodology:

In the previous pages, the critical points towards positivism served the purpose not only of questioning the basic assumptions of this paradigm, but also of emphasising the values and utility of qualitative data. Indeed, in discussions about research paradigms in social inquiry, methodology questions almost always arise and they typically include the debate between quantitative/ qualitative research (Jessor, 1996). In more detail:

3.5.1 The quantitative-qualitative antinomy

The term *qualitative method* refers to a set of approaches and research procedures, rather than to any singular, self-contained method. Their coherence, whether participant observation, semi-structured or unstructured interview, case study or the hermeneutic analysis of text, derives from a common concern with the interpretation of meaning and with understanding the point of view of the “other”. Qualitative and quantitative methods are often cast as an irreconcilable antinomy, with each the polar opposite of the other, but such a contrast is inherently misleading. It is not only how data are collected but how they are *used* –for

example, counted versus interpreted- that determines whether a study is more qualitative or more quantitative. Therefore, according to Hammersley, “the distinction between qualitative and quantitative is of limited use and, indeed carries some danger” (1992: 159).

Of course both qualitative and quantitative researchers “think they know something about society worth telling to others, and they use a variety of forms, media and means to communicate their ideas and findings” (Becker, 1986: 122). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in five ways (Becker, 1993): 1) *The uses of positivism* (i.e. up to which extent a naive reality and a dualist epistemology are assumed and traditional evaluation criteria, such as internal and external validity, are stressed). 2) *Acceptance of postmodern sensibilities* (whether qualitative researchers criticise positivist methods and assumptions but accept them as “another way of telling a story about society” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) or they totally reject positivist criteria). 3) *Capturing the individual’s point of view* (how close can both qualitative and quantitative researchers get to the participant’s perspective). 4) *Examining the constraints of everyday life* (i.e. the etic/ emic dilemma mentioned in previous pages of this chapter). 5) *Securing rich descriptions* (whether the researchers believe that rich descriptions of the social world are important and valuable).

The five points of difference described above reflect commitments to different styles of research. However this does not mean that qualitative and quantitative approaches should be rivals in the social science area, because these points of difference suggest different ways of addressing the same set of issues. This ongoing methodological debate is unlikely to be resolved in any final way (Jessor, 1996), nevertheless for the purposes of the present study, the strengths of qualitative data should be listed, as they have been explicitly proclaimed by Miles & Huberman, (1994):

- Qualitative data depict naturally occurring events in their settings, thus capturing as much as possible reality as it is perceived by the participants.
- Because of their local groundedness, the fact that the data are collected directly in the specific local context of the case under study, the possibility for understanding underlying or not obvious issues and concerns is very strong. This understanding is impossible to derive in the analysis of, for example, survey data. It should be noted that this local groundedness has received criticism, since it poses the question of the extent to which the findings can be transferable to other local contexts (Gherardi & Turner, 1987).
- Finally, the focus of qualitative data on the individual’s thoughts as they are revealed (especially through interviews) allows the researcher better access to the meanings that

people place on their experiences, and to their perceptions of their surrounding social world, which is the inherent aim of any non-positivist inquiry.

Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) make additional claims for the power of qualitative data, which are more related to qualitative *methods*. They claim that qualitative studies possess an inherent flexibility regarding data collection times and methods, which can be varied as a study proceeds and which “gives further confidence that we have understood what has been going on” (p.10). But in a constructivist study the methodological issue is not resolved simply by choosing a qualitative instead of a quantitative methodology. As seen in table 3.1, qualitative methods may also be used by positivists and post-positivists. The *context* in which a constructivist study is carried out, is as important (and perhaps more important) as the use of qualitative methods. The hermeneutic approach is concerned precisely with these contextual issues and emphasises the importance of taking them into account while doing research. In more detail:

3.5.2 The hermeneutic approach

The word “hermeneutics” was used in the seventeenth century, with regards to interpreting the Bible. Initially, researchers tried to play the part of the original author and simulate his context, history and manner of thinking. The researcher’s own values and experiences were to be eliminated. Yet, today supporters of the constructivist and interpretivist tradition emphasise the fact that researchers are no more detached from their objects of study than are the participants. Researchers, they argue, have their own understandings, their own convictions and their own conceptual orientations; they too, are members of a particular culture at a specific historical moment. Consequently an interview will be a “collaborated act on the part of both parties, not a gathering of information by one party” (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 8). The goal in a hermeneutic approach is to get deeper understanding of the individuals’ social-psychological worlds in specific contexts, rather than searching for general theories (Smith & Mackie, 2000). This is why the local groundedness noted above, that is, that the data are collected in the specific local context of the case under study, is *not* a problem in the hermeneutic approach, since the main point here is to understand people’s own worlds and think critically about the assumptions we routinely make as social psychologists and not to transfer the findings to other contexts.

Varto (1992) gives the following instructions for hermeneutic interpretation:

- What we are trying to understand is somebody else's world. Imposing a meaning from the outside, for example by applying some theory to what we are studying by force, may produce a rich analysis, but it may not contribute to any deeper understanding.
- When interpreting the object of study, the researcher is in the midst of his/her own life. There is no such thing as an objective way of reading. It is only within his/her own limits that the researcher is able to derive meanings to what he/she is studying. The same object may have been understood in various ways in the course of time.
- Every researcher should consciously reflect on his/her own way of interpretation. Understanding one's own starting points will, to some extent, free him/her from their subjugation (p. 58).

In the previous pages, the importance of taking into consideration the social context when carrying out research with refugees was highlighted. The constructivist paradigm in general and the hermeneutic approach in particular, emerged then as the most useful perspectives for the research questions of the present study. Since the quantitative/ qualitative debate and the hermeneutic approach have been discussed, I proceed to why I chose a method widely used by qualitative researchers, i.e. semi-structured interviewing for the purposes of the first empirical part.

3.5.3 Semi-structured interview method

In the United States and particularly in earlier periods of social research, methodological discussion had revolved for a long time around observation as the main method for collecting data. Open interviews are more dominant in the German-speaking area (e.g. Hoffmann-Riem, 1980; Kohli, 1978) and now attract more attention in the Anglo-Saxon areas as well (Smith, 1995). *Semi-structured interviews*, in particular, have attracted interest and are widely used (Flick, 2002). This interest is linked to the expectation that the interviewed *subjects'* *perceptions* are more likely to be expressed in a relatively openly designed interview situation than in a standardised interview or a questionnaire (e.g. in Kohli, 1978). Semi-structured interviewing was used in the first empirical part of this study, precisely because the research question aimed at eliciting how refugees *themselves* perceived their post-migration experiences and their well-being.

The semi-structured interview is suggested by Scheele and Groeben (1988) in their method for reconstructing subjective theories. The term “subjective theory” refers to the fact that the interviewee constructs a complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study. This implies that people as the “subjects” of research are to be characterised by those same qualities and abilities, which a person as a scientist regards as part of his/her self-concept: verbal and communicational abilities, reflexivity, potential rationality and the competence to act (Groeben, 1986). The knowledge that people construct includes assumptions that are explicit and immediate and which they can express spontaneously in answering an open question. These are complemented by implicit assumptions, which can be derived through questions more directed to the research topic. These more closed questions can be theory-driven, i.e. they are oriented to the scientific literature about the topic or are based on the researcher’s theoretical presuppositions (Groeben, 1990). In order to articulate these, the interviewee must be supported by methodological aids, which is why different types of questions¹ are applied here. They are used to reconstruct the interviewee’s subjective theory about the issue under study.

In the first empirical part both open and theory-driven questions were asked, as seen from the interview agenda presented in the next paragraphs. It should be noted that the “fastidious details of the method” (Flick, 2002: 85) need to be adapted to the research question and the potential interviewees, by reducing the rules suggested by Scheele & Groeben, as was done in this study. Thus one limitation of the method is that in a large part of the research on subjective theories, only a short version of the method is applied. Another problem is the interpretation of the data collected with it, because there are no explicit suggestions for how to proceed. Nevertheless, the method was chosen because its scope for shaping the contents of the emerging subjective theory remained wide enough.

¹ During the interviews, the contents of the subjective theory are reconstructed. The interview guide mentions several topic areas. Each of these can be introduced by an open question (e.g. in the present study, “what are the main differences between living in your home country and living in the U.K.”), which may be answered on the basis of the knowledge the interviewee has immediately at hand. Additionally, theory-driven questions are asked. These are oriented to the scientific literature about the topic or are based on the researcher’s theoretical presuppositions. In the interview, the relations formulated in these questions serve the purpose of making the interviewee’s implicit knowledge more explicit. The assumptions in these questions are designed as an offer to the interviewees, which they might take up or refuse “according to whether they correspond to their subjective theories or not” (Scheele & Groeben, 1988:35-6).

3.6 Research design

3.6.1 Background of the study

It is important to discuss briefly how I came to be interested in this research area of migration and psychological health and why I focused on how refugees perceive the relation between their experiences in the host country and their well-being.

During my undergraduate studies in social and clinical psychology I undertook several courses on cross-cultural psychology, in which migration and psychological health is a sub-specialty. At the same time, my practical experience² and especially my work at the university counselling centre provided me with my first cross-cultural experiences, since many foreign students would visit this counselling center. In the Greek university foreign students constitute a small minority, so the fact that many of them sought advice and support was indicating that it is something about *these* people's experiences that prompted them to visit the counselling centre. My own initial assumptions were that these individuals are away from their home/ countries and therefore I expected them to show up with stress-related problems, depressive symptoms and psychosomatic complaints. I had formulated these assumptions during the course of my studies because a large section of the literature in cross-cultural psychology focuses on clinical issues and the psychopathological symptoms found within ethnic minorities and migrant groups.

But my interaction with these students suggested many times something different: they would often come to discuss non-psychiatric issues, such as how to expand their social networks, whether they should participate or not in students' political groups, how to learn more about the Greek culture etc. This was the first time when I could see that I, as a trainee clinical psychologist, was already developing views or rather presuppositions about people's psychological health that would not necessarily correspond to how people themselves presented their psychological-health related issues.

I arrived in the U.K. for post-graduate studies at the end of 2000, a time when the asylum-discourse was already intense and which took a negative and even incriminating nuance, a year later, after the events of 9/11. Refugees and asylum-seekers were described in the media with various terms, from "lazy" and "passive", to "vulnerable", "desperate" and "exploiter". Numerous research reports would also discuss these groups' psychological health in terms of "distress", "trauma" and "vulnerability". Due to my clinical psychology

² It is required from all students in the clinical psychology faculty to undertake practical work in different structures, such as psychiatric hospitals and public mental health institutions, for at least six months.

background, the stereotypes with regards to psychological health/ illness first triggered my interest and secondly the stereotypes with regards to their social status. The research question of this study started gradually to be formulated: since psychological health literature, research reports, and the media had something to say about their psychological health, it would be interesting to study how *they* perceived it.

I knew I would have to meet and interact with refugees and asylum seekers, since it was their perceptions I was interested in. Locating channels, or starting points, in order to make contact with possible interviewees required the assistance of gatekeepers, because it would have been difficult to locate refugees otherwise. This is one reason why I approached two organisations in the county of Cambridgeshire. The first one gives advice (e.g. on legal issues, housing or financial problems) and support, mainly through their counselling services, to refugees and asylum seekers and the second one is a group of local people who work to improve awareness of why people are driven to seek asylum and what it is like for them to live in the U.K. My intention was to become involved in these organisations with the ultimate goal of interviewing some of their clients for the purposes of my research study. I also approached these organisations because similar groups and agencies play an important role to many refugees' lives in the host country, thus it would be additionally challenging to explore the participants' social-psychological worlds through this vantage point.

The second group was holding regular meetings for discussing the impact of new immigration laws on refugees and asylum seekers and general issues of asylum. So by becoming a member and attending their meetings I was able to make contact with people and ask them whether they would be interested in participating in my study. The situation with the first group, that was giving advice and support to refugees and asylum seekers, was rather more complex. This group did not allow me to "simply join in and conduct interviews". What they suggested was that I volunteer for them (that is, spend at least one working day on a weekly basis) and help out with various tasks, mainly administrative work. In exchange, they would allow me to interview some of their clients, of course only after obtaining the potential participants' consent. It should be noted that this "restriction" is also evident in the interview questions I used while carrying out the first empirical part. Due to ethical considerations the organisation asked me to present a specific interview agenda, which they would first check and then would allow me to proceed with the interviews. I accepted this prerequisite and went on to carry out the first empirical part of the study. In the second part of the research, for reasons which are discussed in the end of Chapter Four, I interviewed the other group of participants in a more open-ended way.

3.6.2 Choice of interviewees

In an interview study, the issue of sampling is connected to the decision about which persons to interview (case sampling) and from which groups these should come (sampling groups of cases). Furthermore, it emerges with the decision about which of the interviews should be further treated, i.e. transcribed and interpreted (material sampling). During interpretation of the data, the question again arises with the decision about which parts of a text should be selected for interpretation in general or for particular detailed interpretations (sampling within the material). Finally it arises when presenting the findings and the researcher has to choose the cases or parts of text, which are best used to demonstrate the findings (presentational sampling) (Flick, 2002). Various suggestions have been made in the literature for the problem of sampling. But quite unambiguously they are located at two poles: on more or less abstract or on more or less concrete criteria (Henry, 1990).

At one pole, there is the logic of *statistical sampling*, in which material is put together according to certain (e.g. demographic) criteria, for example a sample, which is homogeneous in age or socioeconomic status. These criteria are abstract, because they have been developed independently of the concrete material analysed and before its collection and analysis.

At the other pole, there is the logic of *theoretical sampling* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), whose basic principle is to select cases or case groups according to concrete criteria concerning their content instead of using abstract methodological criteria. A structured sample results from the use of both strategies of theoretical and statistical sampling. But the main difference between them is that in theoretical sampling the sample's structure is developed step by step during the collection of data and their interpretation and is completed by new dimensions or limited to certain dimensions.

However, both these approaches stem from positivist perspectives, which demand or point to specific sampling techniques. In the case of the present study, I initially sought out refugees or asylum seekers who had an economically active age, because previous empirical research had shown that these populations have adverse post-migration experiences, such as housing problems, language difficulties, unemployment and/or underemployment, racism etc when compared to natives and other ethnic minorities in the U.K. In addition they had a high educational background (that is, all of them had completed graduate education or had at least a few years' practical training after finishing high-school education). I considered this characteristic as important because according to previous research, status-inconsistency,

which is often experienced by highly educated refugees, has been associated with the images of “vulnerability” and/or “passiveness” that are often assigned to them. But at the same time, this group consisted of people who seemed to be primarily strong and highly motivated, since they took the radical decision to flee their countries for improving their lives. This combination of features attributed to refugees in the U.K., that is, having high educational background, facing adverse post-migration experiences and being “vulnerable” and/or “passive”, but also being an atypical, select group led me to choose this population for the purposes of this research study. Therefore my choice of interviewees was clearly influenced by previous research in this area and by the expectations formed in my mind, that this group could provide rich information with which to illuminate the research question.

Individuals who had the above characteristics were selected, for exploring their own perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences in the U.K. and their psychosocial well-being. Finally, the interviewees were found through the “snowball technique”, that is, a few participants were located through the two organisations mentioned above and after being interviewed I asked them to introduce me to more people who fulfilled the selection criteria.

3.6.3 Interview agenda

The interviews were semi-structured, for the reasons explained above, however, I did not want to use closed questions, which would restrict even more the interviewees’ responses and therefore valuable information about their subjective theories would remain undetected. The semi-structures interview mentioned different topical areas, and each of these was introduced by an open question. *Open questions* (e.g. “What are the main differences between living in your home country and living in the U.K.?”) could be answered on the basis of the knowledge and experiences that the interviewees had immediately at hand.

Additionally, I asked *theory-driven questions*, that is, questions which were oriented to the literature about the topic or were based on my theoretical presuppositions. The general stress and coping approach predefined the content and the sequence of the issues to be discussed, which is why I prompted the interviewees to talk about post-migration experiences (which corresponded to “life events”), social support, (that is, “social resources”), explanations given for their experiences (that is, “personal resources”) and finally self-

esteem, sense of adaptation and life satisfaction (that is, “psychosocial well-being outcomes”).

One example of a theory-driven question was the question “what has been mostly difficult while living in the U.K and why” which intended to derive the most intense life event the participants had experienced after migrating to the U.K. This allowed for the possibility that the issue of employment might or might not arise at that point as an important stressor. If employment was *not* being mentioned spontaneously by a participant, then this issue was introduced later during the interview by the researcher. In a similar way, the question “whether they asked for help when facing these difficulties and what kind of help” intended to elicit the social resources the participants used.

Several questions in the interview agenda were theory-driven, since, as already mentioned, the gatekeepers in the organisation where I found most of the participants, required from me a specific interview agenda, with more-or-less predefined items. They brought forward these ethical considerations, for ensuring that the questions I would pose would not make the interviewees feel that I am “intruding their social-psychological world”. This is an ethical issue of utmost importance when interviewing refugees, especially those who are not secure about their immigration status. Because of their fear that the information they give may reach the Home Office or the local authorities, they may show a strong element of suspicion towards the interviewer (Bloch, 1999b), which is why the gatekeepers wanted to check in advance the content of the interview agenda. This highlighted the relevance of the constructivist paradigm and particularly its second tenet, i.e. the social influences on construction. As discussed in the next chapters, the way the participants formed their perceptions of their experiences and well-being were certainly influenced by others, such as the gatekeepers, me, other refugees they interacted with etc.

The interview agenda is presented in Appendix 1, but in general the purpose of the interview was to obtain data on: the main differences between living in home country and living in the U.K., post-migration experiences and reasons behind them, psychosocial resources used by the participants for tackling these difficulties, employment history and meaning of employment, explanations given for current employment status and psychosocial well-being.

It is important to discuss also the choice of specific items in the interview agenda. There is still intense controversy about which stress and coping components should be used when migrant populations are studied and how they should be conceptualised (Thoits, 1995). The controversy has been even greater when researchers have to select the most adequate

definitions of psychological health items (Brandt, 1980; Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Link & Dohrenwend, 1980; Pernice, 1994; Reid & Ziegler, 1988; Williams & Harris-Reid, 1999; Young, 2001). As far as psychological health outcomes are concerned, the stress and coping approach has been precisely criticised for:

1. Using primarily items that capture symptoms of psychological *illness* rather than *psychological well-being* (Young, 2001)
2. Even when more positive dimensions of well-being are studied, there are still confounded definitions of psychological health (e.g. it is unclear how to conceptualise adaptation, as well as whether and how to make the distinction between self-esteem and self-concept (Emler, 2001).

In the present study the items selected for “assessing” psychosocial well-being were “self-esteem”, “sense of adaptation” and “life satisfaction”. As it is perceptions of psychosocial well-being, which this study focused on, the selected items should capture both social and psychological dimensions of well-being. Adaptation has been conceptualised as a multifaceted process (Moghaddam et al., 1993; Searle & Ward, 1990) and has been differentiated into psychological, socio-cultural and recently economic adaptation in studies, which examined migrants’ well-being (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Birman et al, 2004; Takeda, 2000). In this study, the participants were asked to discuss “if they feel adapted in the U.K.”, a question which allows for this psychosocial dimension of well-being to emerge. In addition, one of the reasons for selecting self-esteem and life satisfaction was because they have been previously used as indicators of migrants’ psychological well-being (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Birman et al., 2004; Naidoo, 1992; Padilla et al., 1983; Padilla et al., 1985; Vinokurov et al., 2000; Young, 2001). However, they were also chosen due to the above critical points, which pointed out the need for *positive* dimensions of well-being. Indeed, self-esteem (in this study, it was rather self-concept that I was looking at) is one of the strongest predictors of psychological well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999). At the same time, life satisfaction is a subjective measure of human welfare, which encompasses the positive *and* psychosocial dimensions, since it is defined as “a global assessment of a person’s quality of life according to his own criteria” (Shin & Johnson, 1978) and is affected by one’s aspirations, standards of reference and immediate feeling (Evans et al., 1985).

3.6.4 Data analysis

Thematic network analysis was used for organising and interpreting the interview data. Thematic analyses of qualitative data in general attempt to reveal the themes salient in a text at different levels and thematic networks in particular, aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 387).

Clearly, the process of deriving themes from textual data and illustrating these with some representational tool is well-established in qualitative research. As such, thematic networks analysis is not a new method, but one that shares the key features of any hermeneutic analysis. What thematic networks offer is the web-like network as an organising principle and a representational means, and it makes explicit the procedures that may be employed in going from text to interpretation.

Thematic networks, as an analytic tool, draw on core features that are common to many approaches in qualitative analysis. In this sense, it is difficult to isolate the specific conceptual foundations of the method, as parallels of the guiding principles and specific steps can be found in other analytic techniques. Nevertheless, the procedure of thematic networks analysis can be described as follows:

Thematic networks systematise the extraction of: 1) lowest-order premises evident in the text (basic themes) 2) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarise more abstract principles (organising themes) and 3) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (global themes). These are then represented as web-like maps depicting the salient themes at each of the three levels and illustrating the relationships between them. The procedure of thematic networks analysis does not aim to discover the beginning of arguments or the end of rationalisations; it simply provides a technique for breaking up text and finding within it explicit rationalisations and their implicit signification (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 388). The three classes of themes are:

1. *Basic theme*: This is the most basic or lowest-order theme derived from the textual data. It is like a backing in that it is a statement of belief anchored around a central notion and contributes toward the signification of a super-ordinate theme. In order for a basic theme to make sense beyond its immediate meaning, it needs to be read within the context of other basic themes. Together, they represent an organising theme.
2. *Organising theme*: This is a middle-order theme that organises the basic themes into clusters of similar issues. They are clusters of signification that summarise the principal assumptions of a group of basic themes, so they are more abstract and more revealing of

what is going on in the texts. However, their role is also to enhance the meaning and significance of a broader theme that unites several organising themes.

3. *Global themes*: Global themes are super-ordinate themes that encompass the principal metaphors in the data as a whole. A global theme is like a claim in that it is a concluding or final tenet. It is important to note that a set of texts may yield more than one global theme, depending on the complexity of the data and the analytic aims; however, these will be much fewer in number than the organising and basic themes. Each global theme is the core of a thematic network, therefore an analysis may result in more than one thematic network.

A thematic network is developed starting from the basic themes and working inwards toward a global theme. In the next chapter, three thematic networks are presented, which represent the three *subjective theories* the interviewees presented with regards to the research question. The overall presentation is interspersed with relevant interview quotes, for showing how the basic and organising themes linked together to form a subjective theory. It is important to note that the networks were only a tool in analysis, not the analysis itself. The analytic steps taken for reducing the text from the interviews, exploring and finally interpreting it are described in the next chapter.

3.7 Synopsis

The first section of this chapter presented four paradigms, which inform research studies in the social sciences. After discussing the criticism that has been addressed towards the predominant positivist paradigm within stress and coping research in general and towards stress and coping research with refugees in particular, the choice of constructivism for the purposes of this study was justified. The constructivist guidelines, which informed this study were then discussed in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology.

The methodological section was more extensive, since it discussed the qualitative-quantitative antinomy, why it was useful to derive qualitative data for this study's research question, as well as the importance of using the hermeneutic approach while interpreting this data.

The second section of the chapter was concerned with the research design. Apart from discussing the interview method, the choice of interviewees and the interview agenda, it was

also necessary to give details about the background of the study (i.e. how the research question was gradually formulated) and its interactional context (i.e. relationships formed between the interviewees, the researcher and the gatekeepers). These elements are of major importance in a constructivist study, which aims at understanding individuals' perceptions, as well as how a specific social context influences the shaping of these perceptions.

However, since a constructivist researcher tries to understand the complex world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live it, the interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is not only methodologically interesting, but also politically and ideologically important. The ideological and political implications of the study will emerge after the presentation and discussion of its two empirical parts. Nevertheless this chapter, by describing the constructivist paradigm adopted in this study, already gave some insight on where this contribution can be traced.

Chapter 4: Empirical research into refugees' subjective theories of how their post-migration experiences are related to their psychosocial well-being

This chapter presents and discusses the first empirical part of this study. From the literature review one can see that there has been an emphasis on the stressful experiences that refugees face after migration and on the psychological health problems that result from these experiences. However, it has not been clarified how refugees *themselves* perceive these adverse experiences, their potential solutions and their psychosocial well-being outcomes. Therefore, the research question focused on eliciting the *subjective theories* which refugees had of these experiences, their coping resources and the consequences for their well-being.

For the purposes of the first empirical part I conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 highly educated individuals selected from the refugee population of the County of Cambridgeshire. The interviews were analysed qualitatively (Flick, 2002), by the method of thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) and they provided a rich set of empirical information.

4.1 Series of semi-structured interviews

The general stress and coping approach informed the choice of basic themes for the interviews. The participants were asked about, stressors, resources and psychosocial well-being outcomes, as a way of exploring their perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being. As the interviews were semi-structured, I avoided using closed questions, which would restrict the interviewees' responses and therefore valuable information about their subjective theories would remain undetected. For example, the question "what has been mostly difficult while living in the U.K and why" intended to reveal the most intense stressor the interviewees had experienced since arriving to the U.K. This allowed for the possibility that the issue of employment, that is, one of the stressors in which I was particularly interested, might or might not arise at that point as an important stressor for the interviewees. It should be noted that if employment was *not* mentioned spontaneously by a participant, then I would introduce this issue at a later stage of the interview.

In a similar way, the question whether they asked for help when facing these difficulties and what kind of help attempted to elicit the psychosocial resources the participants used. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, because of the ethical considerations brought forward by the local group for migrants and refugees, via which I located the participants, the questions could not be entirely open-ended either. The employees in the organisation who introduced me to the participants wanted to see a specific interview agenda, with predefined questions before allowing me to conduct the interviews. The constructivist paradigm along which this study was carried out often suggests the use of hermeneutic methods, such as ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) or life-story interviews (Atkinson, 2001) where the researcher asks few and mainly open-ended questions. Nevertheless, because of the above ethical issues, the middle-ground solution was to use *both* open-ended and closed questions.

The agenda is presented in Appendix 1. Due to the semi-structured mode, the order of questioning and the means of addressing each question varied slightly from one participant to the other. For example, some sub-items were not asked because the interviewee would give the answer in advance, on his/ her own initiative. In general, the purpose of the interview was to elicit information on the following topics:

- Main differences between living in home country and living in the U.K.
- What has been difficult while living in the U.K. and for which reasons (stressors)
- Psychosocial resources the participants sought for/used when facing these difficulties (resources)
- Employment history in home country and in the U.K.
- Reasons given for current employment status (resources)
- Self-esteem since coming to the U.K. (psychosocial well-being outcomes)
- Sense of adaptation in the U.K. (psychosocial well-being outcomes)
- Life satisfaction in the U.K. (psychosocial well-being outcomes)

4.2 Context of the interview and characteristics of the participants

The first five participants were located through the two local organisations in Cambridgeshire which, as already discussed in the previous chapter, aid ethnic minorities and refugees respectively. A few months before carrying out this empirical research I became involved as

a volunteer in one of the groups, in order to familiarise myself with such networks, which play an important role in most refugees' social psychological worlds, but also for meeting some of their clients and interviewing them for the purposes of my study. When I asked two clients whether they would want to discuss their general experiences in the U.K. and especially their employment experiences and their well-being, they agreed to do so. By contacting people who were participating in the second organisation, I managed to find three more participants. The other ten individuals were located through "snowballing", i.e. one of the five initial participants would contact a friend or a relative, who would either agree to participate or contact someone else and suggest that he/ she participates and so on.

Most of the interviews were carried out in the organisation where I was volunteering, during office hours. A few participants who were not in frequent contact with this organisation, preferred to have the interview-meeting elsewhere (in this case, we would meet in a coffee-shop they would suggest).

Refugees are described in the literature as guarded and distrustful in their personal interactions because they have to protect themselves (McSpadden, 1987). This means that the level of distrust may be raised when they are approached to speak openly about their experiences and personal situations. The refugees' personal fear may be enlarged by the concern that somehow their responses and their names will be linked and become known in their home countries, causing their families to be in danger. Therefore I assured them that everything they would say would be kept confidential, that all responses would be anonymous and that their identities would be protected. Some participants agreed to be audio-recorded, but some others clearly expressed their wish not to be recorded, in which case I took hand-written notes. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

The sample consisted of eight men and seven women. The participants originated from several countries from the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Most of the participants were young, ten of them were between the ages of twenty-five to thirty-five, while the others were aged from early to mid-forties. The participants were highly educated: five individuals had a post-graduate degree, seven had a university degree, and the remaining three participants had received at least two years of technical training, after having completed high-school-level education. Regarding their migration status, nine participants had obtained full-refugee status, while six of them described themselves as "asylum-seekers". As far as their employment status is concerned, at the time of interviewing, seven out of the fifteen interviewees stated being unemployed, two had full-time employment and six were also

employed but in temporary jobs, which were at a “lower level” from the jobs they used to hold in their home countries.

4.3 Analysis of the interviews

It is important to describe the way the interview material was analysed. Each time I completed an interview, I transcribed it by listening to the audio-recorded interview. In the case of those interviews which were not tape-recorded but hand-written, it was crucial to transcribe them immediately, as I still remembered details from what the interviewees had said, which had not all been written down during the interview.

Thematic network analysis was used for organising and interpreting the interview data. Thematic networks are the tools with which *subjective theories* may be presented and understood. In the next sections three thematic networks are presented, which represent the three *subjective theories* that three subgroups from within the sample of interviewees presented with regards to the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being. Along with the presentation of each thematic network, the basic and organising themes are also presented, in order to substantiate the content of each subjective theory. Relevant quotes from the interviews are integrated in the overall presentation, for illustrating how the basic and organising themes link together into a subjective theory. In the end of each quote the gender, occupation and ethnic origin of the particular interviewee are noted in brackets. After the three thematic networks have been presented and the subjective theories have been clarified, the chapter finishes with a discussion on how the theories emerging from the analysis related to the study’s research question and its theoretical grounding.

The first step in a thematic network analysis is to code the material and this was carried out by dissecting the text into meaningful text segments, with the use of a coding framework. Devising such a framework is usually done on the basis of the theoretical interests guiding the research questions, on the basis of salient issues that arise in the text itself, or on the basis of both (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, coding was based on the stress and coping theoretical approach, which is why the codes were created by having in mind the categories of stressors, attributions of stressors, personal resources, social resources and psychosocial well-being outcomes.

It is important to clarify again how the stress and coping approach has been regarded in this study. I accepted indeed that the concepts and issues of stress and coping are

predominant in the migration and psychological health area, but my aim here was to see how the participants would perceive the above. This meant that I would not use the typical approach in the stress and coping area, which examines “objective” relations between stress, coping and psychological health and instead, I would look at how people *themselves* perceived the stress and coping process. Therefore, this process provided the main theoretical material for studying the research question (and this is why the codes I used during the analysis of the interview material were based on the stress and coping components), but was studied through the participants’ perceptions.

The coding framework was based on pre-established criteria (that is, the topics of stress, coping and well-being) and also on recurrent issues in the text. The codes should have quite explicit boundaries (definitions), so that they are not interchangeable and they should also be broad enough in scope, in order to avoid coding every single sentence in the original text. For example, the code “social life-related stressors” included text quotations such as, “I miss the people from my country more and more” or “I feel I have no friends here”. The 20 codes, which were devised from this study’s interview material, are presented in Appendix 2.

In the next step of the coding procedure the codes are applied to the textual data to dissect it into text segments: meaningful and manageable chunks of text, that is, meaningful quotations, in the present case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the text was coded, themes were abstracted from the coded text segments: this was done by going through the text segments in each code and then extracting the common or significant themes in the coded text segments. For example, from the code “employment-related stressors”, an emerging theme was that employment-related issues are amongst the participants’ main post-migration experiences in the U.K.

The themes derived from the text were assembled into coherent groupings, an action made on the basis of content and also on theoretical grounds (e.g. the social resources that the participants claimed to have activated were divided into “ethnic” and “local groups”). Sometimes the themes are few and similar enough to fit into one network. If they are too many, or if quite distinct issues arise, as in the present study, then more than one network should be made. Each grouping will result in a distinct global theme (i.e. one subjective theory), supported by discrete organising and basic themes. The themes that are derived from the text and then assembled into groups become the basic themes. Then by creating clusters of basic themes centred on larger, shared issues, the organising themes are produced. Finally, in light of the basic themes, the main claim or argument that the organising themes refer to is summarised and this claim is the global theme (i.e. the subjective theory), which refers to the

core, principal metaphor that encapsulates the main point in the text. In the present analysis three different subjective theories emerged because there were obvious differences not so much between the basic themes (i.e. stressors) that supported each subjective theory but between the organising themes (i.e. psychosocial resources). For example, an important difference between the first two subjective theories and the third one was that in the latter the participants discussed also resources they did *not* activate. But the main dimension along which the three subjective theories were different referred to the psychosocial well-being outcomes: the first group of participants who presented the first subjective theory discussed having positive well-being, the second one presented their well-being as fluctuating, while in the third one the interviewees clearly talked about their decreasing psychosocial well-being.

In summary, the thematic networks were created by working from the periphery, that is, the basic themes, inwards to the global themes. The objective was to summarise particular themes for creating larger themes that condense the concepts and ideas mentioned at a lower level. This progression from the codes, to the basic, organising and finally global themes is illustrated in the columns in Appendix 2. In the following pages I start by outlining all the basic themes and then the three subjective theories are presented and discussed in detail.

4.4 Basic themes

In thematic networks analysis the basic themes on their own say little about the text or group of texts as a whole. In order for a basic theme to make sense beyond its immediate meaning it needs to be read along with the organising themes. This is why basic, organising and global themes are usually presented *together* when a thematic network is being discussed. Nevertheless, the present section begins with a presentation only of the basic themes that were derived from the interview material. They are presented separately from the main thematic networks because they cut across *all* three subjective theories. Most participants mentioned similar basic themes, but there were different ways of explaining and responding to them, as illustrated later, when the three subjective theories that different groups of participants presented, are described in detail.

The first topic in the interview agenda referred to the stressful factors, which the respondents had experienced since arriving in the U.K. Questions like “what are the main differences between living in the country of origin and living in the U.K.” and “what has been

difficult while living in the U.K. and why” were used to address this topic. These emerging stressors, constituted the basic themes and are the following:

- **Lack of environmental mastery**

This is a commonly discussed stressor, which is why it was one of the basic themes in all three subjective theories. “Lack of environmental mastery” refers to problems with understanding and using the English language and/ or difficulties in getting familiar with the country and the place one lives in. The quotes below illustrate respectively these post-migration experiences:

“...People here are more open-minded I think. But actually it depends on the level of the society, what level of society you have to deal with. When you have to deal with official people or educated people, they are so nice, but when you have to deal with uneducated people it is completely different...I think when people come from overseas in this country the only sort of help they can rely on is some people from their country, that’s it...At the beginning it is completely like this, after one or two years, when they get in the society perhaps they change, but at the beginning at least in the first six months, even after that, it depends on your nationality...For someone who comes from the Middle-East it is very difficult to establish a life here...” (male, accountant and lecturer, Middle Eastern)

“The language, that’s what I found very difficult. Before I came here I had learnt some English many years ago, but I was thinking I could manage the more general English. But when I came here I found it very difficult, even when going to a shop I could not understand what somebody said” (female, electronic engineer, Asian)

- **Employment-related problems**

Many participants discussed the experience of unemployment. It included several adverse experiences such as difficulties in finding accommodation, poverty and loss of valued social and occupational roles they used to have in their home country. The two issues of housing and employment were interrelated, as seen in the next quote:

“For about six, eight months I think, I lived with friends. And because I had friends they could offer me accommodation without charging me or charging me something basic. But if I had not had friends, I would not be able to stay and I had no other way to get the money. So absolutely no control, I did not have a proper job, I also did not have a place of my own...You know, absolutely no control...I mean it’s important to have a job in that sense because that gives you control. It puts you into a legal status... And once you exist legally that’s when you are in control and then of course when you have the money to have your own accommodation...” (male, graduate in Linguistics, Eastern European)

In addition, unemployment entailed severe financial difficulties, as seen below:

“Well, first of all (the problems) is that I have no money, and I don't mean having lots of money to buy things and travel, I cannot do any of that. But I mean having a bit more than the benefits, because the benefits are nothing really, one cannot live just on that” (male, computer technician, Middle Eastern)

Finally, the most commonly discussed experience related to unemployment was losing previously held social and/ or occupational roles. For example:

“Of course I want to work to make some money, this is common sense. The only thing is that it is very hard for foreign people to find a good job, a job that matches their skills. And you see skilled people either unemployed, or having some low job, while they deserve better...I was unemployed for some time, when I was waiting for the status and I did not have a work permit...That was a very bad time for me, I felt completely useless, there was no point in carrying on, really” (male, IT officer, African)

“For example, in my case, if I was in my country I could not work at a shop, never, ever. Because I was lecturing at the University, I had a job, I had a supervisor, I was educated, so I could not do this there, never. Even to some people I did not say that I work here in a shop, to some of them I said it, to some of them I did not. It is like this” (male, accountant and lecturer, Middle Eastern)

In the previous quotes the participants' valued social roles derived from their profession, but as seen in the next extract, a respectable social role might also result from having a high educational background:

“I got my main diploma and my MSc in Industrial management, from the University of Teheran. This is the best university in the country, especially in this subject. And for the MSc, about a thousand people apply, but only 35 students are accepted. I have to say it is very hard to be accepted because of the competition and it is very hard to do the course...I was very proud to get this education...But here I feel disappointed because I worked hard for my degree and here it is as if I don't have it. This is difficult, it means that I have to prove everything I have again...” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

“I was lucky because my parents wanted me to have good education. So I went to University and this was very important for me, because I come from a small town and most women there get married after school and that is their life, you know, that is all they do. Because of my education I was thinking that I could be important and give something to the society, do something good for people...In my country I had pressure from many people but I was strong and I felt good about myself, here I don't feel that, I feel I am of second sort of people...” (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

In addition, some interviewees discussed how underemployment, that is, having a job that did not match their high educational qualifications and skills, was one of their major difficulties in the U.K. The participant below discussed how she could not find “a proper job”, i.e. employment to match her professional skills and work experience:

“First thing I did after I came here, I think it was half a year later, I was going to work in a company, where they do assembling work. I think it is very hard because my background is scientific and then you come here and you have to do this. So I find it very difficult because of the culture, because the country’s background is very, very different from my country. There are a lot of things you have to face and that keeps the pressure on...And I got some help only from my husband. I feel that I just go to work to make money and that’s it...” (female, electronic engineer, Asian)

As noted in the case of unemployment above, the experience of underemployment entailed also financial hardship and loss of social and occupational roles. For example:

“When I first came here some people helped me to get small jobs, but they were part-time and not good, I mean I could not use my knowledge, so what is the point in having a job like this? The best thing is to have a full-time job, with a stable salary and this will help me save money slowly. But without refugee status and no recognised qualifications I cannot find a job like this. And my application for the status could take years, I am waiting for almost two years...” (male, computer technician, Eastern European)

From the above quotes we can see why employment-related experiences in the U.K. were amongst the most extensively discussed difficulties: these experiences entailed practical issues (e.g. financial hardship, housing problems), but also seemed to have psychological consequences, since the roles they were proud of (i.e. being highly-educated and a good professional) had been lost after migrating to the U.K.

- **Lack of time structure**

This commonly discussed post-migration experience referred to not having any meaningful activities to be occupied with as well as having a lot of idle time:

“I want to work by now, because I am tired of doing nothing or of studying all the time. Ok, going to classes is good but then I have so many hours in the day that I don’t know what to do with myself, this is a very bad feeling...I really want to do something useful...” (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

“I am an academic, so money is not very important for me, graduating was very important for opening my mind...In my country I used very clever ways to do anything, I was active. But I lost that now because I don’t have any activities and I don’t have any opportunities for activities and to be creative” (male, researcher, Middle Eastern)

The participants who discussed in detail the experience of “lack of time structure” focused on the problem of having too much free time, of not undertaking any activities and consequently of feeling useless.

- **Family-related problems**

This is another difficult post-migration experience that almost all interviewees discussed in the interview. It referred to “missing one’s family” (and by saying “family” they referred to parents and relatives who continue to live in their home country) but also to “worrying about the family’s safety and future”, as seen below:

“...I miss my family, this is very difficult. In the first months it was very bad...I was thinking of them all the time, but now I am used to being away from them. I know it is very hard not to miss them, because in our culture we are very close to our families, and not just the parents, but the whole family, brothers, sisters, uncles and grand-parents” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

“Then we got a little place to stay but it was strange because all of my life I know I would go home in the evening and my family would be waiting. But here it was so bad. Because my brother was working long hours and I remember the feeling when I would go home and I would be all on my own. Well, the worst thing was that my daughter was still in my country and we were apart for one year. And when she was there, she was in danger, so you can imagine how much I was afraid for her” (female, accountant, African)

- **Social life-related problems**

Finally, the above basic theme concerned the experiences of “missing friends and one’s own community” and of “feeling socially isolated” in the host country. In the next quote the participant discussed missing her family and friends and, as well as feeling nostalgic about her compatriots:

“...In the beginning I made some English friends, we are still good friends. It was ok for some time, but I think that friends here cannot take the place of your family, and the people from your country. With them you don’t feel foreign, you have the same language and traditions and the same memories. Some people get used to this, but for me it is getting worse every year, I miss them more and more and I don’t know what to do about it...” (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

4.5 Organising themes

Organising themes are middle-order themes that summarise the principal assumptions of a group of basic themes, so they are more revealing of what is going on in the texts, but their role is also to enhance the meaning and significance of a broader issue that unites several organising themes. In this study the organising themes referred to the *active use of resources* the participants used for coping with their experienced post-migration stressors. This active

use of resources was chosen as the significant principle, which linked the basic themes, precisely because it showed what the participants claimed to *do* for coping with the stressors they extensively talked about, that is, it revealed more of what goes on in the text.

The questions used to elicit the participants' psychosocial resources were: "what has been difficult while living in the U.K. and what are the reasons for these difficulties", "who helped them to cope with the experienced difficulties", if they asked for further help, "what kind of help did they ask for" and if they did not ask for help, why they did not. "Locus or sense of control" is one of the most commonly studied *personal* resources in stress and coping research and this is why the interviewees were asked to discuss the reasons given for the stressors they had experienced. At the same time, social support is the most commonly studied *social* resource, which is why they were asked to talk about who and how helped them to cope with their difficulties. The social resources referred mainly to the *social networks* that the participants turned to for receiving several types of help and they are the following:

- **Turning to local refugee group for jobs information and career advice:**

There were several interviewees who previously mentioned their employment-related problems and now discussed how they turned to groups for receiving advice and help on employment-related issues. It is interesting to note in the second quote the clear statement of *not* wanting to approach an ethnic community for help and/ or advice because -according to the interviewee-there is no trust between the members of such communities:

"I don't have strong connections with my own (ethnic) community, because it does not give me any satisfaction to see somebody from Turkey, I just want to see people who have some quality. There are lots of Turkish and Kurdish people here but I don't want to be close to them. There are different reasons why they are here, and this can make things more complex. So no, I am not keen to be with others from my own community. I used to think that seeing somebody from my country was a big thing, but as time goes by you change your mind" (female, teacher, Middle Eastern)

"...I was worried that I would have to compete with other immigrants or refugees, other Eastern European people can be very competitive about jobs. But because I wanted to avoid all this, I went to a local organisation for refugees for asking for help I think it was a good decision to stay away from others from my country..." (female, clinical psychologist, Eastern European)

- **Turning to ethnic group for jobs information and career advice**

At the same time there were interviewees who discussed the importance of their *ethnic group* as a source of advice and informational support, especially with regards to unemployment/underemployment-related issues. For example:

“If you want information on your asylum application or how to apply for income support, the local organisations for immigrants are good, I have not been there but people say they give a lot of help. For other things there is of course the ethnic community. When I first came here I worked for a couple of months and the only reason I found that job were the people from my ethnic group...” (male, computer technician, Middle Eastern)

“In the beginning I did not want to be with people from my ethnic group...because many of them who come here, they want to be with the others only because of their common nationality, not because they match in personality or because they could be friends..But when it comes to other issues, I find that no one else can understand the patience involved, because everyone had to go more or less through the same thing, especially people who are established here. You see no one else can understand the complexity...dealing with visas, with work registrations, registrations with the NHS and finding a job, or at least find out about available jobs... So I would say that my ethnic group turned out to be very helpful” (male, graduate in Linguistics, Eastern European)

Unlike the participants in the previous theme, who approached local groups because they did not trust their ethnic community, the interviewees above pointed out the importance of turning to one’s ethnic group. According to them, the fact that all people in the ethnic group had been through the same things, made them affiliated and consequently willing to help one another with the typical post-migration difficulties they had all faced.

- **Turning to either group for social networking and bonding with others**

Social networking seemed to be an important way of coping with several of the above stressors (e.g. having a lot of spare time, missing family and friends) and for some participants the way to start this networking seemed to be by turning to different social groups, like ethnic groups and/ or local refugee organisations. For example:

“...I have not made any friends, maybe because I stayed away from people but until now I did not have time for that...I guess I will meet at some point people from my ethnic group, I know there is a strong African group here and it is easy to make a few friends like that, but I have to settle some things in my life and then start the social relations” (male, IT officer, African)

Finally there were those interviewees who preferred to turn to the local support group, in order to meet other people, and preferably not others from their ethnic group, and to build a social network in the U.K. For example:

“Well, the English people have been very helpful to me because I have met most of them in organisations or centres and they are doing their job you know, they help you with the papers, the applications, they give any

information you want...The situation is complicated with the other asylum seekers and refugees...Even if [the Community for people from my country] was closer, I don't think I would go. You see, there is something like competition and then it is mistrust. The people that have been here for years may look down on you because they know you are still an asylum seeker and they think you just want to join the Community for some profit, for making connections with the refugees who have been here for long" (male, computer technician, Eastern European)

- **Turning to either group for information about further education opportunities**

For coping with several difficulties, such as lack of environmental mastery and especially language problems, some interviewees discussed how they turned to different groups for receiving advice on further education opportunities:

"For the moment I volunteer in this local group once a week, it is good to come here and do some work and practice my English because I talk. I got a lot of help from here, they found me my first training in IT" (female, electronic engineer, Asian)

"Then I went to my college and their social services helped me with so many things...They told me about the available English courses, they helped with getting the books...and I felt some sort of respect because they gave us all the information we needed and they helped us to start a life here" (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

- **Turning to either group for finding activities**

As previously discussed, having a lot of idle time and no meaningful activities, emerged as one of the main experienced problems in the participants' lives in the U.K. It is interesting to note below how they approached different groups for staying active:

"...The English people have been very helpful to me because I have met most of them in organizations or centres for social services and they *are* doing their job you know, they help you with the papers, the applications, they give any information you want about accommodation and health matters. And they help a lot with English courses, they put me immediately into classes, and they also gave me the books, that was very good... But with my application that is not fixed yet and without qualifications, I cannot find a job. And my application could take years, I am waiting for almost two years and the procedure is so slow. So I prefer to stay unemployed, because even if I worked now I would not get any more money than what I get through the benefits. And I keep myself busy because I go to some I.T. and language classes-they will be useful if I am accepted to do the course for the diploma" (male, computer technician, Eastern European)

- **Not turning to any social resource and being self-reliant**

Finally, there were a few participants who discussed the problems they experienced while living in the U.K., but for some problems they did *not* turn to any network or support group for solving them, unlike others who turned to any group for receiving help:

“No [I did not ask for help] because I did not need anything else. They gave us the information about asylum-seekers and that was the only necessary thing. Of course it was strange to be in a new country and I felt alone, but I did not want to go and see other refugees and I also stayed away from my ethnic community...Everybody says that people from your ethnic group especially refugees and immigrants here, can help you but everytime I spoke to someone I did not like it. I don't know why...I have decided to stay away from them, we cannot be friends and we cannot help each other in any way. If they want help, like information, they can ask someone or they can read the documents for asylum-seekers, I did that, why don't they do the same? Why don't they do things by themselves?” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

These participants emphasised their ability to cope *themselves* with some of their problems, which could explain why they preferred not to turn to any group for receiving specific help.

Before closing this section, it is important to discuss also the *personal* resources that the participants claimed to have activated, for coping with their problems. Sense of control is the most commonly studied *personal* resource, which is why the participants were asked to give reasons about the stressors they experienced after migrating. These resources referred mainly to the internal or external sense of control the participants felt they had over their post-migration experiences and they are the following:

- **Attributing employment-related problems to discrimination**

Several participants perceived inter-ethnic discrimination (i.e. English people discriminating against them on the basis of their ethnicity) as responsible for their unemployment/underemployment. In the next quote the interviewee attributed his unemployment to prejudices that some employers hold towards ethnic minorities:

“I think that the most big problem is that some people are racist. The issue, when you apply for jobs or everything, is who is your interviewer, who is your examiner. It will always be someone from England, or English, or British or other European nation. And they don't feel you, they don't understand you...In a sense they suppress you by refusing you... And the other reason is experience. Because you don't have experience, hundred people apply for a position, some of them have experience, some of them don't, so they use the excuse of language reason... I don't think it is the right reason. If you don't work at all how can you get experience? You have to work from an elementary, basic level and then you progress in your life experience... So that is true, that is a problem. I think, I see, to the best of my knowledge, that most of the people here they are racist” (male, researcher, Middle Eastern)

At the same time, some interviewees referred to another type of discrimination, as the reason of their employment problems: it seemed to be *intra-ethnic discrimination*, which occurs not between indigenous and foreign populations (as was the case above), but *within* migrant/ refugee groups in the U.K. Due to similar conflicts, recently arrived refugees did not

want to build social networks with others of the same nationality who already lived in the U.K. The following example shows clearly the above:

“The people that have been here for years may look down on you because they know you are still an asylum seeker and they think you just want to join the community for some profit. Well I must say this is true sometimes. So they don’t trust you and you don’t trust them because they have become “English” in a way and you don’t know if they try to keep you away from some opportunities or available jobs out there” (male, computer technician, Eastern European)

- **Attributing employment-related problems to lack of skills/qualifications**

Other participants tried to explain their employment-related problem by attributing these to their lack of professional skills. The following interviewee attributed her unemployment to that her qualifications were not recognised in the U.K., therefore she was not eligible to apply for jobs where such qualifications were required:

“I feel I am quite ready to work now, because my English is much better... But my immigration status is not decided, it takes so long...I am an asylum seeker for three years now, so it is difficult to take big decisions about future work. Another problem is that my education does not count here, I have to get a proper diploma in Economics that will be recognised here...” (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

- **Attributing employment-related problems to personal sense of pride**

There were few participants who brought up the issue of “personal sense of pride”, as they discussed their employment-related difficulties. The following interviewee attributed indeed his unemployment and/ or underemployment to this reason. Because of his high-educational background and long work experience, he wished to be employed *only* in jobs, which would match those qualifications. It is interesting to note that he did not turn to anyone for help or advice on how he could obtain such jobs. Rather he said he preferred to rely on himself for any eventual solution to these problems:

“...of course I need a job to make my life better but I can wait. Finding *any* job is easy, like the one I had before, but that one was temporary. If I take the first job that appears then the unemployment benefits will be cut and my salary will be so low that I won’t be able to pay not even my rent. So I am ok for the moment and I prefer to stay without a job. A better and permanent job will come, I just have to recognize my MSc and then I will enter the system” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

- **Attributing family and social life related problems to social exclusion**

While talking about another set of stressors, that is, family and social life related problems, several interviewees mentioned an external reason, that is, social exclusion as the source of these problems. For example:

“I found it very difficult to make friends with the English people. I met some friends, mostly English, at the school where my son goes and we would meet there with the other parents. But my English was very poor...so no social life really, it is very hard I must say” (female, electronic engineer, Asian)

- **Attributing family and social life related problems to legal constraints**

Another external reason some participants presented while explaining their family and social life related problems was the constraints involved in being a refugee that were holding them back from regularly keeping in touch with their families and from building new social networks, as described below:

“The power of the State is very different between my country and the U.K...In my country the police patrols here and there and they can stop you and ask for your identity card or other papers. And if you don't have them, they can take you in their office and keep you there and if they finally find your papers, but don't like something about them, well, anything can happen, you can even go to prison...Well, something like that does not happen in England, so I guess you could say that there is more political freedom here. Of course, there are other ways to be imprisoned here. For example, I am not allowed to go to any other country, and this feels like prison, you know. I have friends that live in Italy or Spain and I cannot go and see them. But this is another subject” (male, computer technician, Middle Eastern)

- **Attributing mastery and time structure problems to social exclusion**

There was an additional set of experienced stressors, which were discussed in the basic themes-section, that is, “lack of environmental mastery” and “lack of time structure”. Some participants attributed again these experiences to external reasons and in particular, to processes of *social exclusion*. For example:

“Well, it is true I don't have friends right now..I think I am an exception because other refugees spend all their time together. But they get together just to gossip-you know- and waste their time...The thing is that I don't want to waste my time, I want real communication, not stupid chatting. And I don't want to be with them because I don't like the label of “refugee”. It is a label and you cannot get rid of it. This is why I would never go to the Refugee Council or any big organisation like that, you go there and they don't see your name but only that you are a refugee. Oh, I don't like that, I prefer to make it on my own without people pointing at me the refugee-

name. When I find permanent employment and settle down in a way, and hopefully I will not be a second-class citizen any more” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

- **Attributing mastery and time structure problems to loss of motivation**

Finally, a few participants attributed the same experienced stressors, that is, “lack of environmental mastery” and “lack of time structure” to internal reasons and in particular, to *loss of motivation*, as seen below:

“...there are days when you realise you are poor, you are still waiting the result from your application, you have no house or money of your own and you feel weak...I have been feeling sad and weak for a long time. But these feelings come and go, you cannot feel like this forever” (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

Since the basic and the organising themes, which cut across all three thematic networks, have been pointed out, it is important to describe the different subjective theories that three subgroups of participants presented regarding the research questions.

4.6 Emerging subjective theories

Thematic networks are only a tool in analysis and *not* the analysis itself. The thematic networks presented below are structured along the three thematic categories that were discussed in the previous pages. They can be read by starting from the basic themes, and then moving toward the organising themes and the global theme, which is the core of each network and summarises the participants’ subjective theory.

Three subjective theories emerged from the data. Their differences were not blatantly evident but the most significant ones rested in the resources they said they activated for coping with several problems, and also in the well-being outcomes they presented. Some interviewees discussed the specific resources they activated, some others the general resources they used, while some others discussed also the resources they did *not* activate. Regarding their well-being, some participants talked about positive psychosocial well-being outcomes (and these participants belonged to the group that presented the first subjective theory), others presented a fluctuating picture (these participants who presented the second subjective theory), while yet some others discussed only negative outcomes (those who

presented the third subjective theory). The three emerging theories are discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.6.1 First subjective theory

Six participants made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being through the subjective theory, which is described below. The main point in this theory is that all six participants claimed to have activated social resources to cope with their problems and that all discussed having positive well-being outcomes.

<u>Basic themes</u>	<u>Organising themes</u>	<u>First subjective theory</u>
Unemployment/underemployment	Attributing employment problems to inter-ethnic discrimination or to lack of skills and turning to ethnic group for job advice or to either group for education opportunities respectively	This group made sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they activated and their increasing well-being
Family/Social-life related problems	Attributing family and social-life problems to social exclusion and turning to either group for networking	
Lack of time structure/lack of environmental mastery	Attributing mastery and time structure problems to social exclusion and turning to either group for finding activities	

Table 4.1: First thematic network

In the above thematic network the basic themes were the ones that have already been extensively discussed, that is, employment-related problems, family and social life-related issues, and also the problems of having “no time structure” and “no environmental mastery”. At the same time, there were several resources the participants said they used for tackling these problems, such as turning either to an ethnic community and/or to local groups for receiving employment information and career guidance, and turning to any group for keeping busy and/ or meeting others.

The experienced stressors were explained by referring both to external reasons (inter-ethnic discrimination) and internal reasons (lack of skills and qualifications-even though this

could be seen also as an external reason, in the sense that others in the U.K. did not recognise their skills).

These participants who perceived inter-ethnic discrimination (that is, the British people discriminating against them, on the basis of their ethnicity) as responsible for their unemployment or underemployment, seemed to primarily turn to their ethnic group and ask for information and advice, in order to tackle the problem directly (e.g. find employment) and indirectly (e.g. regain lost occupational and social roles). They chose this coping strategy most probably because in their ethnic group they could protect themselves from discriminatory attitudes and practices, as described below:

“But then [because of the work permit problems] I could not find a proper job, so I started looking for alternative ways to go on, there are many ways you can do that. I mean even if you are a highly qualified person, you are forced to take jobs that are illegal first of all, unsafe or menial, you are just overqualified for them...And finally, by chance and by necessity really, I resorted to finding other people from my ethnic group who had already established themselves here” (male, graduate in Linguistics, Eastern European)

With regards to other experienced problems and in particular, family-issues and social life-related problems, the participants who presented this subjective theory, made external attributions, since they discussed how *social exclusion* was responsible for such problems they had experienced since migrating. They turned to any group, that is either local or ethnic, that could provide opportunities to meet others and build social networks.

“I hope I will make friends here, so I will speak better English and learn the culture. Because now I don’t have many friends, there are some people I met at the local refugee group and they are nice people...But I think when we move to another city we will meet many people and I will not be so foreign” (female, accountant, African)

External attributions, such as social exclusion, were mainly used also to explain the lack of mastery and time structure difficulties. The participants decided, as in the case of family and social life-related problems, to turn to any type of group for receiving help:

“Well, the English people have been very helpful to me because I have met most of them in organizations or centres for social services and they *are* doing their job you know, they help you with the papers, the applications, they give any information you want about accommodation and health matters. And they help a lot with English courses, they put me immediately into classes, and they also gave me the books, that was very good. So yes, I think there is help from there any time you want it” (male, computer technician, Eastern European)

Of course the starting point for reconstructing subjective theories has been that people in everyday life develop “theories” on how the world as well as themselves operate. This means that people’s subjective theories should also incorporate the perceptions they have

regarding their psychosocial well-being. So the next issue that arises is how the issue of psychosocial well-being emerged in this subjective theory.

In the interview agenda the questions used to elicit well-being outcomes referred to: a) participants' self-esteem b) their sense of adaptation since migrating to the U.K. and c) life satisfaction. By looking at this subjective theory, it appears that the latter was connected to a positive perception of well-being, since this group of participants presented themselves as having high self-esteem, strong sense of adaptation and life satisfaction. Regarding self-esteem, there were some interviewees who presented themselves as *strong* and *determined* to overcome problems, as seen below:

“Your self-esteem is going up and down from one extreme to the other. Especially when you go for a job and you do everything right but then you don't make it to the final cut... Well, I know people and I have heard of people who got completely depressed because of such circumstances. But I think the difference between me and the people in that situation was that I really don't think I had many other options... and that's what made me stay here, persist and try to stay here” (male, graduate in Linguistics, Eastern European)

As far as sense of adaptation is concerned, they discussed *feeling in general adapted* in the host country. It should be noted that they distinguished between different types of adaptation, such as financial and social adaptation. For example:

“I do like it here, since my child was born here and his school is here and his friends are here and sometimes I feel that I would like to go back to my country but he does not. So anyway I think life can be ok. But I miss home and I think of my family... Anyway, I am quite happy to live here because everything is here and all you have to do is do something about it” (female, electronic engineer, Asian)

Finally, with regards to life satisfaction, these participants said they were satisfied with their present life as a whole. It should be noted that they also discussed their satisfaction with *particular* life domains, i.e. their occupational situation as well as their social life:

“I feel I am satisfied because I have plans... Of course one is never happy, there are always more things we want. Well, I wanted to try for more nursing jobs, but now things have changed in my life. I will soon get married and my fiance works for many hours and if I become a nurse then I will work overtime... So I have quit my plans to become a nurse and now I will do some re-training... And getting married and having a proper family is very important...” (female, accountant, African)

Therefore this subgroup of participants made sense of their post-migration experiences (including employment) and their well-being by talking about several stressors, different reasons to explain the stressors they experienced, the social resources they activated and their positive well-being outcomes. Of course there were variations between the

resources this subgroup of participants said they activated and the well-being they described nevertheless, the first subjective theory was distinctive from the other two.

4.6.2 Second subjective theory

Six participants made sense of their post-migration experiences and how it relates to their well-being through the subjective theory which is described in the thematic network below. The main points in this theory are that all six interviewees said the activated social resources to cope with their problems and that they all discussed having fluctuating well-being outcomes. The second thematic network can be illustrated as follows:

<u>Basic themes</u>	<u>Organising themes</u>	<u>Second subjective theory</u>
Unemployment/underemployment	Attributing employment problems to intra-ethnic discrimination or to lack of skills and turning to local group for job advice or to either group for education opportunities respectively	This group made sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they activated and their fluctuating well-being
Family/Social-life related problems	Attributing family and social-life problems to social exclusion or legal constraints and turning to either group for networking	
Lack of time structure/lack of environmental mastery	Attributing mastery and time structure problems to social exclusion and turning to either group for finding activities	

Table 4.2: Second thematic network

In the above thematic network the basic themes were those already presented in the previous one, that is, employment-related problems, family and social life-related issues, as well as the problems of lacking time structure and environmental mastery. The participants said they used several psychosocial resources for coping with their problems, such as turning either to an ethnic community and/or to local groups for receiving employment information and turning to any group for meeting others and finding activities. The experienced stressors were explained by referring both to external reasons (intra-ethnic discrimination, legal constraints) and internal reasons (loss of motivation).

As in the first subgroup of participants, the interviewees who presented this subjective theory also mentioned the “lack of skills and qualifications” as a reason behind their employment-related problems. But unlike the previous subgroup of participants who pointed out inter-ethnic discrimination as responsible for their unemployment or underemployment, some individuals in this subgroup also discussed *intra-ethnic* discrimination (that is, discrimination within refugee groups in the U.K.) as an important reason behind their employment-related problems. They seemed to primarily turn to local groups or organisations for receiving job advice. They chose this coping strategy most probably because in the local group they could avoid discriminatory attitudes and practices, found within their ethnic group as clearly described below:

“...I see myself as a qualified and dynamic person, you know, I never sit and wait for others to decide for me, this is why I left from my country in the first place. But then they come up with some comments like, “you are overqualified for this position”. This is a lie, why don’t they say they simply don’t want a foreigner and even more, a foreigner like me? And what makes the whole thing strange is that [the interviewer] was not even British, I guess she was a second generation immigrant from Africa. So it is not only the British who feel that you dislodge them, and that you have come to take their place. No, actually some British people were quite helpful, I was the other day to a local group for refugees and they seemed to care a bit. The problem is also the other foreign people who have been in the U.K. for a long time. There are all these different groups, but they are all part of this one system and the discrimination goes on and on. And there are people that have to go through this experience over and over again, it is so unfair. That is why I say I have been very lucky with the people I met” (male, IT officer, African)

With regards to other problems and in particular, family-issues and social life-related problems, this subgroup of participants attributed them to external reasons, such as social exclusion (as seen also in the first subjective theory) or to *legal constraints*. The following interviewee discussed how she avoided building social networks in the U.K. because she was still waiting for a decision on her asylum application, and was therefore unsure about whether it was worth creating networks if she would have to leave eventually from the U.K. She preferred instead to interact with a few people in a local support group, and to wait until she could start social networking:

“...I would like to make new friends here, there are many eastern Europeans here, and I would also like to meet more English people. But my Status is not decided, I am not a refugee yet, so maybe I will have to leave the U.K. This can happen in one month, in five months or in a year. So I think it is better to wait until I know if I am staying and then I can make plans about meeting new people...I am happy with the people I know from the local group, this is fine for the moment ” (female, graduate in Economics, Eastern European)

For explaining experienced problems like lack of mastery and time structure, this subgroup used internal attributions, such as loss of motivation. The participants decided, as in the case

of family and social life-related problems, to turn to any group, either ethnic or local, for receiving help and in particular, for finding activities. For example:

“...I did not find it very difficult to find a job in the U.K. Of course for six months I was waiting to get my work permit, and that was very bad, I felt so empty, because I was not doing anything. I went to a department of the Refugee Council in East London and I started volunteering. I was giving help and advice to immigrants and refugees, because I had good work experience in this. I started feeling useful again, even if I did not have a job” (female, clinical psychologist, Eastern European)

Finally, by looking at the subgroup of participants who presented this second subjective theory, it seems they portrayed a fluctuating psychosocial well-being, because the self esteem, sense of adaptation and life satisfaction they discussed was not consistently positive, as noted in the previous group of participants. The following interviewee presented himself as confident at the time of the interview, but also as having lost his strength at some point after migrating to the U.K.

“At some point I felt there was no hope for the future, that I could not achieve anything. I was so desperate I even tried to find the main person that brought me to the U.K. But that would be like taking a step back, I mean one is supposed to make it on his own and stay away from nasty networks. After some time and with a bit of luck, I used connections with a few people I know because I needed them to help me during the first year here, but maybe now it would be good to have some friends. It is still very early to say how things will go. Even if I say now that I am not 100% satisfied with my life, I believe that things will turn out to be all right...It is all a matter of hoping and believing that things will get better, I mean one is never completely satisfied, but hoping and planning for the future, that is most important ” (male, IT officer, African)

As far as sense of adaptation is concerned, these participants pointed out that it would take time to feel “having some small part in the host country”, as noted in the first quote below. It is interesting again to note that they distinguished between economic and social adaptation. The following participant discussed how she felt economically adapted at present but pointed out that her social adaptation could be attained but several years later:

“My everyday life is ok but I think it will be years until I feel really adapted. Some people say that you are adapted if you have a job, a house, a car, you know... But I know some people that came here as refugees, they have been here for 20 years and they have all these things, one of them even has two houses and another has quite a lot of money. But if you ask them, they will say that they are not adapted. I have a new life now, a job and a house, so everything is ok. From this point of view I feel adapted. But I think adaptation is not only about having money and nice things. It is about feeling that you have some small part in the host country, that you can give something to it because this country gave you refuge. But it will take many years to feel this” (female, clinical psychologist, Eastern European)

Another participant discussed feeling more or less socially adapted but definitely not professionally adapted. It is interesting to note that he also distinguished between social and professional adaptation:

“After finishing education if I get a proper job in a short-time, then it is ok, but if I don’t find a proper job and I stay here, it is going to be bad. So far everything is ok...People can adapt but it depends on the definition of adaptation, I think. How you want to define adaptation. For example, I am a Muslim. I have different rules than the majority of people living here. For example in the office when we go for the company’s lunch, I cannot eat everything that the other people can eat. So if adaptation means this, then it’s very difficult and then for someone it never happens. So it depends how you define it...I haven’t had any problems living in this society...” (male, accountant and lecturer, Middle Eastern)

Finally, with regards to life satisfaction, the subgroup of these interviewees discussed being satisfied with their present life as a whole, especially when they compared it to their life in their home country. At the same time, they seemed dissatisfied with specific domains of their life, such as their family situation and their social life. The following quote is indicative:

“Things have improved a lot for me, from a material point of view I have many things that I wanted...But there are other general things that I want to have. For example, I know I must be very patient until I can feel that I am adapted here...Of course I miss family and the people from my country and some friends I used to have, but now I am here and I have to make the best of it” (male, IT officer, African)

In summary, what emerged from this subjective theory was that this subgroup of interviewees made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being by talking about various stressors, internal and external reasons for explaining the problems they experienced, the social resources they activated and their fluctuating well-being. The main difference with the previous theory was that the participants who presented the second subjective theory discussed their self-esteem, sense of adaptation and life satisfaction, not only in positive but also negative terms. The third subjective theory revealed some more differences when compared to the other two, as seen below.

4.6.3 Third subjective theory

A subgroup of three participants made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being through the third subjective theory. Some important points in this theory were that all three participants discussed the resources they activated but also those they chose not to activate, and that they all presented negative psychosocial well-being outcomes. The third thematic network can be described as follows:

<u>Basic themes</u>	<u>Organising themes</u>	<u>Second subjective theory</u>
Unemployment/underemployment	Attributing employment problems to personal sense of pride or to lack of skills and turning to neither group or to either group for education opportunities respectively	This group makes sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they did and did not activate and their decreasing well-being
Family/Social-life related problems	Attributing family and social-life problems to legal constraints or loss of motivation and turning to either group for networking	
Lack of time structure/lack of environmental mastery	Attributing mastery and time structure problems to loss of motivation and turning to either group for finding activities	

Table 4.3: Third thematic network

In the above thematic network the basic themes were those already presented in the previous two thematic networks, i.e. employment-related problems, family and social life-related issues, and also the problems of lacking time structure and environmental mastery. As far as personal resources are concerned, this subgroup of participants explained the stressors they experienced by talking about both external reasons (legal constraints) and internal reasons (loss of motivation). Regarding social resources, the participants discussed the resources they activated for coping with their problems, such as turning either to an ethnic or a local group for finding education opportunities and turning to either of these groups for networking and finding activities.

As in the previous two subgroups, two interviewees who presented this subjective theory mentioned the “lack of skills and qualifications” as a reason behind their employment-related problems and said they approached either local or ethnic groups for finding education opportunities. However, what was interesting in this subjective theory was that some participants attributed their employment-related problems to a personal reason and said they did *not* turn to any resource for help or advice. Two participants attributed their unemployment or underemployment to their *sense of pride*: due to their high-educational background and long work experience, they wished to be employed *only* in jobs, which would match those qualifications. But it is interesting to note that they said they preferred to rely on themselves for any eventual solution to these problems, as seen in the following quotes:

“...if you want information on your asylum-application or how to apply for income support, the local organizations for immigrants are good, I have not been there but people say they give a lot of help. For other things there is the ethnic community. When I first came here I worked illegally for a couple of months, and the only reason I found that job were the other people from my country. In the beginning I believed I needed them, but now I don't think so. I should say that I don't want to be in networks here, you cannot really trust others and the older you get, you prefer fewer people in your life. I know people who feel better when they know there are others to help them, but I don't need that, I do everything by myself” (male, computer technician, Middle Eastern)

“...I sent applications for some other jobs and I saw that my MSc was not recognized in the U.K. I thought it was strange, because I know some people from my country who went to the U.S. or to Canada and their diplomas were recognized. Maybe I did not try enough to find the equivalent title and send the papers and prove that my MSc is equal to English MScs, maybe I was lazy, I don't know..I understood that I had to get the best qualification I can get... So, I left the job and I am here now. Well, I don't have a job for seven months now...I knew I could “go up” in that company, if I waited a little longer, because I had good connections with the people there. But I wanted to study in the best University, that's why I left and came here... I *will* apply to it and I will apply to other universities and I hope some good one will accept me. Let's see...” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

Regarding the other post-migration difficulties, that is family-issues and social life-related problems, the participants attributed these either to internal reasons and in specific to “loss of motivation” or to external reasons such as legal constraints. They chose, as the participants who held the other two theories, to turn to any group for meeting others and create their own social network. For example:

“...There are times when I am very stressed and I worry about everything, and there are times when I am only tired. But I also have hope for the future, as I told you, people who know me say that I am not a person who gives up...When I came to England I was very lonely, but it gets better. I got my first job and my English colleagues chatted with me and slowly, I was more comfortable. I really liked working with them but also talking, we would often go out for a drink and that was really nice, it made me feel ok” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

The last set of stressors, that is, “lack of time structure” and “lack of environmental mastery” were attributed, as seen in the subgroup who presented the second subjective theory, to their “loss of motivation”. The participants said they decided to turn to any group for finding activities, as discussed below:

“...Without a job you feel down not only because you have no money but there is another thing: I don't like to waste my time, I don't want to do nothing. I had lost my interest for some time and it was terrible. That was why I decided to do voluntary work for refugees. I do something useful with my time, because I help other people, I also improve my English and I learn things about administrative work... I fill my time with something useful and that is important...” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

With regards to psychosocial well-being, this subgroup seemed to have decreasing well-being outcomes, since they all discussed having low self esteem, a weak sense of adaptation and experiencing life dissatisfaction. With regards to self-esteem there were those interviewees who presented themselves as *lacking the confidence* to overcome difficulties they were facing, as seen below:

“Psychologically, I am depressed, I lose my mood. I was very emotional, I used very clever ways to do anything in my country, when I was there. But I lose that because I don’t have any activities and I don’t have any opportunities for activities and to be become a creative person, or whatever I want to do...I am still intelligent but if my environment provides for me, if the opportunity comes to me I will do anything, I will lose my depression and I will get back my mood again, for many reasons which I told you about” (male, researcher, Middle Eastern)

As far as sense of adaptation is concerned, they discussed *not* feeling adapted in the host country. It should be noted that, as in the other subjective theories, they distinguished between types of adaptation, such as economic and social adaptation and pointed out the different time scale that each type of adaptation would require in order to be attained:

“Being comfortable is one thing, adapted is another. I feel comfortable in England and with the other people, and Cambridge helps for that, because it is very small and international. But adapted? I don’t think this will ever happen. Maybe if I had a career after many years. But I don’t even have legal status, so what adaptation are we talking about? An English friend was teaching me how to speak the language, to use the English accent. It was impossible for me...So I said “I will speak the language with my accent, because if I don’t, it is not real”. I am a foreigner here, and this is what is real” (male, computer technician, Middle Eastern)

With regards to life satisfaction they discussed being *not satisfied* with their life as a whole, especially when they compared it to their life in their home country. At the same time, they discussed their dissatisfaction with specific domains, such as their employment situation and social status. The next quote is indicative:

“After my education I would like to migrate to the United States. Because it is so multicultural...I don’t have any experience in the United States but as far as I know they are multicultural and they cannot be racist because all operations come from around the world...That is the reason why I am not feeling very confident and flexible in this country...I am not happy really, by this situation I am not happy. If in the future something positive happens for me maybe I will change my mind. Otherwise if life remains the same, no, I don’t like it. I don’t like this waiting from everyone around to improve my life because I had activities in my country...You know fate changed my life, you know what I am saying? Fate changed my life, I don’t know if fate is from God or the environment...Because generally, naturally, I was a very active person, I would never stay at home. I am 36 years old, I haven’t had an experience like this before from 30 years old until now, during these years I am here. Also I lose my patience...My mentality changes, I haven’t been like this before” (male, researcher, Middle Eastern)

Therefore, this subjective theory revealed that this subgroup of interviewees made sense of their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being by talking about several stressors, internal and external reasons to which they attributed their problems, social resources they did and also did *not* activate for coping with their problems and their *decreasing* well-being. The resources they did not activate as well as the negative outcomes they described, made this subgroup and the subjective theory it presented rather different from the first and second subgroups, that discussed similar stressors, but only resources they activated and presented a positive and fluctuating well-being picture respectively. It is important to note that the participants of the third subgroup had particular common features, that is, they were male, Muslim and originated from the Middle East and Asia, unlike the participants in the first and second subgroups who were either male or female and originated from various regions. In the next section, I discuss what is derived from a synthesis of the three subjective theories with regards to the research questions of this study.

4.7 Discussion of the interview findings

4.7.1 How the participants used the stress and coping concepts: theoretical implications

The findings have implications with regards to stress and coping *not* in the sense of confirming or refuting the stress and coping assumptions. As already discussed in the second chapter, the participants' perceptions and in the case of this empirical part, their subjective theories, are of a different epistemological status to the claims that stress and coping researchers make. However, the participants' subjective theories do have implications and can even challenge the *images* or *stereotypes* that have emerged from the prevalence of the stress and coping approach in the area of refugees' psychological health and are frequently assigned to this population.

In the above interview findings we can see that the participants' subjective theories suggested *no* obvious relation between certain stressors the participants experienced and their well-being. At the same time, they suggested no obvious relation between the activation of certain resources and well-being outcomes. The three groups who presented different subjective theories experienced similar stressors (as seen from the basic themes) and also used similar coping resources (as seen from the organising themes). However, the well-being

they presented emerged as quite different, especially between the first and third groups who discussed having positive and negative psychosocial well-being outcomes respectively. This observation was in accordance with the findings of previously reviewed studies (e.g. Birman et al., 2004; Young 2001) that found within their samples different correlations between experienced stressors, activated resources and well-being outcomes.

It is also interesting to point out that the participants' employment status and their well-being were *not* clearly related, according to their subjective theories, as many stress and coping researchers have supported. This can especially be seen in the group that presented the first subjective theory: these participants held different employment statuses, including unemployment, nevertheless they all presented their psychosocial well-being as positive.

I was particularly interested to see whether there would be an obvious relation between experienced problems and well-being outcomes, in the participants' subjective theories. In the first chapters I criticised the stress and coping approach precisely for focusing on resources that people lack instead of those they have and on negative psychosocial outcomes. Therefore, the interview findings that revealed no such obvious relation between stressors and well-being outcomes justified indeed my criticism. This observation agreed with the findings of Takeda's study (2000) who found no correlation between employment status and psychological health outcomes, and Birman et al. (2004) who found that increase in socioeconomic job status did not necessarily correlate to improvement in psychological health outcomes. However, these studies did not further explore what their findings entailed regarding the usefulness of the stress and coping concepts when studying refugees' well-being.

By looking at the findings of the first empirical part it was clear that the participants made sense of their experiences and their well-being by actually employing the stress and coping concepts, that is, by talking about the stressors/problems they experienced, the resources they activated in order to cope with these stressors and finally their well-being outcomes. Naturally the research agenda I used was formed along the stress and coping framework, so the participants were undoubtedly prompted to use the latter as they were being interviewed. Nevertheless, they seemed to find such concepts familiar enough to employ them while making sense of their experiences in the U.K. and their well-being.

It should also be noted that most participants did not only use the stress and coping concepts but also the problem and solution *sequence*, that is, each time they would point out a stressor, then they would immediately discuss the solutions/resources that they sought. In the interview agenda, one can see that there was a separate question on how they coped with

post-migration difficulties, but in most cases a participant would begin to discuss something stressful he/she had experienced and then would himself/herself continue to discuss the resources he/she activated.

What is clear then is that the stress and coping framework and its key concepts are not only a common approach to use when carrying out psychological health research, but also a set of concepts which seem to be easily understood and widely used. This could explain the familiarity the participants seemed to have with the stress and coping concepts, as well as the confidence with which they incorporated them in their sense-making ways of the research questions. Therefore, the stress and coping concepts emerged as useful and relevant when exploring refugees' perceptions of their post-migration experiences and their well-being and this empirical part reconfirmed their value in this research area.

4.7.2 How the participants made sense of the stress and coping concepts and their distinctions: theoretical and practical implications

Stressors:

In the first and second chapters respectively, the debates in the research area of migration and psychological health, as well as in the general stress and coping area were extensively discussed. One of these general debates refers to the distinction between chronic stressors and life events. The participants talked about both life events (e.g. separation from family) and ongoing stressors (e.g. social isolation, financial hardship). Another more specific debate in the migration and psychological health area refers to the conceptualisation of stressors that migrants and refugees experience since many types have been proposed, for example socio-cultural, demographic or migration-related stressors. In the findings it was clear that various stressors were discussed. Indeed, as seen from the basic themes, the participants talked about migration-related difficulties, such as social isolation and employment-related problems; socio-cultural issues, such as problems with understanding/using the English language; difficulties in getting familiar with the country and the place one lives in and finally, demographic stressors, such as having a lower socioeconomic status than the one they held in their home country.

The emerging theoretical implication of the findings of the first empirical part is that not only one but different types of stressors should indeed be considered when looking at refugees' well-being, as refugees *themselves* made sense of the problems they experienced along different dimensions. In addition, the practical implication is that people involved in designing and implementing interventions with regards to refugees' well-being should indeed take into account different types of stressors, in order to align themselves with refugees' understandings.

Psychosocial resources:

Another debate in the stress and coping area concerns whether researchers should focus more on resources that people activate for coping with stress or on resources they lack, as well as whether social support should be viewed as a prerequisite of attaining well-being or not (Laireiter & Baumann, 1992; Rook, 1992; Veiel & Baumann, 1992). In the interview findings it was clear that most interviewees talked extensively about resources they activated and not those they were lacking. In addition, it was clear that social support was not necessarily viewed as beneficial, as some participants discussed how they *avoided* an ethnic community or a local group, which could provide support.

When it comes to migrants, another debate refers to whether social support should be divided into ethnic and non-ethnic support (Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Noh & Avison, 1996; Salant & Lauderdale, 2003; Stansfeld & Sproston, 2002). The participants in this study discussed *both* types of support: all interviewees talked about the *local refugee groups* and/or the *ethnic communities*, to which they turned to receive different types of support or, in a few cases, deliberately avoided.

The theoretical implication of the above is that, when looking at refugees' well-being, researchers should of course take into account resources that individuals lack, but maybe even more the resources they activate. This is an important observation especially since mainstream research in this area has focused on resources that people do *not* activate when facing different stressors. The practical implication is that those involved in designing interventions for refugees' well-being should possibly take into account what resources refugees lack, in order to provide such resources, but also those they activate, in order to enhance their provision. In addition, both ethnic and non-ethnic support should be taken into

consideration when designing interventions with regards to social support, since refugees themselves highlighted the importance of this distinction.

Psychosocial well-being outcomes:

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the general stress and coping area a persistent debate refers to the conceptualisation of psychological health outcomes and in specific, whether researchers should study psychological *problems* (e.g. depression, anxiety) or look into more positive and psychosocial aspects of psychological health, such as life satisfaction and quality of life. My question on psychosocial well-being was more focused on positive aspects of psychological health and most participants presented a positive well-being picture. But some interviewees' quotes also revealed negative psychosocial well-being outcomes, such as being "dissatisfied with their life", "not feeling adapted in the U.K." and also "having a negative self-concept".

In the area of migration and psychological health there are more specific debates when it comes to the conceptualisation of psychological health outcomes. One debate refers to whether adaptation is a phenomenon, which is interrelated to psychological health or not and secondly, whether "adaptation" should be divided into socio-cultural and economic adaptation (Berry, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990). The interview findings showed that, in refugees' subjective theories, socio-cultural and economic/professional adaptation were indeed different. Several participants, particularly those who held the first and second subjective theories, discussed feeling adapted in the U.K., in the sense of "feeling comfortable with the British way of life", but they also distinguished between economic/professional and social adaptation and pointed out the different time-scale that each type of adaptation requires until it is attained.

Another aspect of well-being, self-esteem, is also controversial since it is not clear whether it should be considered as a generally positive or negative feeling about the self or as a collection of evaluations about personal features, in which case we are talking more about self-concept (Emler, 2001). As seen from the analysis, all participants gave rich descriptions about themselves, which went beyond a mere positive or negative self-evaluation. Several interviewees presented themselves as strong, determined to bring changes to their lives but also as patient and tolerant. Apart from few participants who discussed how they had "always been strong" and "they would never change", most interviewees noted that "situations could

change at any time”, thus they acknowledged their self-esteem could increase or decrease at any point. In conclusion, the participants evaluated and presented themselves not merely in terms of a positive or negative image, but mainly in terms of broader dimensions of the self.

A final debate refers to which positive aspects of psychosocial well-being should be mostly studied, that is, whether one should focus on individual evaluations of one’s life as a whole, or evaluations of satisfaction with life domains (Hird, 2003). The findings showed that the participants used both evaluations while talking about their present life satisfaction. The subgroups of participants who presented the first and second subjective theories, said they were satisfied with their life as a whole, but they also discussed their satisfaction with *particular* life domains, i.e. their occupational situation as well as their social life. In addition those who presented the third subjective theory discussed being *dissatisfied* with their life and at the same time, they discussed their dissatisfaction with specific domains of their life, such as their family and social situation as well as their employment status.

It should be noted that the findings of Duke (1996), Ferguson & Barclay (2002) and Papadopoulos et al. (2004) also identified several types of stressors while exploring the post-migration difficulties that refugees had experienced. In addition, the distinction between ethnic and non-ethnic support was also noted by Birman et al. (2004) and Duke (1996) who found that both ethnic networks and local support groups were an integral part of refugees’ post-migration experiences. And with regards to the distinctions within psychosocial well-being outcomes, Birman et al. (2004) also distinguished between psychosocial and work-related adaptation and explored both general life satisfaction as well as job satisfaction. However, these studies did not look critically at the usefulness and applicability of the stress and coping concepts while exploring the participants’ well-being. Rather they took these distinctions “for granted” and tested whether the participants would confirm them or not. Of course testing the stress and coping assumptions is useful too and I certainly do not underestimate the value of similar studies. However, through my research I wished to derive refugees’ own subjective theories and at the same time look-as much as possible- critically at the stress and coping concepts and see how the participants would make sense of and use such concepts themselves.

The theoretical implications of the above are that the typical psychosocial well-being outcomes studied in refugees should not be regarded as mere dichotomous indicators. According to the participants’ subjective theories, sense of adaptation, self-esteem and life satisfaction held different dimensions that went beyond the mere distinction of adapted/not adapted, positive/negative self-image and life satisfaction/dissatisfaction respectively. The

practical implications are that those involved in designing interventions for refugees' well-being should first of all regard the latter in a more holistic way than it has been typically viewed and then suggest interventions that aim to improve refugees' psychosocial well-being in all its richness and diversity.

4.7.3 How the participants used the concepts of “psychological activism”: theoretical implications

In the previous chapters I criticised the traditional stress and coping framework for focusing on a) psychosocial resources that people lack instead of those they have and b) individual pathological symptoms instead of also taking into account more positive and psychosocial well-being outcomes. Based on that critique I suggested an alternative stress and coping approach where the individual is viewed along the dimensions of psychological activism, as more useful than the traditional stress and coping perspective for exploring the study's research questions. From the interview findings the concepts of psychological activism emerged indeed as useful and potentially valuable when studying refugees' well-being. By this I do not refer to the assumptions of psychological activism and whether the interview findings confirmed or refuted them. Instead I refer to whether the participants' subjective theories were in accordance with the images related to psychological activism (i.e. non-vulnerable and active) and consequently, whether the participants' subjective theories could challenge the stereotypical images of the vulnerable and passive refugee. In more detail:

The participants presented themselves as having had valued social roles, and this was seen when they included “losing one's valued occupational roles” as one of the consequent psychological problems that employment-related stressors entail. It should be noted that they did not present themselves *only* in terms of employment-related roles; being a family member who supports other relatives was also highlighted, and this is seen when, among other stressors, they discussed missing their family but also worrying about the family's safety and future. Being an active member in one's community is also regarded as a valued social role, which is most probably why they discussed social isolation as one of the main post-migration difficulties they experienced. At a first look it seemed that the participants perceived themselves along important, valued roles, instead of presenting themselves as vulnerable or

passive and thus the image of a psychological activist gradually emerged through their own words.

In addition, what is most interesting is that almost all interviewees discussed how they activated psychosocial resources, such as social support and/or internal sense of control, for coping with the above stressors and consequently for alleviating their negative psychological consequences. Most interviewees mentioned having participated either in their ethnic community or a refugee group for coping with several of the stressors they experienced and especially with the employment-related ones. At the same time, some other participants revealed an *internal sense of control*, because they attributed their employment-related problems or other post-migration difficulties to reasons that are under their control. Some of the participants who presented the third subjective theory, claimed not to have taken any action to cope with employment-related problems. Nevertheless they appeared to have activated *some* resources for dealing with other stressors, like family and social life-related problems or lack of time structure and mastery over their environment.

In the above, one can see that all participants perceived the loss of valued social roles they used to hold as stressful and that they seemed to actively try to restore their lost roles in different ways. This activation of resources was especially important because it highlighted precisely the dimension that the typical stress and coping approach was criticised for, that is, focusing on resources that people lack and which therefore make them succumb to stress. It is important to acknowledge that, of course, these participants were highly educated and highly motivated (since they took the decision to leave their countries for improving their lives), thus I anticipated indeed some “activism” from their part. But they have also suffered a major change in their lives by losing their previously held valued occupational and social roles. Therefore, the interview findings challenged the stereotypes of “vulnerability” and “passiveness” so regularly assigned to refugee populations in contemporary Britain. The participants clearly made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being by using the concepts of psychological activism, which emerged from the analysis of this empirical part as valuable concepts to employ while exploring the research questions.

4.8 Self reflection and methodological consideration

As already noted in the previous chapter, the paradigm whose epistemological position views the participants’ realities as greatly influenced during the interaction between the researcher

and the participants is *constructivism*, and this paradigm informed the present study. The epistemological position that realities are constructed even during the interview session implies that the researcher should be self-reflective and sensitive to his/her subjective perceptions and behaviour that enter the interview context and affect the views expressed by the interviewees. In the constructivist and critical traditions, “research takes the form of self-conscious criticism, meaning the researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective and normative reference claims” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998: 265). In the more specific field of refugee studies it is undeniable that the researcher’s own identity and his/her views affect the process of data collection and interpretation (Knudsen, 1995)

And indeed in the course of the fieldwork I was aware of the many complex issues that come into play in this type of research, for example issues of power and authority. In an attempt to locate myself within my own research, it was important to acknowledge that the subjective theories derived from the interviews were far from unmediated. Rather they reflected interactive processes of collaboration through which both researcher and participants worked towards an outcome of the research. This collaborative process however did not constitute an entirely equal relationship. Indeed, while taking into account ethical obligations such as acquiring consent and ensuring confidentiality, the interview setting as well as my “privileged” positions as a University researcher or a volunteer in a local refugee organisation allowed me to interpret the interviewees’ subjective theories and possibly adopt their insights to support my own. It is important to look into these issues in more detail:

First of all, the *interview context* inevitably predefined the interaction between researcher and interviewee. As already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the local group for refugees and asylum seekers, where I volunteered and from where I located most participants, brought forward certain ethical considerations. In particular, the gatekeepers who introduced me to the participants wanted to see a specific interview agenda, with predefined questions before allowing me to conduct the interviews. Therefore, the agenda contained closed and some open-ended questions, and this constraining interview context could explain to some extent why the emerging subjective theories were less complex than expected. In addition, my theoretical interest in the activation of psychosocial resources, which provided the basis of the emerging subjective theories could have possibly directed the eventual form of the findings, while a more open-ended approach could have produced richer findings.

Finally, features of my own such as originating from Europe, or social identities such as a female trained psychologist and volunteer in the local group which most of the participants frequently turned to, most certainly shaped the findings. For example, my role as an active member there could have put indirect pressure on the participants to talk more about these social networks, which could also explain why most interviewees presented them as very helpful and valuable. In addition, my other identity of being a University researcher could have influenced their emerging psychological activism and especially the emphasis they seem to put on restoring the valued role of the highly educated and good professional. When I asked the gatekeepers to allow me to approach the first potential interviewees and ask them to participate in the study, the gatekeepers presented me to them as a “Cambridge University researcher”. According to them, this identity, that is, my affiliation to a well-known institution, would provide a good reason to convince them to participate. But this identity certainly brought a power-element between the interviewees and me and undoubtedly shaped their responses.

Every researcher who carries out a study based on constructivism knows that his/her features and identities, as well as the interview setting affect what the interviewees say, as indeed in this study. Of course what emerged in the interview *did* give some useful insight on how the participants made sense of their experiences and their well-being. Nevertheless, the question that arose at this point was whether I should continue with the same method and conduct more semi-structured interviews, through which I could hopefully derive richer subjective theories on the relation between post-migration experiences and well-being, or whether I should shift to another method.

While wondering what the next steps should be for continuing this research study, I started to see clearly the shortcomings of the semi-structured interview and of thematic networks analysis. These are that there is a strong direction given by the researcher to the interviewee, the control is clearly held by the researcher and the interviewee is given restricted freedom and space to present their perceptions. The biggest shortcoming of thematic network analysis is that by looking for patterns that can be drawn from the synthesis of the basic and organising themes, findings are removed and become detached from an individual’s own perceptions. In an attempt to locate larger, shared issues, the researcher and the analysis move further away from the meaning that each individual assigns to the research questions. The above observations pointed out to the importance of using a method with which the interviewees would have the opportunity to express their perceptions in an interview context that would allow these to better emerge in all their complexity and richness.

At the same time it is crucial not to let such “insider views” celebrate the individual’s experience, but also take into account the social dimensions which shape the construction of individual perceptions (Crossley, 2000; Yardley, 1997). This need to explore in depth social dimensions emerged after noting the shortcomings of thematic network analysis, but also from the observation that the third subgroup of participants who presented a rather different subjective theory from the other participants were male, young and Muslim that is, they had characteristics which entail very strong socio-political implications in the context of contemporary Britain. For the above reasons, I proposed additional empirical work to further explore the emerging issues through a new research method which would stay as close as possible to the interviewees’ perceptions, but would also aim to reveal how the social context shaped these perceptions¹. *Autobiographical narrative interviewing* emerged as an appropriate method for prompting them to reveal the complexity of their perceptions as fully as possible, because this method allows for more insight to be gained about the dynamics unfolding between the participants and their social context. In the next chapter the autobiographical narrative approach is further discussed, in order to justify this methodological choice for the purposes of the second empirical part of the study.

¹ It should be noted that for the purposes of the present dissertation I decided to conduct an entirely new set of narrative interviews. While carrying out the constructivist study presented in the first version of the dissertation that was submitted, I had not paid enough attention to a basic constructivist principle, that is, the important influence of the social context on shaping the participants’ perceptions. After realising this, I decided not to use the narrative material presented in the first version of the dissertation and to conduct again fifteen new narrative interviews where I explored the participants’ perceptions *and* how the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions.

Chapter 5: Research methodology of the second empirical part

The present chapter explains briefly why, after analysing and interpreting the material of the first empirical part, the need for further empirical work emerged and another method was selected. This chapter also presents how the second empirical part was planned and conducted. In particular, the first section discusses why autobiographical narrative interviewing was chosen instead of semi-structured interviewing and the second section presents in detail the research design (that is, choice of interviewees, methods used for the data collection and analysis and interpretation).

5.1 Implications of the first empirical part

The first empirical part elicited the participants' subjective theories on the relation between their post-migration experiences, and especially their employment experiences, and their psychosocial well-being. It should be noted that, as expected, various subjective theories of stress and coping emerged as the interviewees discussed in turn about the stressors they experienced, the resources they did and did not activate, and their well-being outcomes.

With regards to their subjective theories, the emerging findings suggested that: 1) one subgroup of six participants made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they activated and their increasing well-being, that is, having high self-esteem and life satisfaction as well as a strong sense of adaptation. 2) another subgroup of six interviewees, made sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they activated and their fluctuating well-being. 3) finally, three participants made sense of their experiences in the U.K. and their psychosocial well-being by talking about stressors, resources they did and did not activate and their decreasing well-being. These were the only participants who mentioned also resources they did *not* activate and who presented a negative well-being picture, since they discussed lacking confidence, feeling they could not adapt in the British way of life and being dissatisfied with most domains of life in the U.K.

One general observation was that the interviewees found the stress and coping concepts familiar enough to use them while making sense of their experiences and their well-

being, which is why they talked about stressors they experienced, resources they activated for coping with stressors and finally their well-being outcomes.

In addition, it emerged that the interviewees not only employed the components of the stress and coping framework while making sense of the research questions, but also used these concepts in all their richness and diversity. This means that they discussed themselves different types of stressors, resources and well-being outcomes.

Finally, with regards to the theory of psychological activism, the findings revealed that all participants perceived the loss of valued social roles they used to hold in their home country as stressful and they discussed how in different ways they actively tried to restore their lost roles. The third subgroup of participants discussed how they did *not* activate resources for specific problems they faced, (such as employment-related stressors), nevertheless they did activate *some* resources for dealing with other stressors, such as lack of time structure and social life-related problems. In general, the observation that more or less all participants discussed the activation of resources is very important because it challenged the stereotypes of “vulnerability” and “passiveness” that have been regularly assigned to refugee populations in contemporary Britain. The participants clearly seemed to make sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being through the concepts of psychological activism, which emerged at this stage of the research as valuable for exploring the research questions.

In this study I acknowledge that individual experiences along with social dimensions interactively affect how people construct their perceptions, a point already discussed in the third chapter. However from the participants’ subjective theories it has not been clearly derived how the social context in which they lived shaped their perceptions. In general the interview findings may have been too one-sided because apart from individual perceptions and subjective theories, the way in which social dimensions affected people’s perceptions could not be clearly seen.

While wondering whether I should continue with the same method, I decided to use a more open-ended interview agenda for prompting the participants to discuss as openly as possible how they perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. It is important to note that by saying “as openly as possible” I mean that the participants’ talk becomes more transparent, in the sense that one can see more clearly how the social context, with its different levels, shaped their talk.

Along with the more open-ended set of questions there was also an alteration in the mode of interviewing: in the first empirical part I predefined the content of the issues to be

discussed, which is why I prompted the participants to talk about post-migration experiences (which correspond to life events), social support, (i.e. social resources), explanations given for their experiences (i.e. personal resources) and finally self-esteem, sense of adaptation and life satisfaction (i.e. psychosocial well-being outcomes). I also predefined the sequence these themes should follow (i.e. stressors, social resources, attributions and well-being). In the second empirical part, the main change concerned that the interview began by probing the participants to discuss their post-migration experiences and the perceptions of their well-being from their own perspective, instead of predefining the themes to be discussed and the sequence they should follow. It should be noted that there was also a broadening of the focus on employment-experiences, which was evident in the first empirical part, to post-migration experiences in general. This is because employment experiences did not seem to have an obvious relation to the well-being the participants presented and other experiences emerged from their own words as critical to their well-being.

Autobiographical personal narratives were mentioned as a mostly valuable method for examining the above research question, and in specific, the technique of *narrative interviewing*. In the following pages the narrative approach is discussed, in order to justify the methodological choice of autobiographical narrative interviewing for the data collection and the use of narrative analysis as the main tool for analysing and interpreting the obtained interview material.

5.2 Why choosing the narrative approach

Narrative is most generally defined as temporal sequencing of events. Paul Ricoeur (1984,1985, 1988), one of the most widely cited writers on narrative research, argues that human experience too is arranged and bound in time. Human actors cannot but engage with time, and thus narrative, in their formation of intentions, expectations and memories. As a consequence, the stories that people say do not mirror a world “out there”, they are not the objective accounts of events occurring across time that they seem to be. In addition, they do not mirror a world “in there”, that is, fixed points inside people’s minds; rather they are creative means of exploring and describing different realities. Narratives do not uncover what the truth is, but rather “how people make sense of an event or of several events that they may have had some difficulty in describing so that it becomes true to them” (Parker, 2005: 82).

This is why the narrative approach does not assume objectivity but privileges *subjectivity* (Kohler-Riessman, 2001).

In addition, it gives prominence to human creativity and imagination, because each individual is able to artfully construct a unique story based on his/her interpretations and experiences (Faircloth, 1999). Indeed, people construct and bring together past events and actions in personal narratives in order to make sense of their experiences and claim identities. This is especially true of difficult life transitions: “respondents narrativise particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” (Kohler-Riessman, 1993: 3). So narrators become active agents who create plots from disordered experience and give to their reality a unity that neither nature nor the past possesses so clearly (Cronon, 1992).

Precisely because narratives are essential meaning-making structures, they reveal gradually how an individual makes sense of his/her experiences and how he/she builds a self-defining personal myth or story (McAdams, 1993). But narratives are additionally useful for what they reveal about *social life*, because culture “speaks itself” and becomes more transparent through an individual’s story. Indeed, personal myths or stories are created and lived in a social and cultural context (McAdams, 1993). Narrators speak in terms that seem natural, but it is possible to read through them and see how culturally and historically contingent these terms are (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

The implications of the narrative approach are clear: persons construct part of their social-psychological world by the stories they tell. Using narrative, parts of the self can be located as a psychosocial phenomenon, and subjectivities are seen as constructed yet as still as active and effective. Social discourses and practices interweave to shape the self and its many identities. This is the realm where sociology overlaps with psychology and neither the social, nor the individual is privileged. Rather both are constructed *in relation to each other*, in a distinct psychosocial zone (Andrews et al., 2000).

As far as the present study is concerned: the stress and coping background has triggered the formulation of the research question, as discussed in the first chapter, and even though in the second empirical part the mode of interviewing became more open-ended and the research question broader, the stress and coping concepts and the images of psychological activism would continue to theoretically inform the second empirical part. This means that while exploring the participants’ perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, I would again try to see how they made sense and used the stress and coping concepts as well as the image of psychological activism. Consequently

there was still a need to look at how people perceived the relation between their experiences and their well-being, but also at the *social context* that influenced the shaping of these perceptions. Autobiographical narratives provide indeed insight to the understanding of these social dynamics, because they are produced in the *intermediate zone* between the person and the social context.

The need to approach the participants not as beings detached from their social context was pointed out from the beginning of the study. And after the analysis of the first empirical part I pointed out the shortcomings of the semi-structured interview, i.e. that there was a strong direction given by the researcher to the interviewees and the interviewees were given restricted freedom and space to present their perceptions of their post-migration experiences and their well-being. At this stage of the research, it was made clear that I should prompt the participants to talk about the research issues in a more open-ended way. In summary, since narratives are characterised by the above features, that is, allowing for individual perceptions to emerge, as well as wider social dimensions that shape these individual perceptions to be brought out, I selected them as a mostly useful method for carrying out the second empirical part.

It is interesting to note that some authors (Francis, 1992; Mollica, 2001; Powles, 2002, 2004; Rechtman, 2000) have suggested life history and personal narrative¹ as valuable tools for research in refugee contexts because they offer a number of advantages such as: 1) allowing for the communication of refugees' voices in a powerful way. 2) having a tendency to create a strong bond between the researcher and the interviewee, which can be empowering for vulnerable refugees. 3) helping researchers to understand the impact of trauma, which is why in some cases the process of interviewing may be cathartic. Even though I also support the first point, that is, that narratives can give voice to refugees, as it is their *own* perceptions that are being elicited, I do not agree with the assumptions that narratives empower the participants to such an extent that they may even be therapeutic to them. This is because the power relations formed between the researcher and the participants are constantly *present* during the interview session, and even though the participants have the opportunity to speak out and give their own perceptions and views, they cannot suddenly become empowered. It is important to acknowledge the above especially in a study that

¹ Watson & Watson-Franke (1985) define life history as "any retrospective account by the individual of his/her life, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person" (p. 2). "Personal narrative" similarly refers to any retrospective account, but does not imply the broad chronology of a life history, nor need it be elicited or prompted by another person. Therefore personal narratives would include autobiographical stories, written down in private by the individual, shared during the flow of everyday conversation, or recorded during an interview session.

adopts constructivism, while exploring the research questions. These issues are analysed in the last chapters, where I discuss who was affected and how as a result of this research.

The autobiographical narrative interview was chosen as the specific technique for the data collection. This technique is considered a form of in-depth interview with specific features. Its basic principle of collecting data is described as follows: “*In the narrative interview, the informant is asked to present the history of an area of interest, in which the interviewee participated, in an extempore narrative...The interviewer’s task is to make the informant tell the story of the area of interest in question as a consistent story of all relevant events from its beginning to its end*” (Hermanns, 1995: 183).

This interviewing technique seemed appropriate for the purposes of the present empirical part, because it allows the researcher to approach the interviewee’s experiential world in a more comprehensive way than in the question-answer scheme of traditional interviews (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). It could also provide a solution to the dilemma of the semi-structured interview: how to mediate between freedom to unfold subjective viewpoints and the thematical direction and limitation of what is mentioned. This solution includes three elements: a) the primary orientation is to provide the interviewees with the scope to tell their story by taking as much time as they want. b) thematically deepening interventions are postponed until the final part of the interview. c) the generative narrative question serves not only to stimulate the production of a narrative, but also to focus the latter on the topical area and the period of the biography with which the interview is concerned (Flick, 2002: 102). Further elements of the narrative interview are discussed in the next pages, where the research design is presented in detail.

5.3 Research design of the second empirical part

5.3.1 Choice of interviewees

In the first empirical part of the study, the participants were refugees or asylum-seekers and had an economically active age, because previous empirical research has shown that these populations may have adverse experiences after migrating to the U.K., such as housing problems, language barriers, unemployment, underemployment, facing racist attitudes towards them etc (Bach & Carroll-Seguin, 1986; Bloch, 1996; Carey-Wood et al., 1995;

Shiferaw & Hagos, 2002; Sivanandan, 1990; Wheatley-Price, 2001), when compared to native populations and other ethnic minorities in the U.K.

In addition, they had a high educational background (that is, all of them had completed graduate education or had at least a few years' practical training after finishing high-school education). This characteristic was chosen as an important selection criterion because it defined this research population as a selected group of motivated and strong people who took the radical decision to leave their countries where they had a certain status. Having a high educational background was also chosen as an important criterion because according to previous research, status-inconsistency, which is often experienced by highly educated refugees, has been associated with the images of "vulnerability" and/or "passiveness" that are often assigned to them.

Defining in advance the characteristics of the interviewees may restrict the variation of possible comparisons (Kuzel, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Nevertheless, this sampling strategy was used because the general research aim was to examine how this *particular* population perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being.

As the present study aimed to explore other, that is, not necessarily pathological views, of highly educated refugees in the U.K., it focused on a certain population that has been typically regarded as "vulnerable" and "passive". Therefore, the final group of interviewees consisted of individuals who had these characteristics, that is, high educational background, economically active age and refugee or asylum seeker status.

The narrative interviews were conducted with fifteen individuals (men and women) who share the following demographics: they were between 25 and 45 years old, were highly educated (i.e. had a graduate or post-graduate-level degree or diploma), and either held refugee status or were asylum seekers. The sample finally consisted of individuals originating from Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. This consistency was not planned in advance; it probably reflected the pattern of the existing refugee population in Cambridgeshire at the time of this study, even though I cannot say this with certainty since there are no official records about their geographical distribution and their demographic features.

The participants were identified through the snowball technique, that is, four people were contacted through a local refugee support group and another agency which gives advice and services to different ethnic minorities residing in this area. I explained to them clearly the topic of my research study, as well as details about the methodology I would use (e.g.

description of the autobiographical interview, the reason behind recording etc). After being interviewed, these initial participants were asked to introduce to me more people who had the same demographic characteristics and might agree to take part in the project.

5.3.2 Interview agenda

The narrative interview began by using the *generative narrative question* (Riemann & Schütze, 1987), which refers to the topic of the study and intends to stimulate the interviewee's main narrative. If a narrative is to be accomplished, which is relevant to the research question, the generative research question has to be formulated broadly, but at the same time specifically enough for the interesting experiential domain to be taken up as a central theme. The interest may refer to the participant's life history in general (Riemann, 1987: 46), or it may aim at a specific, temporal and topical aspect of the individual's biography. The latter was the case in this study, as the participants were asked to discuss their experiences starting from the time shortly before migrating to the U.K. and continuing by talking about their life in the U.K. until the time of the interview. Therefore, the generative question was phrased as follows: *I want to ask you to tell me the story of your migration and how much did things change in your life since you came to the U.K. A good way to do this would be to start from the time you first started thinking of migrating and then talk about the things that happened in your life one after the other until today. You can take your time in doing this, and also give as many details as you want, because I am interested in everything that is important for you.*

If the interviewee begins to give a narrative section after this question, it is important for the quality of the data that this narrative is not immediately interrupted or obstructed by the interviewer, for example with questions, directive interventions or evaluations. Instead the interviewer, as a listener, must first of all signal that he/she empathises with the narrated story and the perspective of the narrator and is trying to understand it. Thus he/she supports the narrator to continue the narrative section until its end (Flick, 2002: 98), which is usually indicated by a coda, e.g. "I think this is what I can say about that time in my life".

The present narrative interviews were conducted along these guidelines, and particular attention was paid not to interrupt the narrator until he/she had completed the initial

narrative section not only for data quality reasons² but also for issues of appropriate cross-cultural interaction³.

The main question was followed by the stage of *narrative enquiries* where narrative sections, which were not exhaustively detailed before were completed. For example, according to what they mentioned about employment in the main narrative, they were prompted to talk more about it. Or according to what they said about others in the community who offered their help, the participants were asked to elaborate on who helped and in which way. The stage of narrative enquiries was very important because through the dialogue that unfolded between narrator and interviewer it was possible to see how a specific level of the social context, that is, the immediate interview context shaped the way the narratives were constructed. Some examples of narrative enquiries are the following:

- *You mentioned before that your new job has improved your living conditions but also your psychology. Could you please discuss this in a little more detail?*
- *You said before that when you got a job, “things got better” in your life. How much does having a job help to make things better? Could you please discuss this in a little more detail?*

Of course if an interviewee appears to be unwilling to discuss a particular period of his/her life, or a particular experience, then the interviewer should not press him/her to do so. This is particularly important when working with refugees who may have experienced adverse or even traumatic events (Slim & Thompson, 1993). Indeed, in all cases I discussed with each participant shortly before the interview whether there were any topics that he/she would prefer not to explore at all during the narrative interview.

The last stage of the interview was the *balancing phase*, in which “the interviewee may be asked to summarise the meaning of the whole to its common denominator” (Hermanns, 1995: 184). At the balancing phase, the interviewees were asked to elaborate on

² A main point while interpreting the interview material is whether the participant’s account is primarily a narrative. Although descriptions of situations and argumentations may be incorporated for explaining reasons or goals, the main form of presentation should be a narrative of the course of events and of developmental processes (Hermanns, 1995).

³ As von Raffler-Engel (1988) notes, nonverbal communication is an often unarticulated obstacle to cross-cultural interaction (and thus cross-cultural interviewing). She asserts that the most common problems in nonverbal communication are lack of comprehension and misunderstanding. Breaks and silences are another challenging aspect of cross-cultural communication with obvious consequences for interviewing, especially biographical interviewing (Fuchs, 1984). In some countries, long pauses are part of everyday social interaction, not signals for turn taking, such as invariably occurs in interview exchanges (Ryen, 2000). Compared to speech patterns in some other cultures (e.g. Asian) the fast pace of western speech hardly provides room for long breaks during talk. Indeed western interviewers risk interrupting interviewees’ accounts by starting to talk in the middle of their sentences (Ryen, 2001). Therefore researchers should pay more attention to all these aspects of nonverbal communication, as they constitute an important part of the interview material.

their life satisfaction, the indicator, which was eventually selected for exploring their perceptions of their well-being. For example:

- *In general, are you satisfied with the way your life is and why?*

Since the structure of the interview agenda has been presented, it is important to discuss also the choice of specific items. With regards to psychosocial well-being I did not explore the previously used dimensions, that is, sense of adaptation and self-esteem and focused only on life satisfaction. According to the constructivist approach, and in particular to the symbolic interactionist perspective people are meaning-generating organisms. They construct distinctive personal narratives based on their individual experiences, but are also inspired from building blocks available in the specific culture they live in (and in the case of this study's participants, also the culture they bring with them) (Lieblich et al., 1998; van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). This is why the narratives people construct "are meaningful to specific interpretive communities in certain historical circumstances" (Clifford, 1988: 112). Indeed, in this study the analysis of narratives attempted to look into the perceptions that individuals formed, but also into the way the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions.

Life satisfaction is by definition not only a positive and subjective experience like sense of adaptation and self-esteem but also a *relative* experience, that is, it derives from comparison with others (life satisfaction is typically defined as an "assessment of one's progress towards desired goals" (Okun & Stock, 1987: 481) and is affected by "one's aspirations, *standards of reference* and immediate feeling state"). It is actually distinguished from other subjective indicators of well-being, such as quality of life precisely because it has by definition a relative, interactive dimension (quality of life is a more objective indicator of well-being in that it is based on a more individualist approach, since it assesses quality of life on the basis of someone's behaviour in response to the environment in which the behaviour occurs (Evans et al., 1985)). Indeed, many researchers have come to the conclusion that social dimensions and in particular changing internal frames of reference after comparing one's self to others play a large role in the life satisfaction individuals seem to experience (Halpern & Donovan, 2002). Precisely because in this empirical part the emphasis was put not only on individual perceptions, but also on how the social context would shape these perceptions, the *relative* dimension of life satisfaction made it as the most useful well-being indicator to focus on.

5.4 Locating narratives for analysis

There is considerable variation in how researchers have employed the concept of narrative and, consequently, in methodological approaches and analytical techniques. In one tradition of work, narrative refers to the entire *life story*. As already noted, this is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible (Atkinson, 2001: 125). In a different tradition of work the concept of narrative is quite restrictive, used to refer to brief, topically specific stories organised around characters, setting and plot. Narrative here refers to *discrete stories*, which recapitulate several events the narrator witnessed or experienced (Kohler-Riessman, 2001). Finally, in a third tradition, narrative refers to large sections of talk and interview exchanges, that is, extended accounts of lives that develop over the course of interviews.

Within each tradition lies the debate on the nature of reality, that is, whether the researcher should take into account the narrative itself (naturalistic approach) or as a means of studying other deeper questions (constructivist approach). These theoretical orientations affect how the process of interviewing is conceived and what exactly it can be used for (Smith, 1995). For instance, more traditional realist approaches assume that the interview can be seen as a tool that elicits information about the respondent's perceptions of a particular topic, in this case, stories and narratives of the self. By contrast, constructivist approaches view the interview as a place where specific *social and interactive functions are being performed*. Thus, rather than taking an interviewee's response to a certain question as representative of how they think or feel, the constructivist researcher is usually not interested in how this response may reflect on the psychological or social reality of events outside the interview context.

In the forefront of contemporary psychology and sociology, many authors have focused on what participants say and do in a particular interaction (Atkinson, 2001; Hermans et al., 1993; Rosenthal, 1997; Wengraf, 2000). They have advocated that personal narratives, in both facets of content and form, actually *reflect* people's social and psychological realities. According to this approach, stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world.

At the other end there are those who have focused not on the particular situation where the narrative is produced, but on the larger social context. For example, for the Personal Narratives Group (1989), context is multilayered, involving the historical moment

of the telling, the race, class and gender systems that “narrators manipulate to survive and within which their talk has to be interpreted and their identity derived” (Kohler-Riessman, 1993: 21).

The present empirical study employed the concept of narrative as a set of discrete stories and as far as the nature of truth is concerned, people’s narratives are not considered as accurate representations of reality. Rather I considered them as a part of their ongoing story that represent a certain manifestation of their social and psychological worlds (Crossley, 2000).

5.5 A view of narrative analysis

Personal narratives serve many purposes: to remember, argue, convince, engage or entertain their audiences (Bamberg & McCabe, 1998). Consequently, investigators have many points of analytical entry. Personal narratives can be analysed textually (Labov, 1982), conversationally (Polanyi, 1985), culturally (Mattingly and Garro, 2000; Rosaldo, 1989), politically (Mumby, 1993), performatively (Langellier, 1989, 2001; Kohler-Riessman, 2001) and *interactively* (McAdams, 1993). It is the last of these analytic positions that I adopted for analysing the interview material.

A primary way in which individuals can make sense of experience is by casting it in autobiographical narrative form (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1986) and this is especially true of difficult life transitions (Kohler-Riessman, 1993). Narrators create plots from disordered experience, give reality a “unity that neither nature nor the past possesses so clearly” (Cronon, 1992: 1349). As Taylor points out, “human beings need to situate themselves somewhere in ethical space in order to have a sense of self” (1991: 306). This is because such an ethical space, which can only be constructed through *dialogue* and *social interaction*, respects each individual story, as well as the different shapes of a life that emerge from a person’s account, especially if he/she has been experiencing uncertainty (Skultans, 2004).

For refugees, claiming this ethical space becomes even more difficult when they try to communicate and share a credible past to the host community, who has difficulties in understanding “the transitional and transnational lives of refugees” (Eastmond, 2000). “The present is meaningless unless it can be seen as connected in some logical way with what precedes it. Present events need to be situated within the wider narrative structures to which

they belong” (Czarniawska, 1998: 4). But in the case of refugees, their dislocation means that there is an absence of shared experience, which threatens the consensual basis of their *transactional self*, that is, the self that is created through social interaction ⁴ (Kirmayer, 2002).

Precisely because people need to situate themselves in the present and this can be done primarily through dialogue with a suspicious host community, it was pertinent to approach narratives as *interpersonal encounters* (McAdams, 1993). Narratives are directed towards someone (an audience) as well as coming from someone. According to Squire (1999), for people living in difficult socio-political circumstances, for instance as refugees, a narrative that develops increasingly consistent and coherent notions of the self is exceptional rather than exemplary. Common experiences and similar cultural resources may provide guidelines that help individuals to recount their stories but cannot determine the content of each individual’s narrative (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Therefore it was challenging to explore how they made sense of their experiences in the stories they presented to an audience, especially because people who come from migrant populations are expected to “narrativise particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” (Kohler-Riessman, 1993: 3).

5.6 Description of the analytic steps

For eliciting people’s narratives McAdams uses an interview protocol, which asks about 1) life chapters 2) key events in the interviewee’s life 3) significant people in the interviewee’s life 4) future script 5) current stresses and problems 6) personal ideology and 7) life theme. It is important to note that this is a semi-structured agenda, which means that the list of questions set out in the protocol serve as a guide rather than something that should be strictly adhered to (Smith, 1995). Indeed, the interview schedule I used for eliciting autobiographical

⁴ As refugees try to rebuild a sense of self in the new society, different selves are constructed and presented. Kirmayer explores the twin concepts of the *transactional* and the *adamantine* self, in order to make sense of refugees’ experience (2002: 726). The transactional self is constructed through dialogue and social interaction. However, the dislocation of refugees means that there is an absence of shared experience, which threatens the consensual basis of a transactional self. The adamantine self by contrast, relates to “some inviolable essence of the person, a monological self that has been hidden or suppressed by the lies and coercion of others, or more subtly, by the efforts of that same self to some false image or ideal of itself designed to please others” (2002: 726). Kirmayer dismisses the adamantine self as “something of a fiction” and instead he suggests that selves are transitory and constantly reshaped.

narratives contained fewer questions than the list above, that is, it focused on the interviewees' life chapters shortly before migrating to the U.K. until today, key events in their life in the U.K. (for example, employment-related difficulties), significant others that played an important role in their life (for example, local support groups) and finally on their life satisfaction.

With regards to the analytic steps: the first phase in the analysis consisted of repeatedly reading through the whole interview transcript in order to familiarise myself with the material and to get a general gist of emerging and significant topics. The second phase was to identify the three principal elements that can be found in every autobiographical narrative, that is, *narrative tone*, *imagery* and *themes* (McAdams, 1993).

Narrative tone is perhaps the most pervasive feature of a personal narrative in adulthood and is conveyed both in the content of the story and also the form or manner in which it is told. For example, the tone can be predominantly optimistic or pessimistic. An optimistic story can be optimistic because good things happen or because, even though bad things happen, the narrator remains hopeful that things will improve.

As far as *imagery* is concerned: every autobiographical narrative contains and expresses a characteristic set of images. In order to understand a narrative one must explore the unique way in which the narrator employs imagery to make sense of who he/she is but also to describe other people. Therefore the researcher is looking for meaningful images, symbols and metaphors that the narrator uses.

Finally the researcher has to search for the dominant *themes* in one's autobiographical narrative. By looking at the themes, he/she tries to understand what the narrator of the story aims at and what kind of message he/she tries to produce. It is useful to look for imagery and themes together. This is because they overlap and the use of certain imagery tends to point towards, and be indicative of, particular themes. I identified these three elements, that is, tone, imagery and themes, in all sections of each interview, starting first with the life chapters-question, and then I proceeded separately through each of the interview questions. An example of the general picture emerging from an interview in terms of narrative tone, imagery and themes for each of its separate questions is shown in Appendix 3.

Whether narratives are used as a source of psychological or social science research material, as a source of historical material for family and community, as a means of promoting personal insight, or for any other disciplinary inquiry, interpretations of narratives are usually of two kinds: those that are founded upon a theoretical basis and those that emerge from a personal frame or reference (Atkinson, 2001: 135).

In the previous empirical part three different subjective theories emerged because there were obvious differences between the organising themes (that is, the psychosocial resources) that supported each subjective theory. But the main dimension along which the three subjective theories were different referred to psychosocial well-being outcomes: the participants who held the first subjective theory discussed having positive well-being, those who held the second one presented their well-being as fluctuating, while in the third subjective theory the interviewees clearly talked about their decreasing psychosocial well-being.

In a similar manner, since I was interested in seeing whether the images of psychological activism would emerge from the participants' narratives, I started my interpretations by trying to detect them in the different narratives. I detected "activism" primarily through the solutions/resources that individuals might say they had found in order to cope with their problems. Another important dimension I was looking for was how they presented their psychosocial well-being, and in this case their life satisfaction. When narrative tone, imagery and themes were noted for all sections in all interviews, I clarified which participants discussed activating resources and being very satisfied with their life. In this way, the first story, that is the story of *hope* emerged. The story of *survival* emerged after clustering those narratives that discussed activating resources but not being very satisfied with their life. Finally, the narratives that mentioned activating resources but discussed extensively also about *not* coping and about being unsatisfied produced the story of *disappointment*. It should be noted that the boundaries between the three stories were at times rather blurred. For example, in the stories of *hope* and *survival* the participants would discuss not only that they activated resources for coping with their problems, but also that they used similar resources (such as turning to ethnic communities or local support groups). However, the dimension of life satisfaction was a good way to distinguish between the three stories because the participants who presented a story of *hope*, *survival* and *disappointment* appeared through their narrative as very satisfied, not entirely satisfied and unsatisfied/resigned respectively. Each story is described and analysed in the next chapter.

Any approach to narrative analysis must deal with the "basic issues of structure, meaning and interactional context, but investigators vary in how they formulate these problems and which of them they see as primary" (Mishler, 1986: 75). For example, Schütze (1983) sees the narrative presented in the interview as a true representation of the events recounted. The aim here is less to reconstruct the narrator's subjective interpretations of his/her life than to reconstruct the "interrelation of factual processual courses" (Schütze,

1983: 284). Labov (1982) leaves out the relationship of teller and listener: “His assumption (is) that narrative is a relation among clauses rather than an interaction among participants” (Langellier, 1989: 248). At the other end is the Personal Narratives Group (1989) who examine power relations in the production of personal narratives: “who asks the questions and for what purpose?” Bell (1999) and Kohler-Riessman (1990, 1993, 2001) adopt a middle position: they take into account the narrated facts or events, but are also interested in how the construction of a story is affected by the interactional setting in which it is produced. Kohler-Riessman argues that the how of the telling is as important as what is said, “for it is through choices in form that narrators persuade listeners and, ultimately readers of their texts” (1990: 1196).

I also believe it was important to look at what (content) and how (form) it is said but also under which circumstances it is presented. Parker (2005) identifies certain key ideas in narrative analysis that hold the key to the way a story may be heard and retold by a researcher. These key ideas refer to *temporality*, *event*, *context* and *format*. Temporality refers to the order of telling; an event may be a disturbing or incomprehensible situation or an unexpected change that may hinder or facilitate, but which is also a necessary point for the narrative; context refers to the socio-cultural background against which a narrative story is set; and format is the style or manner in which a story is told and which gives a certain feel to the narrative. It is important that the dialectical relationship between these ideas is taken seriously, for ensuring that the narrator is the centre of the narrative act.

McAdams’ (1993) analytic approach also takes into consideration most of the above key-ideas. The *tone* in his approach seems to correspond to the *format* that Parker (2005) mentions, while *imagery* and *themes* seem both to correspond to the *events*. However, McAdams’ approach belongs to the rather individually oriented or psychologically focused versions of narrative research. This means that psychological processes and in specific defense mechanisms are regarded as the source of the specific narrative strategies that people use to shape how their stories are told to others (McAdams, 1998). It also means that even though this author acknowledges the importance of interpersonal dialogue in the production of a narrative, he emphasises the power that this dialogue has on disclosing the narrator’s self. According to McAdams the importance of telling a narrative lies in that “the narrator, through the process of exploring his/her self, promotes his/her own self-understanding and may also enrich the relationship with important others in his/her life” (Crossley, 2000:69).

Precisely because this approach highlights the importance of exploring and disclosing the self, it gives less prominence to the contextual elements that are embedded in a narrative,

that is, the temporality and the socio-cultural background against which a narrative is set. But since in this study I was not looking at idiosyncratic stories, but at the stories of a distinctive group of people, at a particular place and time, who are in constant interaction with others, it was crucial to include in my analysis also these contextual dimensions.

The above analytic steps were in accordance with the constructivist epistemology and methodology adopted in this study. Indeed, I acknowledge that the social context (i.e. the socio-cultural context the interviewees and I find ourselves in, as well as the more specific context, that is, the time and place where the interviews are taking place and the unfolding dynamics between the participants and me) would be undoubtedly embedded in the emerging stories thus, it had to be taken into account during the data analysis. This is why after the first analytical phase, where I identified *tone*, *imagery* and *themes* in all sections of each interview, I moved to the second phase, which consisted of identifying *temporality* and *context*. These elements are clearly seen in the next chapter, where the interview material is analysed.

5.7 Synopsis

The first section of this chapter discussed the implications of the first empirical part and then explained why autobiographical narrative interviewing was chosen instead of semi-structured interviewing for the purposes of the second empirical part. Indeed, since narratives allow for individual perceptions as well as social dimensions that shape these perceptions to emerge, as the participants narrate their perceptions of their post-migration experiences and their well-being, I selected them as a mostly useful method for carrying out the second empirical part.

The second part of this chapter presented in detail the research design (choice of interviewees, interactional context, i.e. relationships formed between the gatekeepers, the participants and the researcher, interview agenda and finally the methods used for the data collection and analysis). The section regarding the interview agenda was more extensive, not only because autobiographical narrative interviewing is quite different from semi-structured interviewing, but also because of some necessary alterations in the research questions (e.g. focusing on life satisfaction for exploring how the participants perceive their psychosocial well-being).

The analytic strategy employed for analysing and interpreting the material derived from the narrative interviews was also extensively discussed. Of course analysing narratives

interactively is a complex task, which is why the entire strategy will be clearly described and better understood in the following chapter, where I look in depth into the participants' autobiographical narratives.

Chapter 6: Empirical research into refugees' autobiographical narratives on the relation between post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being

As discussed in the previous methodology chapter, autobiographical narrative interviewing was chosen as an appropriate method for illuminating the issues emerging in the first empirical part. Autobiographical narrative interviews were carried out with fifteen individuals who fulfilled the selection criteria and were found within the refugee population of the County of Cambridgeshire.

6.1 Context of the interview and characteristics of the participants

The interviewees were found through the snowball technique. Initially, four people were contacted through the two organisations I mentioned in the previous chapters, that is, an organisation for ethnic minorities residing in the area of Cambridgeshire and another local group, which gives advice and support to refugees and asylum seekers. The initial participants were interviewed and then they were asked to introduce me to more people who had the required demographic characteristics (that is, high educational background, economically active age and refugee or asylum-seeker status) and who might agree to take part in the research study.

One interview was conducted in the local organisation for ethnic minorities, which was mentioned above. Several participants wanted to be interviewed in some public place (i.e. coffee shop) while a few female interviewees preferred to invite me to their house and conduct the interview there. I informed them that everything they would say would be kept confidential and that the transcripts would be anonymous. I also discussed with them whether using a pseudonym would be sufficient to protect them from possible repercussions or whether the material should be carefully edited or not reproduced in any form. Such issues of confidentiality and anonymity are especially important when a participant shares information that is politically sensitive (Rasbridge, 1993). Most participants agreed to be tape-recorded and in the case of those who expressed their wish not to be recorded I took hand-written notes. Each interview lasted approximately 1,5 hour.

The fifteen interviewees (nine men and six women) were between 25 and 45 years old, were highly educated (that is, they had graduate or post graduate-level qualifications), and were refugees or asylum seekers. Ten of them were single and five were married. Four participants originated from Africa, two from Eastern Europe and the remaining participants originated from the Middle East. At the time of the research they were residing in the county of Cambridgeshire. Nine participants were employed and six were unemployed. From the nine people who were employed three people were in full-time jobs that matched their skills and educational qualifications, while the other six participants were rather underemployed, since their jobs obviously were “below” their skills and educational background.

6.2 Analysis of the interviews

In this empirical part I relied mainly on McAdams’ theoretical and methodological approach towards personal narratives, but I also incorporated some dimensions suggested by Parker (2005). The autobiographical method of exploration created by McAdams (1993) was particularly interesting because it emphasises the importance of *interpersonal dialogue* in the exploration of the self. According to McAdams, the telling of one’s story to a sympathetic listener can be extremely illuminating, which is why he compares the narration of one’s autobiography to certain forms of psychotherapy. Unlike a psychotherapist however, the listener need not be a trained professional. Instead he or she should serve as an empathic guide and an affirming sounding board (McAdams, 1993: 254). This means that through the analysis of the interviewees’ narratives, one can see individual perceptions and sense-making ways, as they emerge in a friendly and encouraging context. At the same time, through the autobiographical narrative one can see not only individual perceptions, but also how the social context affects the construction these perceptions, which is essential in this study since the main issue has been to try to illuminate and understand the psychological *and* social world of the narrator (Smith, 1995).

Regarding the analytic steps, the first step consisted of repeatedly reading through the whole interview transcript in order to familiarise myself with the material and to get a general gist of emerging and important themes¹. The second step was to identify *narrative tone*,

¹ In order to get a general gist of emerging themes I also consulted the fieldnotes I had taken after each interview. The purpose of these notes was to describe the interview situation, that is, where the participant and I met, how long the interview lasted, whether there was a friendly or unfriendly atmosphere during the interview,

imagery and *themes*, which were described in the previous methodology chapter. I identified these elements starting first with the life chapters-question, and then I proceeded separately through each of the interview sections (that is, key events in their life in the U.K., significant others and life satisfaction). When this process was applied to all interviews, three stories emerged and in the following pages each story is presented in the form of a “coherent whole” (Crossley, 2000: 102) interspersed with extracts from the interview material to support it.

These stories were further analysed in terms of *temporality* (order of telling) and *context* (socio-cultural circumstances where the interview takes place, and the dynamics unfolding between the participants and me, which I call *immediate social context*). Once again the appropriate parts of the text to be selected for presenting the findings are those that captured the above elements as much as possible.

After each story is described, one case study is presented for elaborating on how and to what extent these stories elucidated the participants’ perceptions. The rationale of using case studies was to “fully exploit one of the principal merits of qualitative methods, the analysis of meaning in depth and in context” (Yardley, 1997: 36). Autobiographical narrative approaches can be characterised as a hermeneutic inquiry where parts of the individual’s life story can be understood only in relation to the whole (across the life span, history and society). Therefore the aim is to produce in-depth analyses and insight into individual histories, which appreciate the complexities of these interrelationships.

6.3 Presentation of the interview findings

6.3.1 The story of *hope*

Four interviewees seemed to make sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being (in specific, life satisfaction) through a narrative of *hope*. I began to detect this story first of all by noting the pervasive *tone* of narration these participants used: a rather persistent optimism could be traced in all of these narratives. The general message was that “things will be all right in the future”.

whether we chatted before or after the interview about general things unrelated to this research study etc. My fieldnotes were highly descriptive but it is important to acknowledge that the researcher’s tacit knowledge and expectations often play a major role in determining which observations are worthy of annotation (Wolfinger, 2002).

In addition, the *imagery* that was used was very positive either towards others (e.g. pointing out how helpful other people were) or towards the narrator's self (e.g. portraying himself/ herself as an optimist who does not give up hope and as happy with his/her life). The *themes* evolved around the problems they had to face either shortly before migrating to the U.K. (e.g. getting the family's consent) or after migrating (such as language difficulties, finding employment, and making friends). At the same time the themes focused also on the solutions found for overcoming these difficulties (e.g. becoming involved in a local refugee group that helped them to find work and to build social networks), as well as the actions they had taken for ensuring they will not face similar problems again (e.g. taking courses to improve qualifications and increase their chances of finding employment). Another theme concerned their present life satisfaction, because they perceived their current circumstances as better than those in their home country. In the extract below, where the narrator discussed key events of her life in the U.K., these issues were clearly seen:

"The first thing was the language. The second thing that was too difficult for me was the job. Because I am a professional and I came here and going to work as a cleaner was no good, it is difficult. Another difficult thing was the weather. And the third thing was to have a new life. Because for me here is a new life. When I was born in my country I started to speak, here I was born again and once again I had to start to speak... When I arrived here, I did not speak English at all so I needed to ask my family for many things. So I went to a refugee group and I found there some very good people. Everybody tried to help me very much, everybody. And I started to speak a little English and somehow I was not so shy. Then I tried to make people understand me and I tried to speak by myself because it was no good when I was asking all the time my family. I am a very determined person so I like to do everything by myself. This is why I tried to make people understand me with my hands and everything. And yes, people never refused me and they never tried to laugh because my English was bad. No, they gave a very good response to everybody...Everybody was very nice" (female, accountant, African)

The general tone in the above narrative was an optimistic one. This could be seen when the narration about the main negative events (e.g. language difficulties, lack of environmental mastery) ended with a positive message, that is, that eventually she *did* improve her language skills and that she met people that helped her find her way in the new environment. The optimistic tone could also be seen from the verbs and phrases she used, which were distinctive for their dynamic and proactive nuance: "I am a very determined person so I like to do everything by myself", "I *tried* to make people understand me", "I *went* to a refugee group and I *found* there some very good people". In terms of imagery it is interesting to note how others (e.g. people at a local refugee group) were portrayed in a positive way ("I found there some very good people...everybody was very nice"). And with regards to the main themes, one could see that this narrative was full of problem-solution units, that is, the discussed problems (language difficulties, difficulties in adapting in the new

place) were immediately followed by the ways through which they were overcome (asking her family for help, and also contacting a local refugee group for help and advice). The same interviewee went on to talk about her life satisfaction by narrating the following:

“I don't miss my country at all, no. I have made here more friends and I have met people here more honest and more kind to me than the people I had met in forty years...So I don't miss my country. I miss the weather. But that's not everything. I need to adjust to what I have here, I need to adjust...In the economic sense it is difficult but it is more difficult in my country. It is ok, I am not rich but I have the necessary things. So it's good. Anyway, when I get more opportunities and when I get a better job I will do more things and get a house...”
(female, accountant, African)

At this point, in order to avoid the tendency to read a narrative simply for content and the equally dangerous tendency to read it as evidence of a prior theory, it was useful to look also at the narrative's *form*. This means looking at how the narrative was organised and why did an interviewee develop his/her tale in *this* way (Kohler-Riessman, 1993). Therefore, as far as form is concerned, the order of telling of the narrative was rather linear: first the problem (that is, language difficulties) was briefly described, then what was discussed was the decision the participant took for overcoming the problem, and the catalyst (that is, her family and the “good people” at the local group) that helped her to get to the solution of the problem, while in the end of the section there was sometimes an evaluation of that decision (e.g. “Everybody tried to help me very much, everybody... And I started to speak a little English and somehow I was not so shy”). Turning to the question of context, the participant seemed to be present-oriented (“I need to adjust to what I have here”), but also referred to the future (“when I get more opportunities and when I get a better job I will do more things”). In addition, she appeared to focus on the place/country she found herself in at the time of the interview, as there was only small reference to her home country. So the general context in which she placed her narrative was Britain, at the present time. With regards to the immediate social context, the participant did not seem to address to me by using explanatory phrases such as “I mean”, or “you know”. Rather she seemed to narrate her story without involving me in her narrative act, something which, as discussed in the following pages, I did not perceive while interacting with several other participants. The story of *hope* and its more specific elements could be seen again in the following extract, where another narrator discussed his life satisfaction as well as his sense of adaptation at the present moment in the U.K.:

“...Now, yes, I think I would say I am satisfied, perhaps not socially, because that is the point that I almost sacrificed to make things work in business and that is completely understandable from my past. In terms of

employment things are going well, so that's good, and I think at this moment that's what matters and I think I am satisfied... I think I would say that I have adapted here at least to a large extent...I am pretty much integrated in this society through work and the things I do and also the friends I have got. I have got a good group of African friends and British friends as well, a combination of both, and in both cases we cooperate well. So that is a major way in which I think I have adapted...I still have to make a few adjustments to be part of this country. I miss home, I have not been there for years, but I am here now... When you talk about difficulties of living here some people may point out some racial elements, that they are coming from Africa, but then again it is not only that because even if you are born in this country, you can still have similar situations. I would say that the working environment in which I am is tolerant in terms of ethnicity or something and you just have to do your job. I think that's the way I see it at the moment" (male, engineer, African)

The narrative tone was quite optimistic, which could be seen throughout the above extract. The interviewee said clearly that he is satisfied with the way things are in his life, even though he acknowledged that he must "still make a few adjustments to be part of this country". At the same time, he portrayed himself with dynamic images of someone who is hard working and decisive ("you just have to do your job") as well as sociable ("I have got a good group of African friends and British friends and in both cases we cooperate well"). The main themes in his narrative referred to the reasons why he came to the U.K. (familiarity with the language and also aspirations to receiving good education in an advanced country), his first experiences in the U.K. in terms of education and employment opportunities and social life, and his positive feelings for the present and next phases of his life ("in terms of employment things are going well, so that's good" and "I have a good group of friends...so that is a major way in which I have adapted").

The narrative had a linear order of telling, where a problem was described (getting integrated in the British society), the decisions he took for tackling the problem were made explicit ("sacrificing social life for making things work in terms of employment"), and then an evaluation of his current situation ("I am pretty much integrated in this society through work and the things I do and also the friends I have got") closed this section. The general context focused on the present time (e.g. "I am satisfied", "that's the way I see it at the moment") and place (e.g. "I am pretty much integrated", "I am here now"). Regarding the immediate social context, this interviewee seemed to direct his narrative sections himself, and not wait for me to prompt him by using narrative-enquiries. This could be seen for example when he used definite phrases "that's how I see it at the moment" or when he justified himself his decisions "that is what I almost sacrificed to make things work in business and that is completely understandable from my past"). At the same time I did not see many attempts from his side to affiliate with me, that is, by involving me in his narrative with

phrases like “you know what I mean” or “you can ask me more questions”, like other participants did.

In summary, in the above narratives there was a continuous optimism and an attitude that things will get better. The participants narrated their migration-related experiences in a linear way and provided explanations mainly of how initial post-migration difficulties were *improved* or eventually *resolved*, especially with the help of people they met in different environments. Turning to a support group often emerged as a main theme and others, especially in local groups/organisations (or in the working environment, as noted in the case above), were presented as the *catalyst* that led to resolutions, while they presented their own self as active and determined.

In order to highlight the characteristic features of this type of narrative, I present the case study of a participant whose case can be seen as a paradigmatic example of the story of *hope*. The case study begins with the presentation of a table, where I describe each section of the particular interview in terms of tone, imagery, themes, while the temporality and the context are discussed in the text.

Case study 1: Omar's story of hope

	Tone	Imagery	Themes
Life chapters	Optimistic/ talking about the past but not in a nostalgic way. Looking forward to the future	Seeing self as active and daring because he criticised government policies in home country/ self as determined to “get things going” and as someone who has a “positive attitude”	Important that he joined opposition party/ realising there was no safety in home country and planning to leave/feeling distressed the first months in the U.K. and facing job difficulties/ receiving help from refugee group/first jobs in the U.K. were good for earning some money/finally got into professional areas he wanted
Key events in the U.K.	Discussing difficulties but emphasising positive events	Distressed while not having a job/refugee group gave him a “lot of support”/struggling to make a new start/ self as active and determined because he took employment he did not want but kept on looking for something better	Going to refugee group to ask for help with immigration status and jobs/ getting first jobs for “sustaining himself”/difficult to find job to match his qualifications/kept on searching/eventually found job in the area that he wanted/settled and satisfied now, but always hoping to go back
Important others	Mainly positive/ praising others but also criticising those who “stereotype refugees”	People working with refugees and solicitor as helpful/some locals regard refugees as “not worthy of a better life”/but neighbours and majority of people as good/other refugees as people who have lost everything but swallowed their pride and are determined to make a new start	Found people at the refugee group who helped/ knows people who are biased towards refugees/ has friends from the neighbourhood and from work/ keeping in touch with friends back in home country
Life satisfaction	Optimistic/ believing that “beyond the problems there should be something better”	Feeling happy because he “pushed through” and the “really difficult times have finished”	Feeling happy here but admits being homesick/ satisfied with life now but still hopes to return to Africa and apply his knowledge and experience

Table 6.1: Tone, Imagery and Themes identified for each section of the narrative interview with Omar.

Omar (the names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality) was a man in his mid-thirties, originating from Africa, who previously worked as a teacher and migrated to the U.K. in 2001. At the time of the interview he was employed. Throughout his autobiographical narrative an optimistic life story and a dynamic self-presentation emerged. This self-

presentation was initially seen at the beginning of his narrative (that is, in the life phases-section of the interview) where he discussed the reasons that made him flee his country:

“Basically, my reason for coming here was purely political, due to political persecution. I was a school teacher, teaching in a rural area where it was the real strong hold of the ruling government...And teachers were viewed with a lot of suspicion because of the way we were criticising government policy...and I was one of those people that were very vocal about it. And when this new opposition party was planned there were quite some attractive ideas that I also felt they were really good so I joined that party and became public about it ”

The optimism that things would become easier, as well as his dynamic attitude emerged also when he narrated the time shortly after arriving to the U.K.:

“I was quite distressed...When I arrived, a local refugee group helped me, they offered free counselling services, which I received. Because things were quite difficult initially, but that support made it a lot easier. And true determination to get things going...”

A dynamic self-presentation along with an optimistic attitude with regards to his professional development in the U.K. can be seen when he pointed out his determination to “fend for himself” and to “keep on going”:

“As soon as I got here, my aim was to be independent because I am used to fend for myself I am not used to receiving handouts...There is nothing wrong about it if you cannot do anything, if you need that, then it is welcome. But if you have the skills, the ability, the energy, the power to fend for yourself why overburden a country’s resources?...So basically, that’s how things happened to me. It has not been easy but it takes determination. You do experience a lot of frustration...but you just keep pushing and going as long as you have a positive attitude...”

By acknowledging how others helped him, a general optimism came out of the entire narrative. It should be noted that he also acknowledged the helpful role that organisations, such as local support groups for refugees had played -at least to some extent- with regards to employment-related problems:

“Through a local refugee group I received interview skills, they helped me prepare the CV, everything was professionally done. I thought I did well in the interviews. But I was not invited to any, apart from the other jobs that I did. So I got into odd jobs. I don’t want to call them odd jobs, they are not, because they are the jobs that sustained me for a long time. I did cleaning, stuff like that...But of course knowing that you have the qualifications and the skills to do better things, I felt my skills were not being utilised. I just kept searching...and then I got a job... I should say that is when I began to move into the areas I really wanted... It’s been two years now, it went very well and I recently got another job, because I have the references now and the experience”

It should be noted that he did not portray *all* others as helpful. While discussing his views on employment opportunities for refugees, he talked about stereotypes that local people seem to hold with regards to them:

“Well, nobody wants to live on handouts, nobody wants to be a refugee in the derogatory terms, like “people who abuse the systems and the benefits” and all that...We cannot deny the fact that there may be refugees like that, but it is not everybody, and I think it is very small minority of them. The majority have left because they did not choose to, but were forced to...And the fact that sometimes people think refugees don’t deserve that, people think that if you are a refugee you must suffer, you must be seen to be suffering...So perhaps you should not get a job and you should be on benefits. But when that happens people turn again around and say look they are on benefits, sometimes, especially asylum seekers when they are not given asylum status they are not allowed to work, they are not allowed to do anything. But how are they supposed to live?...”

Nevertheless, even though he acknowledged others’ biased way of thinking about refugees, in the final section of his narrative he talked about “the good neighbours and friends” he has and in this way he started to close this narrative section by conveying a positive message.

“I am happy, I would not say I am worried about much, I am happy with what I am doing, with the life I am living, peaceful, free country, lovely people, the majority of the people are very good. We have good neighbours, we get on very well, I got friends around now from work and from social life”

Finally, the aspect of *hope* as well as the dynamic side of him could be clearly seen in the part of the narrative interview where he discussed his life satisfaction:

“What was really difficult for me is really finished. Moving from the danger I was exposed to was a huge relief and while things have not been easy I would not say I have been struggling to cope, no. I just told myself that I just got to push through, whatever the brick walls that are around me there should be a way and it’s that determination I have had...And I remain optimistic about anything, I remain optimistic that well, whatever is happening is a temporary thing, beyond that there should be something better, which I think helped me to push through whatever hurdles”

In summary, the imagery he used portrayed a proactive self (e.g. “I just kept searching and searching”), a rather confident one (“I felt my skills were not being utilised”, “it’s that determination I have had...which helped me”) and also a satisfied self (“I am happy”). Others were also portrayed in a positive way (“the majority of people are very good”). As far as the main themes were concerned, and as it is clear from table 6.1, he made sense of his post-migration experiences and his well-being by creating a narrative that was interspersed with problem-solution sections. The main themes referred to the difficulties in overcoming the initial psychological problems and finding employment, to turning to others in the community who helped him to cope with these problems, as well as the actions he was taking at that time to ensure these problems would not occur again.

The order of telling was linear, as it started with a description of the problem (e.g. not being able to find employment in the area he wanted) and then continued with a narration of

how the problem was solved (e.g. keep on searching and applying). In this narrative it was very interesting to see how the participant gradually reduced the description of problems and then focused on the positive outcomes.

Finally, as far as context is concerned, apart from the first part of the narrative where he discussed the circumstances that forced him to leave his country, the participant appeared to focus on the present time and the place where he was living at the time of the interview (i.e. contemporary Britain). Finally, with regards to the immediate social context, the use of some phrases such as “I mean” and “you know” could suggest that he attempted to convey his narrative more clearly to me and establish better communication, but in general he did not seem to try to involve me actively in his narrative act.

6.3.2 The story of *survival*

Seven interviewees made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being through a narrative of *survival*. Unlike the optimistic tone, which was noted in the stories of *hope*, a rather *ambivalent tone* could be traced in the narratives of this group. The general message was that “things are very hard while living in the U.K.” and that “one has to keep on trying to make it through”.

The *imagery* that was used for others was sometimes positive (e.g. portraying other people as helpful) and sometimes negative (e.g. pointing out how others can be unfriendly and biased). The imagery that referred to themselves was also sometimes positive (e.g. presenting one’s self as active and persistent) and sometimes negative (e.g. disappointed and unsatisfied with one’s life).

The *themes* were similar to the themes mentioned in the story of *hope*, e.g. pre-migration issues such as planning how to leave the country and getting the family’s consent. The themes referred also to post-migration difficulties, such as finding housing and employment, and building social networks and the solutions they found for addressing these problems. However in the story of *survival* the emphasis was put on how difficulties *remained*, unlike the previous group, where the themes evolved mainly around how the problems were resolved. Another theme concerned their life satisfaction: they were feeling satisfied with certain things which had improved in their life when compared to life in their

home country, but they discussed they still needed to work hard to achieve things and be entirely satisfied.

The following extract, where the interviewee narrated her first experiences in the U.K., illustrates the above:

“The beginning was awful. Yeah, it was awful first because I could not speak the language. I was doing some voluntary work, it was already very difficult to work...The work on its own was very difficult and also the language difficulties and being alien to the culture and not having all the support that I had, you know, the emotional everything, it was very difficult...And I had some contact initially with a (local support) group because they were recruiting people. I don’t want to say that they were not helpful, but I have to be honest that I didn’t quite understand what they were doing and I did not benefit a lot from them, you know. When I started learning the language I kind of found my way, you know, I knew what I was doing so I just tried to find out things myself. I don’t think I found a lot of information from groups, I tend to read all the leaflets and things and then find out...”

For me it was very difficult when I first came here, I did not know many people, I had to find my own way through the system. But I just tried to live with myself and I went to University and that helped me a lot, and I also had an aim I suppose and I enjoyed being part of the University and reading and writing. I suppose I kind of got used to it and also now I can travel and that makes a difference. And also having my family here, makes it easier for me. Sometimes we do need to rely on other people for our emotional needs” (female, graduate in social sciences, Middle Eastern)

The general tone in this narrative was apparently not optimistic. Most sections that described events (such as meeting people in local support groups) finished with a negative message (“I didn’t quite understand what they were doing and I did not benefit a lot from them”). The verbs and phrases that were used had a dynamic, decisive nuance: “*I just tried to find out things myself*”, “I also had an *aim*”, “*I just tried to live with myself*”. As far as imagery is concerned, as in the story of *hope*, the interviewee portrayed herself as strong but also resilient (“sometimes we do need to rely on other people for our emotional needs”). Finally, with regards to the main themes, one can see that the narrative included the sequence of problem-solution-pending problem unlike the previous story of *hope* that contained problem-solution sections.

With regards to temporality, the order of telling seemed rather circular: first a problem was described (e.g. networking in order to find employment), then the decision she took for resolving it was described (“I had some contact initially with such a group because they were recruiting people”), along with an evaluation of that decision (“I did not benefit a lot from them, so I just tried to finds out things myself”), and in the end of this section she concluded that “for me it was very difficult”. In terms of the general context, the participant appeared to be oriented at the present time and place (“I suppose I got used to it and having my family here makes it easier”) and at the present place. Finally, regarding the immediate social context, the participant seemed to involve me in her narrative act, instead of placing me opposite her as a simple listener by frequently using phrases such as “you know”, “I mean”

and also “but I have to be honest”. I regarded these phrases as an attempt from the participant’s side to affiliate and to communicate better with me, whereas in the story of *hope* I sensed a certain distance between the participants and me.

The story of *survival* could be seen again in the following extract where another participant discussed the significant others part of the interview:

“I feel more positive in the ethnic community here [than in London], but they have adaptation problems here ...And also I am going to try, I am still trying, to put people in the community in contact with each other, you know, I am trying to make people feel much more strong. Because some people never meet the other people here. They knew the names of the other people but they never met them... after two years I knew the people in every group but they don’t know each other. So I am still trying to make them contact ... I can’t say that the community is strong because there is not a real, strong community here but I just try... Anatolian people, you know, have got the same culture. Some things in our culture are bad, for example, the old situation with the conservative culture. Just imagine, for example, in the villages where fundamentalist Islam religion is you never meet in the same place women and men. This culture comes from Islam, but this culture is part of real life in my country. But not here, which is good...

The problem here is really that the ethnic communities are racist with others. Others means you know...the community people from my country mainly live in north London as a ghetto, you know what ghetto means, yes, same community, same place. It might be because of government policies, they never separated them to other places or give them some opportunity to go to other places. But in the same area there are usually black people and Asian people. And in real life they may cause some difficulties, some problems with them...I can’t say that they are a fascist group but it is going to be like that...” (male, graduate in politics, Middle Eastern)

The narrative tone was again not optimistic and rather ambivalent, which can be seen especially from phrases like “there is not a real, strong community here but I just try [to put people in contact]”. The imagery he used for others was either positive (“I feel more positive in the ethnic community here”) or negative (“the ethnic communities here are racist with others”). He presented himself as confident (“after two years I knew the people in every group but they don’t know each other”) and also as willing to take initiative (“I am still trying to make them contact”). The main themes referred to difficulties such as learning the language, finding the right community to adapt in and finding proper employment, the solutions found for addressing these problems (having Middle Eastern but also English friends and interacting with people who had “similar political views”), but also to remaining problems (“I can’t say that they are a fascist group but it is going to be like that”).

The order of telling was circular, starting from the description of a problem (e.g. looking for proper employment), then moving on to mentioning how the problem was resolved (e.g. setting up a new business with a friend), but closing the narrative section with a rather negative message (“I will try to make it my own way, I am not sure it will work but I will try...”). Context-wise, the narrator focused on the present time and location (that is, the U.K. context). And with regards to the immediate context, phrases like “just imagine”, “you

know” or questions addressed to me to check whether I understood what he meant such as “you know what ghetto means, yes, same community, same place...” may have suggested that during our interaction this participant too wanted to involve me in his narrative act and consequently establish better communication.

In summary, in the narratives of *survival* the participants made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being by viewing their overall migration experience as a difficult process where *survival* was the main topic unlike the first story where *hope* was the prevalent theme. The issue of overcoming difficulties was featured in both stories, but in the story of *survival* it was presented more like a struggle and not like a challenging task as seen in the narratives of *hope*.

Case study 2: Zeynep’s story of survival

	Tone	Imagery	Themes
Life chapters	Neither optimistic nor pessimistic/ talking little about the past and focusing on the present	Seeing self as active both in home country as well as in the U.K./ self as “different” because she can manage herself/ determined to help other refugees	Imprisonment because of her political activism / realising she had to leave her country /homesickness and trauma at first in the U.K./support from family and friends/became active again by joining organisation for helping refugees and torture victims/difficulties in finding further education/currently employed and still actively helping other refugees
Key events in the U.K.	Discussing extensively the difficulties she and other refugees had to face in the U.K.	First year in U.K. as “nightmare”/determined to become active and help others/ feeling happy while working in refugee group/ feeling secure in the U.K./self as strong	Family and friends helped her overcome first difficulties/becoming involved in refugee group/difficulties in getting further education/noting that refugees are excluded from getting further education and employment/ finding job/ still involved in refugee group for helping others/hoping to return to home country when it is safe
Important others	Mainly negative/ talking about unhelpful others in the community but also presenting a refugee-group in a positive way	Family and friends as helpful/refugees as people who try for the best /some educational authorities as unhelpful/some refugee groups as unprofessional/ media and many locals regard refugees as criminals	Family and friends as important in her life in the U.K./helped other refugees and torture victims who need support/became friends with others who have the same background /believes that refugees are deliberately excluded from getting education and employment/ hoping that refugees will be accepted in the society
Life satisfaction	Neither optimistic, nor pessimistic/ acknowledging good things and bad things in her life	Feeling strong and presenting herself as determined to go on with her plans	Realising she had many difficult times/ Life improved after becoming active and having a child/feeling safer in the U.K. but not entirely satisfied with life

Table 6.2: Tone, Imagery and Themes identified for each section of the narrative interview with Zeynep.

Zeynep was a woman in her early thirties, originating from the Middle East, who used to be a human rights activist and migrated to the U.K. in 1998. At the time of the interview she was employed. She was chosen as a case study because the story of *survival* emerged clearly from her narrative.

Throughout her autobiographical interview a story of struggle emerged. This can be seen first of all in the life phases-part of the interview where she discussed the circumstances that forced her to leave her country:

“...Before the U.K. I was in my country, and when I was studying at the University I was helping people at a human rights organisation and I was an active person, I was at the students’ union. At that case I had just been arrested by the police, a couple of times... I spent two times fourteen days in a cell, and I was tortured and after I had been in prison for a month, I just decided to come to any country...”

The struggle could also be seen when she talked about the first months of living in the U.K.:

“The first thing was the U.K. for me because my relatives were here...When I came here I didn’t speak any word in English. But I was thinking, you know, my relatives can help me. Because I was really scared, you know, different country, you don’t know any language, you don’t know anything else and after torture and everything I wasn’t ok, how do you say, I got post-traumatic stress disorder and I couldn’t sleep very well and had nightmares and everything and the second nightmare for me was coming to the U.K...The first six months were very difficult, you know, because I had not seen my family and my old friends were in my country, I just had my mind there and wanted to be with my friends and after six months I could not concentrate to the English lesson as well, you know, I didn’t want to learn any English, because, you know, I was always thinking why I am here, I was really angry with my country’s state...”

While describing key events in her life since migrating to the U.K., and in specific her attempts to get further education, she discussed again how she had to fight to find the right course for her because others treated her differently, that is, they discriminated against her, as seen in her following quote:

“...the problem is there is not enough education, not enough courses for refugee people. They need more courses, they need special courses, but there is none, there is just only part-time course in some college. Since last year, there is a full-time course in K.H. College and they don’t accept refugee people there. I really wanted to go there because I really want to have a full-time education in English and I had been there a couple of times, in their international office and I had a lots of rows with them because I am telling them “I need full-time education”, they said “no, there is no full-time education for you here, you have to pay it”. I said “I don’t have to pay it because I have a passport, everything, I am a refugee”...You know some people don’t know what “refugee” means. I am telling them I am, there is no shame in this and she just said “no, no”. After that I called the education authorities and lots of places and reported on her and everything. It is just this kind of racism...Then I just went for one year just for an Arts course”

Finally, when she talked about several others and in specific about people from local organisations for refugees, once again she discussed how difficult it was to interact with them because they were unprofessional and unhelpful:

“I didn’t get any help from any local organisation, nothing. I know people try to do something, you know, just for their friends or relatives or someone else. I have been a couple of times in the Refugee Council, it

was horrible, I didn't like it, you know. They try to, they have, I don't know, they are not professional. There are many organisations in London, they can't get any help from the government, any funds, any grants. They are collecting money from the members of charities and things like that and they try to help people, all things go on voluntarily. I think that's the situation, not a good situation. They got big problems, yeah, there is not enough money, also they are trying to close organisations that help refugee people...There is not anything helpful, you know, there is no help for them..."

It should be mentioned that not all others were negatively presented. She talked in a positive way about those who are welcoming refugees and are friendly towards them:

"I met people from different countries, different cultures, I know the problem is not only in my country but in other countries too. Also sometimes I try to be united and to get together and do something together, that's very good. And also there are people still opening their door to us, not all people, but I know people who want to help other people especially refugees, I know that, that's very good, at least that's very good "

Finally, the ambivalent tone of the story of *survival* could be seen when she discussed her sense of life satisfaction:

"Things are ok now because I am working and my daughter is going to nursery, I will help when I am here and my family is here together. And in the future, I just always worry about her, you know, because I am always thinking I am not from this country, I came here, I had to come here and it was not planned. But when my country is safe and when it is going to be ok, I really want to go back in my country. Because, I don't know, I always feel foreign here, something always reminds me that I am foreign. There are people, different culture, everything is different it is just a situation that is different completely. You can feel everything, I don't know, I am always thinking..."

The imagery she used portrayed a dynamic self who was at times rebellious (e.g. "I was an active person...I was arrested twice by the police") but consistently different from others ("do you know, there is a circle and they always try to keep refugee people out of the circle. It is very sad but I am different, I am different and I can manage myself, I am different because I try to give good education to my daughter and I try to help people always, you know"). She did not present herself as happy and satisfied with her life as the participants in the story of *hope*, nevertheless, she acknowledged that she felt "things were ok" and she emphasised her need "to do something" and not "just sit there and expect everything from the other people". With regards to the main themes, as in the story of *hope*, she talked about the problems of getting further education, finding employment, and a social network to be part of and also mentioned the importance of meeting others in the community who helped her address these problems and the action she was taking at that time ("we have got a small group, we try to help refugees' children, I think it's a good idea and I think we can do lots of nice things together") to ensure these problems would not happen again. However, the

difference from the story of *hope* is that the themes focused also on the problematic situations that *remained*, such as the existence of discrimination against refugees. Unlike the previous narratives of *hope*, this interviewee seemed to focus on the ongoing negative situations instead of reducing the description of problems along her narrative.

The order of telling was circular, because she started with the description of a problem she had faced (looking for further educational courses), then proceeding to discussing how she tried to resolve the problem (“I just tried to take all prospectuses and everything, about the rights of minorities and refugees”) but closing this narrative section with a negative message (“there is not any information, there is no law, and I think they are doing this because they want that, that’s why, they don’t want any refugee or such persons...”). As far as context is concerned, apart from the first part of the narrative where she discussed briefly the circumstances that forced her to leave her country and the initial difficulties of life in the U.K., she appeared to focus on the present time and place (that is, contemporary Britain). Finally, regarding the immediate social context, as seen in the quotes above the frequent use of phrases such as “you know”, as well as questions directed to me such as “how do you say” and “do you know that...”, could suggest that she wanted to clearly convey her narrative to me and include me actively in the narrative act and thus establish better communication.

6.3.3 The story of *disappointment*

Finally, four interviewees made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being through a narrative of *disappointment*. A *pessimistic tone* could be traced in their stories and the emphasis was put again on post-migration difficulties that *remained*, but unlike the narratives of *survival* where despite the difficulties people still took action to improve their lives, in this case the general message was that “the present is bad so there is not much point in hoping for a better future”.

The *imagery* that was used was primarily negative (e.g. others in the community portrayed as unfriendly and even hostile towards them). The imagery that referred to themselves was rather positive when they discussed their pre-migration times (e.g. presenting one’s self as strong and active in home country), but when they talked about post-migration experiences, it was primarily negative (e.g. presenting one’s self as unmotivated and rather resigned).

As far as *themes* were concerned: as in the stories of *hope* and *survival* this group of participants talked about pre-migration problems that made them leave their home country, as well as about post-migration difficulties, such as finding housing and *good* employment, (unlike the other participants who look for *any* job) as well as meeting other people in the community. However, what was different in the story of *disappointment* is that while discussing these problems the emphasis was put not only on that they remain unresolved, which was seen also in the story of *survival*, but on that one should neither hope that they will be resolved nor continue to try to resolve them. This is why these participants did not talk about the solutions they found for tackling their problems (e.g. help from a local group), but elaborated on additional complications that worsened their problems (e.g. local agency discouraging them from applying for jobs). Actually, how others in the community discouraged them from trying to tackle their problems, emerged as an important theme in the story of *disappointment*. Finally, another emerging theme from this group's narratives referred to their life dissatisfaction in the U.K., a feeling that was reinforced when they were thinking about positive aspects of life in their home country. These features were seen in the next extract, where the narrator discussed some of the key events of his life in the U.K. and then compared his experiences of being in prison in his home country and living as a refugee in the U.K.:

“When I visited the Home Office that was a very important experience for me, you know, in terms of contact with the agencies or the outside world. The experience was absolutely bad...They treat everyone, all the people who come to England as people who will exploit the system, like parasites, exploiting the system and taking what they got. That's how I actually felt when I first went there to apply for asylum. Later we had just problems. We had to be into contact with the local authorities because we were living in a very small place, you know...We were actually living in a room, you understand...actually the housing problem was very difficult to solve...

Prison life is similar to my life here, it is a similar experience. For people who are there for just ordinary crimes, being in a prison may be a misery. But for me it was not...it was very difficult and hard but there was a reason why I was there. I was a political activist and I knew what I was doing so that's the way I actually experienced it and you know, found a way to cope with the situation and it was just that I had to be there, I could not change it. I was very disciplined, I would spend years writing and reading. I saw prison life, although there were serious issues and it was very hard and difficult, I turned prison life into a school.

And here, it was not a real choice to be here, but I am here now and it's just one stop in my life...it is a difficult situation but I know why I am here... I am not sure how much this is related to what I was saying but, I believe that culture is a very complex thing...Because culture is that complex and localised I believe penetrating or understanding or living in a different culture it is a very, very difficult thing to do...This is the general and big problem for all foreigners, all immigrants, whatever you call it, you know, it is just a very difficult thing for everybody” (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern)

In the above narrative the general tone was pessimistic. Certain situations were compared (in the above case, the years he spent in prison in his home country with his present life in the U.K.), then what followed was an explanation of why he perceived these two

situations as similar (i.e. both situations were difficult and he did not have another choice) and the narrative closed with definite and negative statements (i.e. “it is just a very difficult thing for everybody”). As in the stories of *hope* and *survival* where the verbs and phrases used had a proactive tone, this participant also used some verbs that suggest activism (e.g. “I turned prison life into a school”, “I found a way to cope”). However he closes this narrative section with a sentence which implies an unwillingness to take further action (e.g. “I believe penetrating or understanding or living in a different culture is a very difficult thing to do”). The imagery he used portrayed a confident self when he talked about pre-migration times (“I was a political activist and I knew what I was doing”), but when he discussed life in the U.K. he presented himself as disappointed (“later we had just problems”). It is interesting to see how he portrayed himself through other people’s eyes, that is, as someone who “will exploit the system”. Others, for example local authorities, were presented as “treating asylum seekers like parasites”.

It is interesting to note that in the above case the interaction with the local authorities was presented as catalytic into discouraging him and his family and possibly predisposing them negatively to the experiences they would have in the U.K. (i.e. “later we had just problems”), while in the stories of *hope* and *survival* local groups and organisations were often presented as the catalyst that led to resolutions. The themes referred to post-migration experiences, such as adaptation problems, as seen above. However, unlike the previous two stories where the main issue was how to find ways to adapt to the new culture, in this case the theme was that living and adapting to the new culture is very difficult and almost impossible to achieve. Another theme was that the agencies, which represent the outside world discouraged him by treating him, and other asylum seekers, as “people who will exploit the system and take what they got”.

With regards to temporality and context: the order of telling was rather static, as a problematic situation was discussed (getting to know the new environment), along with the catalyst that predisposed him into the experiences he would have in this new environment (“when I visited the Home Office that was a very important experience in terms of contact with agencies or the outside world”) and then what followed was an evaluation of the situation (“the experience was absolutely bad”). In terms of context, he was oriented at the present time and place (“I am here now and it is just another stop in my life”), but also referred to the past (“prison life was very difficult and hard but there was a reason why I was there”). Finally it is important to make some observations regarding the immediate social context: as in the previous narratives of *survival*, the participants tried to include me in their

narrative act instead of addressing to me as a mere listener. In the above case, the frequent use of phrases such as “you know” and “you understand”, as well as attempts to convey to me his line of thinking and narrating (e.g. seen through the phrase “I am not sure how much this is related to what I was saying”) could signify the participant’s intention to actively involve me in his narrative act.

The story of *disappointment* emerged also from the following narrative section, where the participant discussed the significant others-part of the interview:

“To be honest, I don’t have any friends here. They just smile in front of you but they don’t feel anything. I had lots of friends, English, Italians, Belgians, Greeks, you know, but then I think my people were not very good to me. The other foreigners they are so different you know, but Turks or Kurds if they do something they do it for, how do you say? For example, I help you but you must help me as well, you know, so it is not very good to be honest.

3-4 years ago I didn’t find a job for a month, I didn’t pay my bills, I didn’t pay my rent for 3 months. I tried to contact my friends and they did not help me, you know, so I got really upset...Even my brother, even my sister didn’t say to me “come to my house”...they really broke my heart. So when I told my sister I don’t have a place to live she said “well, no, I don’t want to, talk to your brother, talk to your friends, they will find you a job”...I was waiting...finally, someone from the East, from a different culture and he said to me 4 months later “how are you doing?” I said “I am doing so bad” and he said “you can always come to my house”. And then finally I went to his house, he said “don’t pay any rent, just stay here”... And then he got a business and he said come to work for me, part-time, stay in my house, don’t pay anything...so I think only a foreigner helped me. So difficult...Because asylum seekers, how come they don’t believe us? Maybe it’s chance, if you get the chance but not really, I am so unlucky, I got it nearly 4-5 times. Sometimes I don’t believe in God, I am really upset ” (male, engineer, Middle Eastern)

Once again the pessimistic tone could be seen from phrases like “I don’t have any friends here” and “I am so unlucky”. The imagery he chose portrayed others, and especially his compatriots and his relatives, as unhelpful, since they did not want to help him when he had serious financial problems (“they just smile in front of you but they don’t feel anything”, “I tried to contact my friends and they did not help me”).

He presented himself as disappointed because his people “were not very good” to him and because even his family let him down in times of need (“even my family did not say to me “come to my house”, they really broke my heart”). In addition he presented himself as unlucky (“I am so unlucky, I got [the Status] nearly 4-5 times”) and disillusioned (“sometimes I don’t believe in God”). The themes referred to post-migration experiences, such as problems with getting refugee status, employment-related problems and social isolation, as well as to his ethnic community who would help him only if they knew they would get something in return. Another theme referred to the problems asylum seekers face while trying to convince others that their asylum case is genuine (“asylum seekers, how come they don’t believe us? It is so difficult...”).

The order of telling was again static starting with the description of a problem (e.g. finding employment and housing), then mentioning the catalyst (i.e. people from his ethnic community and relatives) that influenced him into believing that the problem would not be resolved and finally evaluating negatively the entire situation (“So I think only a foreigner helped me...so difficult”). Finally, with regards to the immediate social context, there were frequent attempts towards me to involve me more in his narrative act by using phrases like “to be honest”. At the same time, his remark that Greek people were amongst his friends could suggest that he wanted to affiliate with me by pointing out his positive inclination towards people who share the same ethnic background as me.

In summary, in the story of *disappointment* the participants viewed their migration experience as a difficult process, which was filled with obstacles and unresolved problems. This pessimistic focus on difficulties that *remained* was featured also in the story of *survival*, but in the narratives of *disappointment* people did not seem to persist and try to cope with these difficulties; rather they seemed to accept passively the way things are and even to avoid taking further action to improve their situation.

Case study 3: Raheb’s story of *disappointment*

	Tone	Imagery	Themes
Life chapters	Pessimistic/ pointing out what is better in the U.K. than in home country but concluding that “for asylum seekers it is torture”	Seeing self as strong minded because he left his country/self as different because he did not want to be enclosed in the ethnic group/active but sad because he misses family	Left home country for political but also economic reasons/homesickness, language problems and difficulties with immigration status and employment/having faced discrimination but acknowledging that the U.K. protects human rights/decided to avoid ethnic community which is too narrow minded
Key events in the U.K.	Mainly negative/ mentioning few good things that happened while living in the U.K. such as making friends, but talking extensively about how the asylum system, inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic tensions disappoint him	Confused in the first months/living in the U.K. is like “an open prison”/feeling as a second-class citizen/ disappointed because it takes long to get refugee status/worried about future/seeing self as unable to do anything if they deport him	Trying to network with ethnic community/waiting for decision on asylum-application/looking for employment/avoiding ethnic community and interacting with English people for learning the language and the culture/friend helped him to find job/feeling that everybody has the right to freedom and a better life but for asylum seekers “life is torture”

Important others	Mainly negative/ criticising his ethnic group and most English people but also pointing out that English people are fair and respect each other	Seeing self and other asylum seekers as second-class citizens/ People from same ethnic group portrayed as narrow-minded /British people as fair because they respect each other but also cold and unfriendly	Avoided people from the same ethnic group because they were narrow-minded/discussing how human rights are protected in the U.K. / could not get refugee status because local authorities cannot distinguish who is a genuine asylum seeker/could not find legal job because local authorities were delaying the decision on his asylum application/has some friends but pointing out the ongoing inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic discrimination
Life satisfaction	Pessimistic/acknowledging that his present life is better when compared to the first years in the U.K. but in general saying that he is unsatisfied with his present life and cannot adapt in the U.K.	Sad because he has not seen family for years and worried about the future because of uncertain immigration status and financial problems/ presenting himself as someone who has been struggling but is currently disappointed	Acknowledging that in the U.K. he has been feeling safer than in home country and that the first big difficulties have been overcome/ realising there are still many pending problems in his life and feeling he cannot do much to improve his life circumstances because “this is the asylum seekers’ destiny”

Table 6.3: Tone, Imagery and Themes identified for each section of the narrative interview with Raheb.

The story of *disappointment* could be clearly seen through the autobiographical narrative of Raheb, a man in his early thirties originating from the Middle East who migrated to the U.K. in 1998. At the time of the interview he was employed.

In the beginning of the narrative, while discussing the reasons that made him want to leave his country, it was interesting to note how he talked about his dynamic attitude and his decisiveness that made him feel “against the government”:

“...at the time I left my country I mean, it was really bad...I mean there are lots of checkpoints where police stops you and asks for your id and it says which city you are from on your identity card, ok? But my city has always been like a separate city, and because of our religion we are not like normal Muslims, we are quite different. That’s why the country now looks at my city’s people like potentially guilty people, yeah, and they tried a couple of times to destroy the people who are still in my city...Of course another reason was the economic. Because if you are living in a country and if you are not free to do whatever you want, I mean, you cannot make money too. And this is true. It is like a chain, like a link... Actually from my country those who came here as asylum seekers, I don’t know about the rest, but you can see people who come from Africa, Iran, Iraq, most of them are “politic” because they have to be against their governments...I mean they are right

because have a look at Iraq there was a dictator, have a look at Africa almost same governments have been there”

But then as he started talking about important life-chapters and in specific about the first experiences in the U.K., what emerged was a negative narrative tone:

“I believe whoever comes here, they expect too many things from Europe, yeah, as they have seen it on television. But at the end of the day most of them once they are here they see that life is different. I know many people, actually, I visited a hospital in London and there were hundreds of people and 90% were asylum seekers. I mean they have psychological problems. Because...for example, me, when I left my country I did not know where am I going, you don't know the language, you don't know anything, yeah, you don't know whether everything is going to be good for you or bad, I mean, whether you are going to survive at least, ok? ...”

The pessimistic element was also clear when he gave his opinion about the current asylum regulations/system:

“...after the first year you start to understand how the system goes, everything, because up to a year you are not sure actually, often because of your situation, whether they are going to send you back or not. And there is another thing there is a law, human rights law, whoever goes to another country as asylum seeker, that country has to tell that person between 18 months whether they are going to stay here or they are going back to their country. After 18 months, if they say ok, you have to go back to your country, after 18 months, this is illegal. But what a pity nobody goes to court to say “look, I accept that, but there is a European law saying once I come here you should have told me between 18 months whether I am going to stay or not”...I mean this is another problem, another torture for asylum seekers. There are many people, they have been living here for 15 years, 20 years, they still don't have anything. They don't have permission to stay here, come on, that is too much, I mean, if you are going to give it or not, I mean just decide and give it to people, whoever you don't want to keep just send them back. At least they will lose just 1 year, 1,5 year before they get used to this country, they will go back, but what a pity they don't...”

In addition, it was interesting to see the negative tone he used while talking about his ethnic community:

“...[Foreign people live in ethnic communities isolated from the local ones] because people want to do that. Like in London, there are a couple of places where all people from my country are there and they don't want to go out. They become a community, and like they say “this is our country, this is the England for us, this is the place, if you go out from this part of ours, you are going to die”, that's what they believe. But this is the worst scenario...Because by doing that they don't learn the language because they don't mix...And if you do that you cannot learn the language, if you don't learn the language you cannot communicate with English people and then you will give them the option to become like racist, ok? It is not good to have a rich community in your own language, with your own people, it is not good I believe ”

In the second case study the participant also discussed how she avoided interacting with people who were prejudiced against refugees. But, unlike Raheb in this case study, who

emphasised how his ethnic group basically pushed him away, she pointed out how this negative interaction with certain people eventually motivated her to get closer to people who had the same background and help each other, that is, in the story of *survival* the final message was not as pessimistic as in the story of *disappointment*.

Disappointment could also be seen in the section on life satisfaction where he starts his narration by talking about English people, by pointing out what is better in the U.K. compared to his home country, but then closes this section with the pessimistic statement that “generally, for asylum seekers it is torture”

“I have English friends, not many...I have mostly foreign friends, like Spanish, Greek, Italian...If you compare English people to Mediterranean types you can see they are more cold, more selfish. The Mediterraneans are more friendly, more helpful...What is good actually here is that people respect each other. This is for me one of the most important things and the law system really works in this country. Because in my country, you can be for any reason, any time guilty... There you have to prove yourself you are innocent, but in this country until proof, you are innocent...Generally this country is better actually, except for the weather and except most of the people. I mean English people, they are not friendly...Also this system creates asylum seekers...Because I have been asking English people, do you know why asylum seekers come here? They say because they don't have money, that's why they come in. Why don't they have money? They have lost money, they don't have money, because of that, you are the reason they don't have money. If they didn't go to Iraq for the petrol nobody would come here. Nobody who comes here can be rich, trust me, I don't believe it...Generally, for asylum seekers it is torture”

The imagery he used when he talked about the past was that of an active and decisive self (e.g. “I was against the government, I was right”), but that of a resilient self while living in the U.K. (“you get used to everything in another country”). Regarding the main themes, after talking about the circumstances that made him flee his country, he talked about post-migration problems and why they remain unresolved (e.g. asylum system delaying decisions on asylum applications). He pointed out the importance of learning English in order to communicate with the local people and learn their culture, and also mentioned having some English friends, but ultimately characterised them as cold and unfriendly.

The order of telling was static, starting from the description of a problem, then focusing on how the problem *remained* unresolved and concluding with a negative message, which left no hope for the future. Context-wise, the narrator focused on the present time and location, but when compared to the other two stories there was more reference to the past (that is, the pre-migration period as well as the first years in the U.K.) and to his home country. Finally with regards to the immediate social context, the frequent use of phrases such as “I mean” and “for example” suggested that he probably tried to convey his narrative

to me as clearly as possible. At the same time, there were several times he used phrases such as “trust me” and “can you imagine”, which could signify his intention to involve me in his narrative act. Finally, as seen in another participants’ quotes, he clearly noted that Greek people were amongst his group of friends, which could suggest his intention to affiliate with me by pointing out that he had good relations with people who share the same ethnic background as me.

6.4 Discussion of the narrative interview findings

Now that the three stories have been presented and analysed, it is relevant to link them to the research issues and questions discussed in the first chapters. This means exploring the narratives’ findings to discover whether and how these individuals, while making sense of the relation between their experiences and their well-being, used the stress and coping concepts in general, and the images related to psychological activism in particular. In order to do this, it is useful first to summarise the main building blocks of each story:

	Tone	Imagery	Themes	Temporality	General and Immediate Context
Story of hope	Persistent optimism	Others in the community as helpful/self as dynamic, active and hopeful	Problems (housing, job and networking) and their solutions/ others’ help as catalytic/life satisfaction	Linear, problem-solution-sequence	Present time and place and looking forward to the future/ No attempts to affiliate with researcher
Story of survival	Ambivalent	Others in the community as helpful or unfriendly/self as persistent, strong, enduring	Problems (housing, job, networking)and solutions/ remaining problems (discrimination etc)/others’ help as catalytic/ satisfaction in some domains	Circular, problem-solution-problem that remained-sequence	Present time and place/ Attempts to affiliate with researcher

Story of disappointment	Negativity and pessimism	Others in ethnic group as narrow-minded or unhelpful/ British as good but mainly unfriendly/self as strong in home country but disappointed in the U.K.	Problems (finding housing, proper job and social group)/how unhelpful others were catalytic in showing that problems won't be resolved/life dissatisfaction	Static, problem and how the problem was not resolved-sequence, along with a negative evaluation	Present time and place but also referring often to the past/ Attempts to affiliate with researcher
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Table 6.4: Summary of the main analytic elements in the three stories

6.4.1 How the key concepts of stress and coping and the images related to psychological activism emerged in the stories of *hope* and *survival*

In chapter Four, the analysis of the three subjective theories revealed that there was no obvious relation between certain stressors the participants had experienced and their well-being. A similar observation can be made also here: from the findings of the stories of *hope* and *survival* it was clear that there was no obvious relation between these participants' post-migration experiences and their life satisfaction. At the same time, there was no obvious relation between the activation of certain resources and their life satisfaction. Based on my constructivist paradigm, I did not expect these to emerge either. The two groups who constructed the stories of *hope* and *survival* talked about experiencing similar stressors (e.g. accommodation and employment problems and social isolation) and having used similar resources (e.g. support from ethnic community or local organisation), as seen from the derived themes. However, their sense of life satisfaction seemed to differ, as the first and second groups discussed being highly and partially satisfied with their life respectively.

In addition, it should be noted that these participants' employment status and their life satisfaction were *not* clearly related. This is contrary to what many traditional stress and coping researchers have supported (see chapter One). This could be particularly seen in the group that made sense of their experiences and their well-being through the story of *hope*: these interviewees were holding different employment statuses, including unemployment and underemployment, nevertheless they all discussed being satisfied with their life. Of course this observation should not underestimate the importance the participants gave to employment-related problems they had experienced. Unemployment and underemployment emerged indeed, through their own words, as a major problem and worry for them, but

somehow these experiences did not make them discuss that they were dissatisfied with their life. Therefore, the findings of the narratives of *hope* and *survival* confirmed again my initial expectations that there would not necessarily be an obvious relation between experienced problems and certain well-being outcomes, as many researchers from the stress and coping area have claimed.

However, the participants' autobiographical narratives were not elicited for testing whether the typical stress and coping assumptions would be confirmed or not. As in the first empirical part, where I explored through the participants' subjective theories whether and how they would make sense of and use the stress and coping concepts, I also explored the same issue here, in their autobiographical narratives. Indeed, the participants of the first and second groups actually employed in their narratives the problem-coping sequence, that is, they talked about problems they experienced, resources they activated for coping with these problems and finally their life satisfaction. The interview agenda I used in this empirical part was more open-ended than the semi-structured one used in the first empirical part, so these participants did not use the exact stress and coping concepts, such as stress, support, self-esteem, adaptation or life satisfaction, along with their distinctions (e.g. ethnic and non-ethnic support, self-esteem and self-concept etc), as noted in the first empirical part. Nevertheless, they seemed to find the problem-coping sequence familiar enough to employ it in their narratives on their own and without being prompted in their narratives. Thus the stress and coping concepts emerged also in this empirical part as useful while exploring the way highly educated refugees made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being in autobiographical narratives.

In addition, images related to psychological activism seemed to emerge from some narrative stories: the participants of the first and the second groups presented and evaluated themselves as having had valued social roles and this was seen from the imagery they used (e.g. good professional, community member). These interviewees also discussed how they activated psychosocial resources for coping with the loss of such roles, which could be seen from the imagery they used either to describe themselves (e.g. presenting a determined self, which suggests an internal sense of control) or to describe other people (e.g. presenting others as friendly and helpful, which implies that the participants sought and received social support). From the above we see that these participants perceived the loss of valued roles as distressing and that they actively tried to restore them in different ways. Thus, as discussed also in the first empirical part, the findings of these narrative interviews seemed to challenge

again the stereotypes of “vulnerability” and “passiveness” that are often assigned to this population.

6.4.2 How the key concepts of stress and coping and the images of psychological activism did not emerge in the story of *disappointment*

The previous paragraph referred to the first and second groups who presented the stories of *hope* and *survival*, since they incorporated the problem-coping sequence, as well as the images of psychological activism in their narratives. However, the third group has to be discussed separately, since the story of *disappointment* reveals that these four participants did *not* employ the problem-coping sequence, while constructing their narratives. Even though they talked about experienced problems, what is most important is that they did *not* talk about continuing to activate resources at the time of the interview. As seen from the narrative tone, an important message was that “they were not hoping that things could improve”. In addition, the imagery and themes show that these participants emphasised not only that they have not much hope for the future, but also that they were rather unmotivated to change the adverse circumstances they were facing and somehow accepted them as *inevitable*. A clear example, which illustrates that these interviewees had stopped using coping resources was their attitude towards employment-related issues: they acknowledged unemployment and/or underemployment as problems, and after making some small efforts (e.g. taking language courses), they did not seem to take further action to address these problems. Other participants, for example in the story of *survival*, discussed how they were willing to endure being underemployed, while they were persistently trying to find better employment (e.g. by getting further education, and thus by improving their skills or by looking for new social networks and thus increasing their chances of finding new employment-opportunities). However, the narrators of the story of *disappointment*, apart from a few efforts in the beginning, seemed to have *given up coping*, and accept their situation passively (and this was especially seen in phrases such as “this is the asylum seeker’s destiny” or “I have been so unlucky...sometimes I don’t believe in God”).

The above observation strongly suggests that the images related to psychological activism did *not* emerge in the way all fifteen participants made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being. As noted in the first chapters, the stress and coping approach supports that there are several types of stress-generating events and circumstances

that people use *coping resources* in their responses to them (Pearlin et al., 1981), so the activation of resources is apparently an integral part of this approach. Moreover in the theory of psychological activism what makes someone a psychological activist is that people will be motivated enough to keep on activating resources until the problem is solved. The participants in the third group discussed how they had gradually stopped activating resources, which is why disappointment emerged as a prevalent theme in this narrative. The theoretical implication of the above is that for certain participants the images emerging from their narratives were in accordance with the stereotypes of “vulnerability” and “passiveness” and therefore the image of the psychological activist is not applicable to all participants. The practical implications of the above findings are that people who are involved in designing and implementing interventions for refugees should differentiate more clearly between the distinct experiences of refugees as they occur in diverse contexts.

6.4.3 The need to see the narrative stories embedded in the social context

In the above discussion three distinctive autobiographical stories emerged, which described how highly educated refugees in the U.K. made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being. These stories suggest a more *balanced view* of the research population, since most participants did not perceive their experiences and their well-being necessarily through the lens of “vulnerability” and/or “passivity” as it is typically assumed, but on the contrary through sense-making ways where hope, persistence and activism were prevalent. At the same time, the third story of *disappointment* prompts us to search for a *deeper view* of how and why some participants did *not* perceive their experiences and their well-being through a positive lens like the other two groups and moreover did not seem to adopt the image of a psychological activist in their narratives. This deeper insight can be gained by exploring *how the participants formed their perceptions in social interaction*, an issue to be explored in the following chapter.

Indeed, the above stories are of course not reducible to individual qualities. The reasons why these stories emerged as different can be traced both at the individuals (i.e. people’s experiences) but also the social dimensions that surrounded them (i.e. other people one interacts with), as well as the cultural context these individuals were living in. As already noted in the first chapters, in this study I support that accounts (in this case, narratives) given by individuals are always embedded in *context*, in certain kinds of social relationships and set

against a certain kind of cultural background. As Ahmed (2000) clearly argues, a narrative is always also a social-cultural narrative, and an individual or a group will rework available elements into a specific shape to produce something distinctive that captures their own experience. This is why it is important at this point to look at the participants' perceptions through a more *contextualised perspective*, and thus finally work towards the second goal of the study, which is to understand, not only how these highly educated refugees in the U.K. formed their perceptions, but also how the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions. The narrative analysis in this chapter, particularly the sections discussing temporality and the immediate and general context, took the first step towards this more contextualised perspective, but in the next chapter this is pursued in greater depth.

6.5 Connecting the three stories to well-being-related actions

Since I have explored highly educated refugees' perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, it is important to see how these perceptions/views were expressed into psychosocial well-being-related *actions*. This is because in this study, by adopting the approach of symbolic interactionism, I have explored the participants' subjective theories and narratives with the assumption that these also have implications about the actions that the participants take or do not take with regards to their psychosocial well-being.

According to the approach of symbolic interactionism people have the ability to think, create meanings and define situations while interacting with others and *act on the basis of the meanings and the definitions they create*. In this sense, I have assumed that there is connection between talking about the relation between post-migration experiences and well-being and then *acting* accordingly in order to maintain or promote well-being. It is thus important to see not only the different ways through which the interviewees made sense of their experiences and their well-being, but also the different *actions* they took or did not take for reaching and improving their well-being.

For instance Omar's hopeful way of making sense of his experiences and his well-being was manifested not only in that he said he was satisfied with his life, but also in that he was working towards certain goals in order to be *more* satisfied, such as finding employment and carrying out active social networking.

As far as more specific attitudes are concerned, the story of *hope* was expressed first of all in the way he was coping with employment-related problems (i.e. taking up jobs that were below his educational level for sustaining himself but constantly looking for better employment) or with social-life related problems (i.e. communicating with friends in Africa who were informing him about the socio-political developments there).

Zeynep's way of making sense of her experiences and her well-being was expressed again in her sense of life satisfaction but also in that she wanted to realise her plans (e.g. organise support meetings for refugees) in order to "do something for the people". In addition, it was expressed through certain actions she took for coping with lack of time structure (i.e. participating in local support group in order to help others and contribute to the community) and with employment-difficulties (i.e. actively looking for further educational courses to improve her qualifications and thus her chances of finding a good job). The story of *survival* was also translated into actions, when she chose to officially complain about how a local college discriminated against her and prevented her from enrolling into their classes because of her refugee status.

Finally, Raheb's disappointed way of making sense was expressed more in the actions he did *not* take rather than those he took. First of all it was manifested in his life dissatisfaction and in that he accepted that "this is the asylum seeker's destiny". It was also expressed in his way of addressing employment-related problems (i.e. he did not wait for a decision on his asylum application and chose to work illegally). Then it emerged through the ways he *stopped* being involved with his ethnic community because they had formed their own enclave and were living almost in isolation from the British context. One type of action he took was to try to mix with English people in order to learn the language and the culture, but he pointed out he did not really want to carry on even with this activity because "most of the people were not honest" and he felt he was being discriminated.

What emerges from the above is that some participants not only narrated stories of *hope* and *survival*, but also *lived*, at least in some domains of their life, as people who were hoping for the best for them and were willing to struggle for it. But some other participants appeared as not only presenting a story of *disappointment*, but also *living* as disappointed people. The above observations have strong implications for the social and psychological arena of health and well-being and are necessary for the "applied aspirations of social scientists working within this arena, if they are to influence practices and policies outside research psychology" (Crossley, 2000: 155). These as well as other implications are analysed

in the last chapter, which discusses the contribution and the limitations of this study and makes suggestions for future research.

6.6 Self-reflection on the methodological alterations

As in the closing section of the first empirical part, it is important to discuss also here the immediate interactional issues that come into play in any constructivist study. This is because it is important not just to reflect on the participants' perceptions, but also on the perceptions that we, as researchers, may have with regards to our participant(s). A researcher should indeed be able to situate him/herself in the process of the research and should be aware of various preconceptions (which may become biases, in the negative sense) towards the participants (Hegelund, 2005).

Some comments should firstly be made on the relationship between the participants and me, as the nature of this relationship has certainly had a significant effect on what was said and *not* said during the course of the narrative interview (Chamberlain & Thomson, 1998). In this second empirical study it is important to note again the complexity of the relationship between the interviewees and me. This complexity derives from the several identities I was holding such as a female researcher in a well-known University, having been volunteer in the organisation where I met some of the participants as well as someone originating from Europe in general and from Greece in particular. Such identities are likely to form a power-relation between the interviewees and the researcher and might push some participants either towards me or against me, as seen from the discussion on the *immediate context* in each story. The complexity of the relationship between the interviewees and me derived also from the interview context, which undoubtedly affected our interaction. In particular, the fact that some narrative interviews were carried out in a public place (e.g. coffee shop) they had chosen or even at their homes could affect what they discussed in their narratives (i.e. making them feel more at ease to criticise local groups and agencies). Similar comments were also noted in the first empirical part. However, in the second empirical part there are some *differences*, which should be pointed out.

In the first empirical part the gatekeepers presented me *first* as a researcher of Cambridge University (possibly for gaining the participants' respect) and *secondly* as a volunteer. In addition, the interview agenda was semi-structured and as already discussed

checked in advance by them. The above elements could have constrained the interviewees' responses. Indeed, in the end of the first empirical part I discussed the one-sidedness of the derived subjective theories, since they revealed mainly individual subjective theories without much indication of how the social context influences the construction of these theories.

In the second empirical part, there were fewer guidelines and restrictions, while carrying out the research, as I had decided to carry out narrative interviewing, which is undoubtedly more open-ended than the semi-structured mode. In addition, I presented myself to the participants not necessarily and firstly as a Cambridge University researcher, but with a broader range of identities, e.g. that I am a PhD student, a trained psychologist, Greek etc. This honesty about the range of social roles the interviewer holds, is crucial for cultivating trust and rapport between the interviewer and the narrators and thus allowing the complexity and richness of an individual refugee's experiences to unfold during the interview (Powles, 2004). Therefore, in the second empirical part there was less tension because of the open-ended interview and my less-threatening presence; nevertheless it is important to acknowledge that power elements were always there and affected the findings in many ways.

The most interesting finding began to emerge in the narratives of the third group of participants. Of course the first two stories of *hope* and *survival* also gave insight to the research question, since they revealed that some participants perceived their experiences and their well-being through a positive lens. The stories of *hope* and *survival* were similar to the first and second subjective theories of the first empirical part: these also incorporated the image of a psychological activist. However, the third group in the second empirical part revealed *more* than the third group in the first one. In the first empirical part, the subjective theory constructed by this group (which consists again of Muslim men) slightly differed from the other two, because they brought forward their sense of pride as a distinctive element which made them *not* wanting to cope with some of their stressors. In the second empirical part, what began to emerge was that the particular social context, which this group found themselves in, was catalytic in their distinctive sense-making ways. In conclusion, what was gained from the second empirical part in comparison to the first one, was *deeper* insight into the research question. This is clarified in the next chapter, where I explore how the way the participants created their stories was shaped by the social context, in all its levels.

Chapter 7: The critical role of the social context in how refugees made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being

7.1 The need for contextual analysis of the participants' perceptions

In the empirical work presented in chapters four and six I have explored through two different methods, how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being. The first empirical part elicited three subjective theories, which produced certain interesting findings with regards to how the participants perceived the relation between their employment experiences and their psychosocial well-being. It also revealed how they incorporated the stress and coping concepts and the images related to psychological activism in their subjective theories, which suggested the usefulness of these concepts as well as the applicability of these images when exploring the research question. The second empirical part went into further depth and revealed how some interviewees, through the autobiographical stories they created, actually did *not* shape their understandings of the relation between their experiences and their well-being along the stress and coping concepts or the images of psychological activism.

These findings were important firstly because they had a personal value, since they provided *meaning* to people's lives. Indeed, every personal story can be seen firstly from a psychological perspective. But it can also be seen from a *social* perspective. From the standpoint of society, to create and live a personal story is to connect to the grand narratives of one's social world, as stories are created through social interaction and lived in an active social context. Without this connection there is a danger that people's narratives will capture not much more than the recounting of past experiences and that the way lives are constructed in relations where exploitation and resistance are both present will be obscured (Newman, 1999). In the case of refugees, where power differentials between them and agents in the host society (such as service providers, local authorities as well as researchers) can silence their authentic voices (Muecke, 1992), the need to connect the participants' own stories to the social context is particularly pressing.

Then in this study, which is guided by constructivism, it is important to see the participants' perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being *not* in isolation, but in the social context where these perceptions were formed, as different social actors interacted. This allows for a consideration of the power relations at

play within a specific context and the ways in which different perceptions may co-exist and even clash with one another. Indeed, one of the main goals of this study has been to explore how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, but also how the social context influenced the formation of these perceptions. The need to connect the social context to the participants' perceptions was already pointed out in the end of the first empirical part. Through the contextual analysis of the stories of the second empirical part one began to see this connection, but in this chapter the analysis goes into greater depth.

The social context consisted of several levels such as the immediate level, which refers to the direct interaction between the researcher and the interviewees, the macro-level, which refers to the interaction of the participants with stereotypes currently assigned to refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K. and finally the community level, which concerns the interactions the participants had with others such as people from the same ethnic group, other refugees and British people they met in local organisations and agencies or at the workplace.

In the next sections I explore how these different levels of the social context largely influenced the shaping of the participants' perceptions. It is essential to clarify that in the present analysis, the social context is not an unproblematic external reality that, in a one-way direction, shapes refugees' perceptions. When I explore, through the participants' accounts of social context, how the context shaped their perceptions, I am dealing with refugees' retrospective accounts of social context and *not* independent observations of the latter. Each account that is selected and presented in the following pages emerges from the *interplay* between context and individual perception and is not an independent observation, detached from the context in which it was formed.

At the same time one more point should be made: throughout this chapter I use and rely on refugees' accounts of social context for understanding how the latter influenced the shaping of their perceptions. These accounts may at times fail to capture refugees' own impact on what they describe. Indeed, in some of the following selected quotes we can see primarily how others affected the participants' perceptions and predisposed them to future experiences. However, I am aware that refugees *themselves* created these perceptions, as they try to give meaning to their experiences and convey this meaning to their audience. So it is important to note that in the present analysis, as in the entire thesis, I acknowledge the impact of the context on shaping perceptions, but at the same time I do not regard refugees as passive subjects, but as agents who have had an active influence on the context they talk about.

7.1.1 How the immediate context influenced the shaping of the participants' perceptions

The “immediate social context” refers first of all to the *context of the fieldwork*. As already discussed, I started carrying out the empirical work *after* negotiating with the gatekeepers in two organisations and knowing that, along with my involvement as a volunteer in one of these groups, I would be allowed to carry out the interviews. On the one hand, this collaboration with the gatekeepers meant they would check the interview agenda of the first empirical part and even alter it according to their interests. For example, gatekeepers who wanted to receive indirectly feedback from their clients suggested that I ask the participants whether they turned frequently to refugee groups or ethnic communities for receiving help and what they thought about them. On the other hand, the collaboration with the gatekeepers gave certain legitimacy to my research project, which encouraged refugees, especially those who were frequently visiting these organisations, to allow me to intrude into their social-psychological worlds. It also provided me with the opportunity to observe these worlds from an important vantage point, since involvement in such local organisations and agencies is an integral part of most refugees' post-migration experiences.

It should be noted that this intrusion of mine was not a one-dimensional affair because it also exposed me to the participants' scrutiny and questioning. For example, some participants asked me whether I found it easy to live in a foreign country, as well as how difficult it was to be a graduate student in a well-known institution such as Cambridge University. At the same time a few participants approached me as a social resource to receive information that interested them. For example, some refugees asked me if I knew other local organisations in Cambridge where they could undertake volunteering work, while waiting to find full-time employment and a few others sought my advice about furthering their university education.

However, even though there were some aspects of reciprocity during the research process, I was constantly mindful of the *power relations* inherent in this process. As already mentioned, specific features of mine such as being white and female or social identities such as being a trained psychologist, a University researcher and volunteer in the local group which many participants frequently turned to, inevitably put a distance between the participants and me and thus, shaped their understandings of the research question. Then other characteristics of mine such as being foreign seemed to make some participants be more affiliated with me, but the fact that researcher and researched alike are non-British did not

necessarily imply that our experiences and sense-making ways were similar, especially when ethnic and class attributes differ.

In addition, when carrying out the narrative interviews, pre-conceived expectations about the kind of information I needed sometimes interfered in the course of the interview. My strong influence on how the participants constructed their perceptions was clearly seen when for example I asked a participant who presented a story of *survival* to elaborate on “what has been good while living in the U.K.”. The interviewee started to reply to this question first by laughing and saying “Good, well...”, and then after a long pause, she started to talk about some positive things she could think of: “...Good thing is my daughter, yeah, and knowing the people who are the same as me, they have the same stories, the same background as me...And also there are people still opening their door to us, not all people, but I know people who want to help others especially refugees, I know that, at least that’s very good”. But then she continued this narrative section by saying that “But I just can’t say lots of things are very good, you know. There is not much experience I had of good things in here...”, a phrase which signified that her intention was not to talk about what has been good, and that she was obviously prompted by me to add that dimension to her narrative.

Another example of co-construction can be seen during an interview with another participant who presented a story of *survival*. As she was talking about how adapted she feels in the U.K. she pointed out that even though she was gradually feeling more confident she still felt insecure because of her language skills: “I was not confident at all, at the moment I am gaining this confidence, for me the confidence I don’t have is because it is still difficult for me to find another job in England. Cause if my English would be perfect all my writing and all my speaking would be, you know, one hundred percent correct...and that’s what stops me actually from doing some more challenging job. Cause I would love to do something new and challenging but I am afraid that my ability and my English is going to stop me there...It’s just that I don’t feel confident enough to make mistakes. And I cannot give in to them cause then I would be so stressed. And that’s one problem I have...”. At that point I immediately asked her “how she was managing to overcome those insecurities or fears”. She then discussed about her intention to improve her English: “...At the moment my level of English is high enough to actually not go to normal school. Now I will have to have a private tutor or I don’t know which kind of course because if I do Proficiency, they just only teach you how to pass the exam...Maybe what I will have to do is write essays every week and then I will have to have somebody correct them for me and maybe after a while I will learn and I will stop making some mistakes...Ok, this is something I have to improve, this is something I have to improve, you know, this is something that I have to do today”. In this example it is again clear how I urged the participant to talk in the second part of this narrative not exclusively about problems she was experiencing but also about the ways she was coping with them.

Finally, during an interview with a participant who presented a story of *disappointment* it is clear again how I contributed to the pessimistic story that was emerging. After a very long narrative of how he came to the U.K. and how he was struggling with his daily life, the participant closed this narrative section by saying “Finally, next month I am going to go to the solicitor and then send the form and see what happens, if they refuse or not [the asylum case]... I don’t know what will happen next. Just wait and wait, all the pressure...”. At that point I commented on his narrative by saying “this is not at all easy...” and he continued by discussing in more detail the disappointment as well as the confusion he was feeling: “It is not easy, it is so difficult for me cause all the time I am thinking, I have to think for the next hour, you know... I don’t know how to say it, sometimes life is good here, sometimes not very good, I don’t know what will happen”. In this example it is possible to see how I prompted him to talk in more detail about his feelings regarding the ongoing problems he was facing.

It is therefore not uncommon that the expectations of the researcher enter either into the research design and/or during the interview process, as in the cases above, resulting in a situation where the interviewee may be prompted to shift his/her narrative more towards the direction that the researcher has in mind.

In some cases co-construction of the interview material occurred also after the interview session was over. For example, a participant who presented a story of *survival* requested from me not to depict certain sections from her narrative where she described incidents of discrimination she had experienced in the U.K. while presenting my research findings with quotes selected from different interviews.

There were several more types of interaction unfolding between the interviewees and me, as seen particularly from the contextual analysis of the narrative stories. Most participants who created the stories of *survival* and *disappointment* seemed to try to involve me in the construction of their narrative and affiliate with me, while the group who presented the story of *hope* did not. It is difficult to point out which features and identities of mine made some participants feel more at ease with me and which ones had the opposite effect.

My Greek nationality could have triggered the affiliation that many participants seemed to be keen on forming with me. Over a long period of time Greek foreign policy has been consistently friendly towards Arab and Kurdish populations because it does not want to alienate their support over Cyprus or damage Greek investments in the Middle East (Kaminaris, 1999). This friendly basis could therefore explain the positive predisposition that several participants expressed towards me, especially those who presented a story of *survival* and *disappointment*, most of whom originated from the Middle East. It is also interesting that

most of these participants gave their consent to be audio-recorded, which could indicate a sense of trust in me. It should also be noted that there were some interviewees, especially from the group who presented a story of *survival* who knew me through our interaction in the local refugee organisation where I had been volunteering. It could therefore be that some participants responded to my request to narrate their stories because the narrative act was consistent with our previous interaction in the organisation.

In summary, the immediate context where the second empirical part took place seems quite significant for the shaping of the emerging autobiographical stories. However, in order to explore further the context in which these highly educated refugees formed diverse perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, it is important to look into another contextual level.

7.1.2 How the broader context influenced the shaping of the participants' perceptions

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) remind us that as social constructions, stories always have a larger socio-cultural locus. Individuals capture, in their singularity, the unique features of the historical moment and the broad cultural context they find themselves in (Denzin, 2000). This is why it is important to explore how this broader context influenced the way the participants formed their perceptions.

Throughout the narrative interview data the participants saw public perceptions of refugees in the U.K. as primarily negative. The interviewees discussed how they felt that the general public regard refugees and asylum seekers as “useless”, “lazy”, and/or as “dangerous” and “terrorist threats”, images that, as discussed in the first chapter, are assigned indeed these groups in the current context of contemporary Britain.

Omar, who provided the first case study, clearly discussed this in his narrative:

“...well nobody wants to live on handouts, nobody wants to be a refugee in the derogatory terms, like “people who abuse the systems and the benefits” and all that”

A participant who presented a narrative of *disappointment* also acknowledged the existence of similar negative images attached to refugees, i.e. that they come to the host country to abuse its economic resources:

“For half of the years I was here I lived on benefits, for the other half I did not. I mean I wanted to contribute, if you like the country you are in, then you want to do that. People have this simplistic view that refugees and asylum seekers, that we abuse the system”

There was also a sense of frustration surrounding the issue of public perceptions as well as media portrayal of refugees in the U.K. and an observation that the public does not understand them and that the ideas they hold are unfair. The next quote from a participant who presented a narrative of *survival* gives a good description of this:

“Some organisations think they are criminals, you know, all the newspapers always making some comment about asylum seekers. I read about one shop-lifter, he was an asylum seeker and just tried to steal a small thing, but nothing dangerous ok? One whole page for the asylum seeker and just a small information about a rapist, because the person was English. You know, I am just very angry sometimes...”

What is interesting to note is that each of the three groups who constructed the stories of *hope*, *survival* and *disappointment* respectively, were also aware of the more *particular* negative images that are assigned to them. In more detail: the first group who constructed a narrative of *hope* consisted of four interviewees, all of which had an African ethnic origin. As discussed in the first chapter, a stereotype in the western media that is usually assigned to refugees or asylum-seekers from Africa or other war-torn countries is that of the “vulnerable” and “useless” refugee. By looking at the imagery and themes the participants used, it is obvious they were aware of the images that are assigned *particularly* to them. For example, Omar discussed how others often regarded refugees as “people who abuse the systems” and as “not worthy of a better life”. Thus by incorporating in their story a narrative which highlights the dimensions of optimism and activism, they seemed to present a self that counters the above negative images.

Every personal story can be seen as a figure against the ground of culturally given sense-making ways of life (Parker, 2005). It is interesting then at this point to see what parallels can be drawn between the three stories of *hope*, *survival* and *disappointment* and current western sense-making ways. By looking at the analytic elements of the story of *hope* similarities can be traced between this story and another type of narrative derived from studies that addressed the way in which individuals adjust and make sense of illness and suffering. In particular, the imagery and themes used in the story of *hope* suggest that by acting/working as well as hoping for the best, things will be all right at the end of the day. This story and its elements resembled the *normalising story* that Crossley (2000) derived, while interviewing people living with an HIV-positive diagnosis. It also resembled the *restitution narrative* that Frank (1995) traced while interviewing people with chronic illness.

According to Frank, such restitution narratives are characteristic of modernity and constitute the culturally preferred narrative in contemporary western culture. Such narratives incorporate the expectation that “for every suffering there is a remedy” (Frank, 1995: 80) and their important feature is their assumption that by maintaining an optimistic attitude and by acting on the world in some way, a solution will be forthcoming. This assumption was also expressed in the *form* of the narration and particularly in the linear way the narrators usually chose to tell their story.

Of course one cannot clearly see to what extent this group of participants borrowed elements from such western narratives for making sense of their experiences and their well-being and to what extent they were already bringing similar narratives from their own culture. Indeed Makgoba (1997) and Nyasani (1997) supported that people of African descent are linked by shared cultural features, which include friendliness, patience, tolerance and optimism. So it is possible that the participants selected elements from both their own culture and the western one, in order to create a narrative of *hope*. What is important is that through this narrative this group told a distinctive story and reacted to the stereotypical images assigned to them and in a way re-negotiated the “vulnerable” and “passive” role.

The second group consisted of seven participants and in specific, two women originating from Eastern Europe, and three women and two men originating from the Middle East. As already discussed in the literature review in the first chapter, another stereotype currently assigned to refugees and asylum seekers is that of the “welfare scrounger” or of “someone who abuses the asylum system”. The above stereotype contains the assumption that these people are passive, but also that they are willing to exploit what the host country offers so that they have an easier and better life. From the imagery and the themes the participants used one can see their awareness of these stereotypes. For example, when an interviewee discussed how local people regarded her, she pointed out that: “most people are friendly but you also meet very difficult people and it’s not something you are used to in your country...And you get people saying to you racist comments like, you know “if I was you I would first learn English and then work here” (female, teacher, Eastern European)

By looking at the imagery and themes in the story of *survival* the main emerging message was that life is full of difficulties, which require extraordinary persistence and strength in order to be dealt with, but this is the only way one can change his/her life towards something better. This resembled the second type of story that Crossley (2000) elicited while interviewing people with an HIV-positive diagnosis and which she called the *conversion/growth story*. According to Crossley, this type of narrative involves more of a

focus on the inner or psychological dimension of experience and a commitment to achieving greater self-understanding and awareness. The story of conversion/growth is also analogous to what Frank (1995) calls a *quest narrative*, where illness or some other type of suffering are portrayed as a journey, during which individuals experience crisis and change and are able finally to open themselves to the mystery of life.

In this case too, the participants most probably borrowed elements from their own culture as well as the western one to create their story of *survival*. The Middle Eastern culture is described as giving great importance to individual initiative and also personal honour and dignity (Greg, 2005; Lindholm, 2002). At the same time, values such as autonomy, dignity and individual resistance against oppression are especially emphasised by theoreticians in Eastern European countries (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Petersen, 2001).

Once again we cannot see to what extent the story of *survival* included elements from the Middle Eastern or the Eastern European cultural backgrounds and from the West but most probably it derived from a combination of *both* backgrounds. As in the previous group, through this narrative this group also reacted to the stereotypical images assigned to them and in a way re-negotiated the passive role.

Finally, the third group of participants consisted of four men who originated from the Middle East. This group is at the present moment and in the western context, often widely perceived as a “burden to the host society” but also as a “dangerous” or even “criminal” population (Threadgold, 2002; Said, 2003). The participants were also aware of such images that apply to them and this can be clearly seen in the following quote of one participant: “They treat everyone, all the people who come to England as people who will exploit the system, like parasites, exploiting the system and taking what they got. That’s how I actually felt when I first went there to apply for asylum” (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern)

The participants of this group were aware of the negative stereotypes that were assigned to them but by using a narrative of *disappointment* they emerged as too pessimistic and almost resigned from continuing to try to change this situation.

The negativity expressed through the pessimistic tone, the disappointment and withdrawal emerging from the imagery and the themes, the static way of narrating and the focus not only on the present but also on the past, conveyed the message that this group did not consistently try to counter the negative stereotypes that the general public assigns to them. These participants pursued neither the “hopeful and active” image nor the “enduring and hard-working” one. The focus was on describing how they were initially strong, but eventually gave up hope that their problems will improve or be solved. The story of

disappointment seemed to resemble Crossley's (2000) *story of loss*, in which the HIV-positive individuals she interviewed were clinging to what was currently available and could see no future. Parallels can also be drawn between this third story and what Frank (1995) describes as a *chaos narrative* where the modernist foundations of remedy and progress crack to reveal vulnerability, futility and impotence (p. 97). The narrative of *disappointment* suggested that these participants presented themselves through the negative images that are so often assigned to them. The influence that the Middle Eastern cultural background had on their perceptions seemed to be overshadowed by the influence of the context in which they currently live. This observation then makes it necessary to explore the final level of the social context.

The perceptions held by me and the general public certainly influenced how the participants made sense of the relation between their experiences and their well-being. However, they did not have such an immediate impact as the perceptions held by people they met at the community level, that is, in local organisations and agencies, ethnic communities who give advice and support to refugees and asylum seekers and/or the workplace. Refugees are in frequent contact with people they meet in their community and those interactions can have a strong effect on the way a refugee perceives his/her experiences and lives his/her life. This is why it is necessary to move to the community context, where we can see how the three narrative stories and -to a lesser extent- the subjective theories derived in the first empirical part were shaped by it.

7.1.3 How the community context influenced the shaping of the participants' perceptions

Although the participants did not discuss it, to an observer such as myself elements of the structure and routine of the organisation where I was volunteering and where I met several interviewees seemed to shape strongly the interaction between clients and gatekeepers and in some cases continued to maintain a distance between these two. For example, staff in these organisations tended to dress casually, but the manager and directors of different departments (such as the counseling department or the one on employment and training) consistently wore suits. The space seemed segregated because there were certain rooms, and especially the so-called interviewing room, where client records and notes were kept and where only staff had

access. However, the staff spent a lot of time with the clients in other areas, and the clients called them by their first name, elements which could bring some balance and bridge the distance between them. Nevertheless, the specific way the community context influenced the participants' perceptions can be clearly seen through their own words.

There appeared to be two types of interaction between the participants and the local organisations and agencies they visited and consequently two ways in which these groups and communities seemed to shape the way the participants formed their perceptions. Some interviewees acknowledged the help they received from such organisations and approved of them and the way they approach their refugee clients. In these cases where the participants described this interaction as positive, these groups seemed to shape positively the way refugees perceived and evaluated their experiences. The following quote of a participant who presented a story of *hope* clearly shows how others in the community contributed to this shaping:

“After my second year in the U.K. I found out that you can ask for medical help, information and stuff from local centers and organisations. I was initially cautious because the Home Office expect you to take care of yourself, to sustain yourself. So I was hesitant...then I found out about a local community that helped refugees...It's good to know they are there, it makes you feel you are not totally on your own at the end of the day” (male, engineer, African)

But some other participants did not regard local organisations in a positive way and disapproved of the way they negatively predispose their clients. The following two extracts from a narrative of *disappointment* illustrate how others affected the participants' perceptions of their experiences in the U.K. The quote below suggests that the way the local authorities approached the participant apparently formed his expectations about how life in the U.K. would be:

“When I visited the Home Office when I applied for asylum, that was a very important experience for me, you know, in terms of contact with the agencies or the outside world, and the government agencies. The experience was absolutely bad...I don't know whether the staff there, people who work there have been chosen or whether they have become like that, you know, with time. They treat everyone, all the people who come to England as people who will exploit the system, like parasites, exploiting the system and taking what they got. Later we had just problems. We had to be into contact with the local authorities and the City Council because we were living in a very small place, this is, you know, compared to what we had before very big. We were actually living in a room, with the baby, you understand...So we had to be in contact with the local authorities, with the staff there for the housing, actually the housing problem was very difficult to solve” (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern)

The following quote of another participant from the same group clearly shows how others in the community, and in particular the people he met while undertaking post-graduate studies in the U.K. shaped his perceptions and evaluation of his education-related experiences he had in the U.K.:

“I am not an economic migrant, and I say that not because I am a refugee but because money is not my motive, it never was...The educational path I took was encouraged by my parents. In my culture intellect was and I think it is considered to be a sacred value, you know. But here what matters is the status one has, not the degrees, not the knowledge one has. After my experiences here I am deeply disillusioned and disenchanted with the educational world. The “universalism” of the University does not exist any longer. The University is supposed to be a place where people exchange ideas and become creative. But then I came here, I saw what was happening...I mean academics are isolated in their own world and they are just part of the institution that is called now University...Now I am totally disappointed. I came here and I wanted to open my eyes. I did open them but what I saw was so nasty that now I just want to close them, I don’t want to observe things. I think I have become like an ostrich...” (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern)

The effect of the community-level context on the participants’ perceptions can also be traced in the interview material of the first empirical part. In a few of the participants’ responses to the psychosocial-resources theme, it was possible to see once more how interactions with others, especially in their ethnic communities, shaped the participants’ perceptions and evaluation of their post-migration experiences:

“...Everybody says that people from your ethnic group especially refugees and immigrants here, can help you but everytime I spoke to someone I did not like it. I don’t know why... maybe they were jealous of me, of my education. Of course, everytime someone would ask me to help I would, but they only wanted to get something from me and not give back. I have decided to stay away from them, we cannot be friends and we cannot help each other in any way” (male, accountant, Middle Eastern)

“...Ethnic communities don’t have power, political or governmental to do anything for you. Whatever they want to do. For example for language schools, for many many communities, African, Persian, Arab nations, ask them (and they will say) they don’t have power to do anything and the Heads of them are English and then they, it depends, I am not saying that all of them are racist, but they can display racist feelings. Or if they compare between me and the English people of course the first choice will be English people and the second choice, if they can do anything, will be me, you know... You have to start from the basic level, it is natural. But they have to allow you and give you the permit and offer to you that position, but they never offer, it is difficult” (male, researcher, Middle Eastern)

It should be noted that when it comes to the influence that ethnic communities have on the participants' perceptions, interactions with other compatriots *in the country of origin* also plays an important role. This means that the participants' perceptions were influenced not only by the ongoing interactions they have had with their compatriots in the U.K., but also by the interactions they had with them *before* they came to the U.K. It is expected then that some interviewees who had experienced tense and hostile relations with others from the same ethnic group even in their own country would be negatively predisposed about the interactions they would have with their compatriots also in the U.K. For example, in the following quote of a participant who presented a story of *disappointment* we can see that the negative interaction he had had with other compatriots before he fled his country had already influenced his perceptions and attitudes towards them, who like him, now live in the U.K.

"I had lots of friends, English, Italians, Belgians, Greeks, you know, but then I think my people were not very good to me...Turks or Kurds if they do something they do it for, how do you say? For example, I help you but you must help me as well, you know, so it is not very good to be honest... 3-4 years ago I didn't have a job for a month, I didn't pay my bills, I didn't pay my rent for 3 months. I tried to contact my friends and they did not help me, you know, so I got really upset... Even my brother, even my sister didn't say to me "come to my house". Even my family, didn't say it to me, they really broke my heart. Finally, someone from the East, from a different culture said to me "you can always come to my house"...so I think only a foreigner helped me..." (male, engineer, Middle Eastern)

In a similar way those participants who had experienced good community relations in their home country were positively inclined towards their compatriots in the U.K. In the case of African participants, this positive predisposition towards people of the same ethnic group is probably enhanced by their cultural background. In African cultures there is greater emphasis on the community rather than the individual and "the existence of the individual in the African society is a quasi-dissolution into the reality of others for the sake of the individual's existence" (Nyasani, 1997: 60). The following quote suggests that this emphasis on the community applies also to the British context, where the interviewee pointed out the importance of keeping in touch with other compatriots:

"...I have just been emailing my friend, I was asking about how things are going and I was telling them I keep watching the news at home, I contribute to the meetings that we do here and it is taking too long for things to get better at home. I want to go back, that's what I really want to do. Cause I know with the skills that I have and the things I have acquired here... I could go back and develop the country. Ok, as soon as I am set to do so I will be quite happy to go...So sometimes people think that refugees come and they want to stay there

forever...but I think that most of my friends, most of the friends I know they want to go back” (male, teacher, African)

Finally, the interaction between the participants and others at the workplace (that is, either potential employers or co-workers) should also be discussed. This is because people at the workplace also emerged as having influenced the participants’ perceptions of their experiences (in this case, their employment-related experiences). For an interviewee who presented a story of *hope*, the interactions he had with others obviously shaped his perceptions of employment-related issues in the U.K. as well as his expectations regarding his future employment:

“I was looking for jobs after I finished my studies...It took me months to find something, it was very difficult...First of all you need to know the culture...One big difficulty is that they tell you that you have to “sell yourself” while in our culture even if you have achieved a lot you don’t boast. I found this difficult but I had to learn it...Gradually the meaning of work for me changed. And I changed my priorities... Being money-oriented is good but only for a while, I would not do it for much longer, that’s not me” (male, engineer, African)

Another participant who narrated a story of *survival* seemed to have been influenced by her interaction with a local organisation regarding her perceptions of employment-related prospects:

“The organisation I volunteered for later they employed me and it was a full-time post... When I was a student I did various jobs, I worked in cafes, in restaurants, you know, I did cleaning, when I was a student I had very little money so I had to cope, to stay alive... Then I got that job because the organisation they already knew me, so it was, you know, I had a very close contact with them so it was easy for them to decide to take me. But I don’t know whether I would have the same opportunity, whether I would be that lucky to have a full-time job” (female, graduate in social sciences, Middle Eastern)

In addition the participant below discussed how a local job center influenced him into believing he would have serious difficulties in finding employment in the future, which would even slightly match his qualifications:

“We went to the Job Center and that was another experience, you know, which was not very nice. I mean when we went to the Job Center we filled in all the forms, you know, there are just lots of questions about what you did in the past, what you can do and what sort of jobs you are looking for. And obviously I did not speak the language but I was a graduate so I had different work experience before I came here... And the advisor, because I did not speak the language, she said that there was no way that I am going to find a job I wanted or that I did in the past, I don’t think she was in a position of saying this but she did. She said that the only option available was to do washing-up in cafes and restaurants and you know, not even work as a waiter...That was really difficult, another thing that was very difficult for us to deal with. So at the moment I am studying English, trying to improve. But we know now that because of the language difficulties and coming

from another country has made it harder for us to do what we want to do” (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern)

Therefore, in the above discussion I have illustrated that the interviewees’ perceptions were not created in isolation but in a complex set of social dynamics. Several social actors emerged as influential to the way highly educated refugees perceived and evaluated their post-migration experiences. These were also largely responsible for the differences that were observed in the well-being outcomes the participants discussed and in particular their life satisfaction. In more detail: the immediate context, that is, the interaction of the participants with me played an important role on their willingness to be interviewed, as well as on what they disclosed in the course of the interview. The negative stereotypes the public currently holds towards refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K. seemed to affect the shaping of the stories of *hope* and *survival*, which emerged not as mere personal accounts, but rather as critiques of these stereotypes that apply to them. The community context and especially local organisations and agencies seemed to play an important role into how the third group of participants created a story of *disappointment*. By deeming these participants’ future employment opportunities as extremely limited and in general by discouraging them and telling them that things would not get any better, these social actors seemed to play an important role into why this group perceived their experiences and well-being in a pessimistic way.

The third group of participants found themselves confronted by particularly *hostile* and *negative attitudes*, compared to the other two groups. This was noted also in the few quotes from the first empirical part presented in the previous pages. It is important then to look more closely at the third groups of participants in both empirical parts, in order to better understand why their perceptions emerged as very different to those of the other participants.

7.2 The particular influence of the social context on shaping the perceptions of Muslim male participants

By looking at the interview material of the second empirical part, it seems that the third group of participants were treated by local organisations and/or their ethnic groups rather with hostility and were told in advance not to expect much while living in the U.K. The work-related context also emerged as particularly negative and discouraging with regards to their

employment prospects in the U.K., even though this was not necessarily the case for the other two groups. Finally, the public's perceptions of this group of individuals were not just negative, but also had the ability to marginalise them, since the threat labels that apply to this group clearly define them as unacceptable and out of place (Hall, 1997). Then it is by far not a coincidence that these Muslim male participants, who had faced the most hostility and the worst discrimination from several social actors in the contemporary British context, adopted the most negative perspective while making sense of their experiences and their well-being.

In the previous chapter the narrative analysis revealed that the third group of participants had several negative post-migration experiences and that others, by being unfriendly, by discriminating against them etc, played an important role into making them adopt an attitude of *disappointment*. But from the above discussion what further emerges is that these others played an important part into predisposing the participants in relation to the experiences they would have in the host society. Then it is not only that this group was treated differently, but was at the same time probably pushed to learn to expect and even accept this negative treatment as *inevitable*. This belief in inevitability can gradually encourage them to feel a sense of personal responsibility for the problems and predicaments they experience (Smail, 1993) and make them overlook the strong influence that the social context has had on the way they perceived their situation and consequently on the way they lived their situation.

The above belief in inevitability entails a very serious form of disempowerment for these people. This is where processes like internalised oppression (Griffin, 1997; Hardiman & Jackson, 1994) or internalisation of deprivation (Hagan & Smail, 1997) may occur, whereby people may come to believe that the stereotypes being spread about them are true, and may develop feelings of distress, low self-esteem and even behave in ways analogous to their social stereotypes. Moreover, the distress that results from this type of oppression will be usually projected upon those people over whom they have some degree of control (e.g. families, people from the same ethnic group) as well as upon themselves through isolation, fear, feelings of powerlessness and despair (Lipsky, 1987). Indeed, if we look closely into the story of *disappointment* we can already see feelings of powerlessness and despair mentioned, as the participants discussed that “this is the asylum seeker's destiny”, that “generally, for asylum seekers it is torture” and that they see themselves as “unlucky”. It is also possible to see some projection of oppression upon one's own people since the imagery and themes suggested that they regarded their compatriots and even their relatives with suspiciousness and sometimes hostility. The negative feelings can also be traced in the subjective theory of

the third group in the first empirical part, especially where they discussed their *decreasing* well-being.

Indeed in the first empirical part the third group of participants, which consisted again of Muslim men, seemed to have faced many more stressors and in particular, more hostility and discrimination than the other two groups. Then it was also not a coincidence that this group presented the most negative subjective theory while making sense of the research questions. However, if the research had stopped at the completion of the first empirical part, this critical influence of the social context on the participants' perceptions could not have been seen. The findings at that point would have suggested that this group was "vulnerable" and "passive" and that they themselves were primarily responsible for these outcomes (especially since they brought forward their *sense of pride* as the reason for *not* wanting to cope with some of their problems). This is because the method used there did not allow for the influence of the social context on the construction of perceptions (and in that case, of subjective theories) to fully emerge.

The second empirical part is a progression from the first one, and was carried out precisely because with the narrative approach, one can explore in further depth this power that the social context has on how the participants form their perceptions. Through the narrative analysis -and especially from the imagery and themes emerging from the narrative stories- it was indeed possible to detect how others influence the way the participants construct their perceptions. But taking into account the social context does not simply mean acknowledging that others influence the participants' perceptions, but also exploring who and how may influence these perceptions. The purpose of this chapter was precisely to carry out this exploration, which is why in the previous pages it became clearer *how* exactly others contribute to this construction.

7.3 Synthesis of the findings: Implications for the main research issues and the theoretical perspectives of this study

In summary, by looking at the findings we can see that not all participants emerged as "vulnerable" and "passive", since there were two subgroups in each empirical part that appeared to make sense of their experiences and their well-being through a positive perspective. These participants talked about stressors they experienced, but also discussed

resources they activated and primarily positive well-being outcomes. This finding agrees with my initial viewpoint for the importance of looking not only into refugees' pathology, that is, resources they lack and negative psychological health outcomes, but also at resources they have and at positive dimensions of psychological health.

At the same time, in both empirical parts there were certain individuals who emerged indeed as "vulnerable" and "passive", as they discussed resources they stopped using in order to resolve their problems, and negative outcomes such as low self-esteem and life dissatisfaction. This finding was particularly interesting since *all* participants were a selected group of highly motivated people who took the radical decision to leave their countries for improving their lives. These interviewees emerged, through their own words, as having received particularly hostile attitudes and strong discrimination. The discussion in this chapter showed that the social context, especially the negative attitudes they received at the community-level context, was largely responsible for their *disappointment*. It also highlighted the implications that this influence of the social context can have on individuals, who may be encouraged to blame themselves for their problems and thus be forced to live with a sense of guilt and powerlessness.

Overall the findings of both empirical parts illuminate my position that the social context was critically influential in shaping highly educated refugees' perceptions of their experiences and their well-being. The findings also suggest that the social context should be carefully explored in social-psychological research with refugee populations not only for academic purposes (that is, understanding better these populations' social-psychological worlds), but also for ideological/political ones (that is, exploring how and to which extent we-social researchers, service providers, general public in the host society- may contribute to and maintain their social-psychological problems).

The above discussion brings us back to the research issues in the migration and psychological health area raised in the first chapters. After introducing the stress and coping theory, which is prevalent in the research area of migration and psychological health (and especially refugees' psychological health), I discussed in detail the main debates between stress and coping researchers. These ongoing debates refer to the conceptualisation and assessment of stressors, psychosocial resources and psychological health outcomes.

Then in the second chapter I criticised the stress and coping approach for:

- focusing on psychosocial resources that people lack instead of those they have and on individual pathological symptoms instead of also taking into account more positive and psychosocial well-being outcomes;
- deriving standardised stress and coping states, instead of exploring how people perceive *themselves* the stress and coping process. This critical point referred to the need to use qualitative methods for deriving people's subjective perceptions, but also to the need to explore how these perceptions are shaped by the social context the participants live in.

My research findings suggest that at least two groups in both the first and the second empirical part found the stress and coping concepts and the problem-solution sequence familiar enough to employ them in their subjective theories and narratives respectively. So the stress and coping terms emerged as conceptually useful while exploring how highly educated refugees made sense of their experiences and their well-being. At the same time, images related to psychological activism seemed to emerge from the stories of the participants of the first group, but also of the second, who presented and evaluated themselves indeed as having had valued social roles and as having activated psychosocial resources for coping with the loss of such roles. Thus the findings of these narrative interviews seemed to render the images related to psychological activism as relevant and very useful for challenging the stereotypes of “vulnerability” and “passiveness”. Therefore, this supported my initial view for the need to look at resources that people seem to *have* instead of those they lack, and at positive and psychosocial instead of necessarily pathological and individual psychological health outcomes.

At the same time, by looking at the obvious variations in the ways the three groups of participants in both empirical parts made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being, it became clear how important it was to look at the perceptions that people formed *themselves* with regards to stress and coping. The third group in both empirical parts discussed how they gave up their coping efforts (in the first empirical part this emerged in relation to certain stressors, in the second one this giving up was rather prevalent in their narrative) and this distinctive sense-making way would not have emerged if I had attempted to elicit standardised stress and coping states.

Nevertheless, the aim of this study was not only to explore the participants' perceptions of their experiences and their well-being, but also to see how these perceptions are created and shaped in a certain *social context*. Other stress and coping researchers who work on refugees' psychological health have addressed the issues of eliciting more *positive*

and *psychosocial* outcomes through the participants' *own subjective* perceptions, but have overlooked how these perceptions are shaped by the social context in which refugees live. As already discussed in the third chapter, this lack of contextual analysis has been prevalent in social psychological research with refugees.

This study then took an important step further by exploring whether highly educated refugees would perceive their experiences in the U.K. and their psychosocial well-being through a negative or positive perspective, by eliciting their *own* perceptions on the above research question and, finally, by showing how the social context influenced these perceptions. The main goal that has been achieved is not only the production of knowledge¹ with regards to the research issues (Holzman, 1999) (and as discussed in the second chapter, this is rather *lay knowledge*), but also a deeper understanding of *how* this lay knowledge can challenge the stress and coping *conceptual narrative* that most researchers in the West have constructed to characterise the relationship between refugees' experiences and their psychological health.

It is pertinent to close this chapter with a discussion on the images related to psychological activism. The theory of psychological activism regards people as agents in control of their lives who will take action in order to protect their psychological well-being in case it is threatened. This theory emphasises individuals' motivation and ability to take different actions, but at the same time acknowledges that social dimensions may prevent the ultimate success of these actions. But even though this theory cultivates the image of people as active agents, it fails to look in detail into how these social dimensions may operate and suppress people's "activism".

The theory of psychological activism suggests looking into more positive psychological health outcomes and at resources that people have, and also looking at these through people's own perceptions. It claims to do so for giving voice to individuals who, in the traditional stress and coping area, have been regarded as passive subjects overwhelmed by social stress. But by suggesting to look at positive dimensions of psychological health, through people's perceptions and by *not* exploring how these perceptions are socially constructed, the image of the psychological activist risks becoming yet another individual trait like the ones presented by other psychological theories, which concentrate on individual responsibility and ultimately regard people as beings detached from their social context.

¹ Knowledge here is not meant in the objectivist sense of a literal account of what the world is like. Like other constructivists, I support that what we take to be as knowledge is the result of perspective.

This study's findings suggest that for some participants the images related to psychological activism were inadequate to use while exploring how they perceived their post-migration experiences and their well-being, precisely because they underestimated the importance of external dimensions (and in this case the often *brutal life circumstances* for non-white migrants who live in a Eurocentric society), on how they perceived their situation and how they lived their lives. This observation highlights the limitations of psychological activism as a set of alternative images that could challenge the stereotypical ways in which refugees have been and still are portrayed.

In summary, the images related to psychological activism were suitable for exploring the research issues raised in this study because they do incorporate a more positive outlook on people, as they focus on resources people *have* and on *positive* psychological health outcomes. However, the main shortcoming lies in that, by focusing on individuals' motivation for action and potential for success, the images of psychological activism obscure the strong impact that the social context has on people's perceptions of their situation and their well-being and consequently, as discussed in the next chapter, on the well-being related actions they will or will not take. The above discussion highlights the study's theoretical contribution, which is presented along with the methodological and practical ones, in the following and final chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusions of the research study, contribution and limitations

This concluding chapter of the thesis summarises the main steps in the research effort, outlines the most important findings and discusses their potential contribution to knowledge in theoretical, methodological, practical and ideological terms. The practical contribution emerges primarily from the findings of the previous chapter where I explored the influence of the social context on the participants' perceptions of their experiences in the U.K. and their well-being. The theoretical, methodological and ideological contributions emerge from an evaluation of the entire research process. In its concluding section, this chapter identifies the study's main limitations and highlights some issues for further research.

8.1 Overview of the research

The goals of this study, as outlined in Chapter One, were to explore how highly educated refugees in the U.K. perceived the relationship between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being and also explore how the social context influenced the shaping of their perceptions. A review of the literature on migrants' and refugees' psychological health, as well as the stress and coping literature highlighted the main debates regarding the conceptualisation and assessment of the stress and coping components. Discussing these issues was important for describing the background that triggered the formulation of the research question. In addition, it was necessary to discuss the stress and coping approach since later on in the thesis I explored how the participants themselves made sense of and used the stress and coping concepts, as well as the images related to psychological activism, which is an alternative stress and coping approach.

After presenting the main points of interest in the traditional stress and coping research area, which are the focus on resources that people lack and on negative psychological health outcomes, I built on the need to also explore resources people have and positive and psychosocial outcomes. Secondly, I suggested the importance of eliciting the participants' own perceptions of the relation between their experiences and their well-being, instead of deriving standardised states of stress, coping and well-being. For these reasons in Chapter Two I presented an alternative stress and coping perspective, i.e. the approach where the individual is viewed as a *psychological activist*. It should be noted that the theory of

psychological activism was not in any way tested, for example to examine whether its assumptions were confirmed or not. What was indeed explored was whether the images related to psychological activism would be supported or not through the participants' own words.

Chapter Three presented the methodology used in the first empirical part. After discussing the main research paradigms in the social sciences, the positivist paradigm was critically reviewed and then an introduction to constructivism followed, which informed both empirical parts. The second section of the chapter presented the research design. Apart from describing the interview method, the choice of interviewees and the interview agenda, I also discussed the background of the study (i.e. how the research question was gradually formulated) and its interactional context (i.e. relationships formed between the interviewees, the researcher and the gatekeepers). I considered these elements as crucial in this study, since it aimed at exploring individuals' perceptions, but also at studying how the social context influenced the shaping of these perceptions.

Chapter Four presented and discussed the findings of the first empirical part, which elicited the subjective theories that fifteen young and highly educated refugees held with regards to the relation between their post-migration experiences, and particularly their employment experiences, and their psychosocial well-being. One key finding was that the interviewees found the stress and coping concepts familiar enough to use them on their own while making sense of their experiences and their well-being and that they used them *in all their richness*, that is, by distinguishing themselves between different types of support and by bringing forward the existing nuances between different well-being outcomes. In addition, as far as the images related to psychological activism are concerned, the findings revealed that all participants perceived the loss of valued social roles they had in their home country as stressful, and that in different ways they said they had actively tried to restore their lost roles. A subgroup of participants discussed how they did *not* activate resources for certain problems they faced, nevertheless they activated *some* resources for dealing with other stressors. In general, the key observation was that more or less all participants discussed the activation of resources and consequently their emergence as psychological activists challenged the stereotypes of "vulnerability" and "passiveness" that are regularly assigned to refugee populations in contemporary Britain. The participants clearly seemed to make sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being through the positive images related to psychological activism.

However, at this point of the research the shortcomings of the semi-structured interview emerged. A deeper critical look at the first empirical part revealed that the semi-structured interviewing most probably had directed how the participants discussed their perceptions. The main issue was that there was a strong direction given by the researcher to the interviewees, so the participants had restricted freedom and space to present their perceptions. At the same time, it was unclear how these perceptions are formed in social interaction. Indeed the derived subjective theories seemed to be too one-sided, i.e. too focused on the individual since they did not allow the influence of the social context on people's perceptions to emerge.

While wondering whether I should continue my research with the same method, I realised the importance of prompting the participants to talk as openly as possible about their perceptions and of carefully exploring how the social context influenced these perceptions. I decided to use a more open-ended set of questions, as well as a different mode of interviewing for prompting the participants to elaborate also on the social context, while discussing again their perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being.

The transition to another method was further discussed and justified in Chapter Five. In particular, the first part of the chapter discussed why autobiographical narrative interviewing was chosen instead of semi-structured interviewing and its second part presented in detail the research design (i.e. sampling procedure and methods used for the data collection and analysis).

Chapter Six discussed the findings elicited in the second empirical part. The findings of the analysis of the autobiographical narrative interviews carried out with another group of fifteen highly educated refugees revealed that the participants made sense of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being through three distinctive autobiographical stories. The first two stories of *hope* and *survival* that two subgroups of participants presented suggested a more *balanced view* of the research population, that is not necessarily "vulnerable" and "passive", since these participants made sense of their experiences and their well-being through stories where hope, persistence and activism were the main elements. At the same time, the third subgroup and the story of *disappointment* they created, revealed that some participants did *not* perceive their experiences and their well-being through a positive lens like the other two groups. It also highlighted the need to explore in depth *how the participants formed their perceptions in social interaction*.

Indeed, in Chapter Seven I explored in greater depth the critical role of the social context on how refugees made sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being. The analysis revealed that apart from those participants, in both empirical parts, who perceived their experiences and their well-being through a positive lens, there was a group of individuals who could be viewed as “vulnerable” and “passive” because they seemed to avoid taking action to improve their psychosocial well-being. However, deeper analysis revealed that the social context, and particularly the negative attitudes they received at the community-level context, was largely responsible for their *disappointed* sense-making way. The discussion in Chapter Seven also highlighted the serious implications that this influence of the social context can have on individuals, as they may be encouraged to blame themselves for the problems they have experienced. In this way, the limitations of the images related to psychological activism also emerged. This is because, even though these images can be useful while exploring similar questions as in this study, they often underestimate the important influence of the social context on people’s perceptions and thus make them emerge as another set of individual traits.

8.2 Contribution of the research

This section discusses the contribution of this research in terms of theory, methodology, practice and ideology. However, it is important to discuss first the impact of the research, that is who was affected as a result of the research and how. In a constructivist study where rich social dynamics and diverse power relations are inherent in the research process, such a discussion in the closing section emerges as not only relevant but also necessary.

8.2.1 Impact of the research

From an *intellectual* point of view, it is me who has probably benefited the most from this research. By exploring the participants’ perceptions I gained insight firstly on whether and how the stress and coping concepts, as well as the images related to psychological activism can be applied to the ways in which these individuals made sense of the research question. The critical discussion of the stress and coping framework played an important role in formulating the research question, which is why it was especially interesting and intellectually challenging for me to explore whether and how the participants would

incorporate these concepts in their subjective theories and autobiographical narratives. Secondly, by adopting a constructivist paradigm, I have managed to move beyond the assumptions of mainstream psychologists who focus primarily on individuals' negative psychological outcomes and approach people as beings detached from the social context in which they live. As Parker (2005) says "the problem with most mainstream psychology is that it either deliberately leaves things as they are – it explicitly reproduces existing power relations- or it pretends that scientific inquiry or interpretation is neutral, and so it gives tacit support to those in power" (p. 123). By adopting a constructivist paradigm and by supporting that scientific interpretation is *not* neutral, I have challenged my own presuppositions (stemming from my background in clinical psychology) on how to carry out research in this area and thus, by looking critically at the traditional psychological approaches, I have taken a small albeit important initial step towards "not giving tacit support to those in power". With this intellectual insight I have gained, I hope with my future work to be able to work prefiguratively, that is, anticipating a better form of society in the very process of struggling for it (Kagan & Burton, 2000). It is too ambitious to claim that this current work has been prefigurative and I do not attempt to even make such a claim but it has definitely laid the foundation for my future development.

Struggling for a better form of society and in this case, struggling for the protection and fairer treatment of refugees in Europe based on the values of dignity and respect is an extremely complex issue. This is because in order to discuss constructively how a certain group could be protected and better treated, this group should already have a place in the society and a minimum amount of power. But refugees, seem to be not only disadvantaged, but moreover marginalised and even excluded because due to their transitional and transnational lives (Eastmond, 2000) they are unable and quite often thwarted from really claiming their own place in society.

At the present moment, while it is widely acknowledged that the successful integration of refugees in Europe is of benefit to all (refugees, host communities, governments, economies etc) the distinct climate of intolerance and racism in Europe is marginalising refugees through negative media reporting, political antipathy, insecure legal status, a lack of educational and employment opportunities and/or hostility from local communities (ECRE, 2005). Attending to refugees' needs through integration policies and practice and the acquisition of rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals at the moment seem almost unattainable. However, research studies like the present one, which suggest a

more balanced portrayal of this group with regards to their well-being take a small step towards their better treatment.

As far as the *material* aspect is concerned, the ones who seem to have benefited mostly from the research are the gatekeepers I approached in order to locate and meet the study's potential participants. By ensuring that I undertake voluntary work with them, they certainly had control over the research, as they followed closely the research questions that were posed, as well as the research process that unfolded. But they also gained in the actual material sense, since the work I was assigned to do, would be normally carried out by a full-time employee.

From a *political* aspect - political in the sense of day-to-day interactions and relationships that are woven into broader patterns of power and resistance- the participants seem to have benefited since they had the opportunity to make themselves heard by forming and conveying to me their own perceptions of their social-psychological worlds. According to Bourdieu (1999): "By offering the respondent an absolutely exceptional situation for communication, freed from the usual constraints (particularly of time) that weigh on most everyday interchanges [...] the researcher helps create the conditions for an extra-ordinary discourse, which might never have been spoken [...] Although they probably do not consciously perceive all the signs of this availability, certain respondents, especially the most disadvantaged, seem to grasp this situation as an exceptional opportunity offered to them to testify, to make themselves heard, to carry their experience over from the private to the public sphere" (p. 615). I believe the interview situation where the participants and I interacted, gave them indeed an opportunity to experience another type of interaction in the community context (especially since I was a representative of the local group many of them attended) and to make themselves heard. But as this author cautions, it is important also to acknowledge that our encounter was *not* an "absolutely exceptional situation, freed from constraints", in which the participants emerged as more empowered and their relationships with others at the community context (e.g. the gatekeepers) somehow became more egalitarian.

As previously discussed, the power relations between me, the gatekeepers and the participants were unfolding in different ways and they were constantly *present*. Therefore their voices were certainly heard to some extent, but I do not claim that with this research, interactions and relationships between the participants and others in the community changed, and that deeply-embedded power elements were suddenly reduced. Power elements were there all along the research and by not acknowledging this, it would be again as if I claimed that "inquiry is neutral".

8.2.2 Theoretical contribution

A contribution that should be noted first is the successful bridging of ideas and previous work from the migration and psychological health literature, the stress and coping approach and the constructivist research paradigm. Although migration and psychological health is a multidisciplinary area and therefore such cross-overs are common, I believe that any piece of research that manages to combine concepts from different areas in an interesting and innovative way, contributes to the stronger establishment of the discipline.

Another important theoretical contribution is the exploration of how the participants perceived their experiences and their well-being along the concepts of *stress* and *coping*. The theory of stress and coping has been widely used in studies that examined migrants and refugees' psychological health. However, in this study what was achieved was not a testing of whether the stress and coping assumptions would be confirmed, but an exploration of whether and how the participants *themselves* would incorporate the stress and coping concepts and the problem-solution sequence while making sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being. The findings revealed that these concepts were indeed useful while exploring the research question, since some participants perceived their experiences and their well-being by adopting the problem-solution sequence and by making *themselves* the distinctions between the stress and coping components. At the same time, there were some interviewees who used neither the stress and coping sequence nor the concepts, the reasons for which were explored in depth in Chapter Seven, where the influence of the social context on the participants' perceptions was analysed. The theoretical contribution lies in the exploration of how the participants, through their own perceptions, i.e. through the *lay narratives* they constructed, made sense of the *conceptual narratives* of stress and coping that have been constructed by researchers. This is very important because every description we, the researchers, produce or that we encourage our participants to produce is saturated with theoretical concepts, but this does not mean that every such concept should be taken at face value (Parker, 2005).

The original use of the images related to psychological activism for the purposes of the study was another theoretical contribution. The findings revealed that it was indeed a useful, alternative set of images, since some participants perceived the loss of valued roles they used to hold as distressing, and actively tried to restore them in different ways and thus challenged the images of "vulnerability" and "passiveness". At the same time, the observation in Chapter Six that some interviewees did not use the images of psychological

activism, since they discussed how they seemed to have *eliminated or stopped their coping efforts*, and the contextual analysis of the interview material in Chapter Seven, revealed the limitations of these positive images. In particular, by underestimating the role of the social context on the way people perceive their situation and consequently act upon it, the images related to psychological activism risk trivialising the important influence of the social context on people's perceptions of their experiences and their well-being, and consequently on their well-being related actions. In summary, this study has highlighted the relevance of these images to this population and their usefulness while exploring the research question, but it also showed their limitations.

A final note should be made with regards to the study's theoretical contribution. Community psychologists have criticised mainstream psychological research for being theory- (or method-) driven rather than problem-driven (Fryer and Fagan, 2003). Critical psychologists in the area of migration and health have noted the same, especially in studies looking into refugees' psychological health (Ingleby, 2005). Along this line of thinking, my study could be criticised for focusing on *concepts* and *images* while exploring the research issues, rather than on refugees' actual *problems*. I acknowledge that the stress and coping background played a part in shaping the research questions, and thus in a way the study has been theory and not problem-driven, but it should be emphasised that the study has been certainly *problem-relevant*. I clearly did not directly address problems that refugees experience in the host country, such as unemployment, underemployment, financial hardship and social isolation. Nevertheless, by challenging damaging stereotypes that apply to this group I have tried to raise awareness on the importance of looking at them also through a rather more positive lens and approaching their problems through a more holistic and not just individually-oriented approach. This study then has not carried out action research (in the sense of qualitative research that turns academic investigation into prefigurative political practice), but it can be considered as setting out the groundwork for carrying out action research.

8.2.3 Methodological contribution

In this study, the use of both semi-structured *and* autobiographical narrative interviewing constitutes its first methodological contribution. By combining two qualitative methods and

by deriving subjective theories and narrative stories, deeper insight was gained with regards to the research question. Indeed, the second empirical part was a progression from the first one, and it was carried out because with the narrative approach, I would be able to explore in greater depth the influence of the social context on how the participants formed their perceptions. Through the narrative analysis -and especially from the imagery and themes emerging from the narrative stories- it was indeed possible to explore in detail how different levels of the social context played a critical role in the way the participants shaped their perceptions.

An additional methodological contribution refers to the application of the *narrative approach* for the purposes of this study. Autobiographical narratives are subjective accounts of life events occurring across time that individuals construct in order to make sense of their experiences and protect their many identities or claim new ones. As autobiographical narratives can reveal both the *social* and the *individual* and how these are related to each other, they were very useful for exploring refugees' perceptions, but also for how the social context shaped these perceptions.

Different types of narrative such as oral histories, autobiographical narratives and life histories have been used in refugee contexts by researchers from the fields of transcultural psychiatry and anthropology, but in social psychological studies with refugee populations it is still an innovative method. In this study it was possible to see not only individual sense-making ways of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being, but also how and which level of the social context influenced these ways of sense-making. The fact that autobiographical narratives were the valuable tool that explored this interplay between individuals and social context, highlights the importance of incorporating them in the methodological set that social psychologists use when doing research with refugees.

8.2.4 Ideological contribution

The findings enrich our knowledge of how refugees perceive their psychological health by suggesting a broader outlook, i.e. not necessarily negative and individual pathology-oriented and by approaching the participants not as beings embedded in their social context. Although a perspective on social power is not entirely new in psychology (Hagan & Donnison, 1999), in the area of migration and psychological health it has *not* been widely used and it should become increasingly important in the near future. And although the findings of this study do

not even begin to claim to change the world in the sense of eliminating prejudice and promoting social justice (Guernina, 1997), they *do* take an initial small step towards the above goals by challenging prevalent damaging stereotypes with regards to the well-being of marginalised people and communities.

Before closing this section a word of caution should be added as far as the social construction of refugees' pathology is concerned. The suggestion that the social context influences the way people perceive their well-being and thus "that psychological health symptoms may be socially constructed can be misinterpreted as implying that all such diagnoses are mistaken" (Ingleby, 2005: 21). All along this research effort I have been very careful not to attack other approaches such as clinical psychological ones that focus on people's psychological illness. In this study I did not set out to test whether other disciplines' interpretations of different symptoms are exaggerated or not, but I aimed at exploring how refugees *themselves* would perceive their experiences and their psychological health and in particular, their psychosocial well-being. It is important to note that I do by no means imply that all refugees who have been diagnosed with a psychological illness are simply malingering, because such a misunderstanding could have disastrous consequences for those people whose pension rights or asylum status are jeopardised by it (Watters, 2001).

The above word of caution had to be put in this section since in a discussion about ideological contribution it is not sufficient to talk about how the researcher worked towards challenging negative stereotypes and eliminating prejudice. Researchers should also show their awareness of how they might end up inadvertently undermining the participants' interests at the very moment they claim to encourage the fight against prejudice, to make their voices heard and to disseminate their own perceptions.

8.2.5 Practical contribution

The interview findings suggest that refugees make frequent use of local organisations and agencies for refugees as well as ethnic communities in order to cope with post-migration issues, such as securing housing and employment, finding further educational opportunities, meeting others and establishing a social network etc. These organisations and communities emerged as highly influential to refugees' perceptions of their situation in the U.K. and consequently to their actions to change or not their situation. These findings enrich our

knowledge about the contribution of different agencies to refugees' lives, an issue which requires much research attention, as there are currently more questions than answers regarding the experiences of new immigration at the community level (Robinson & Reeve, 2006).

Since local agencies emerged as influential particularly with regards to refugees' employment routes and the cultivation of conditions necessary for their adaptation in the host country (such as language skills, recognition of qualifications in the U.K., etc.), this study can suggest certain guidelines on how local agencies should approach their refugee clients. In particular, they need to be realistic, that is, they must be careful not to make their clients develop very high expectations that will be difficult to come true (e.g. promising them that they will immediately find a job to match their qualifications). But at the same time they need to be supportive and encouraging towards their clients, which means not dismissing their opportunities of improving their lives in the U.K. As already discussed, making people believe that their efforts to improve their lives will fail and that they will constantly receive negative treatment from others, can push them to believe in the inevitability of failure, but - even worse - that they are responsible for it. This is one of the most insidious forms of disempowerment and local agencies, which are often an integral part of refugees' lives, can and should play a main part in preventing this.

Finally, some suggestions should be made with regards to future policy making. The implications of the interview findings were that people involved in designing and implementing interventions focused on refugees' well-being should indeed take into account different types of stressors, as well as different types of resources such as ethnic and also non-ethnic support, in order to align themselves with refugees' own understandings of their well-being. In addition, those involved in designing such interventions should differentiate more clearly between refugees' distinct experiences as they occur in diverse contexts and should regard well-being in a more holistic way than it has been typically regarded. Overall the findings of this study suggest that future policy making should take a broader perspective on refugees' experiences (that is, addressing the problems they face, but also enhancing the positive aspects of their lives) and also more holistic (that is, looking at people *and* the social context where they live in).

8.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

8.3.1 Cross-cultural relevance of theoretical concepts

One limitation of this research refers to the cross-cultural relevance of the concepts of stress and coping and the images related to psychological activism. The findings of this research suggested that these concepts and images were useful while exploring the research question, as some participants indeed used them while making sense of their post-migration experiences and their well-being. However, I did not explore in further depth why they incorporated these concepts in the way they made sense of their experiences and their well-being and moreover, what role their own cultural background played in the familiarity they seemed to have with using these concepts. It is interesting to note that there is and has been considerable debate about the emphasis on refugees' agency (in the sense of trying to make sense of the world and act upon it accordingly), coping and thus psychological activism, as critics have argued that these images are essentially Eurocentric and do not reflect the fact that most non-western societies are based upon interdependence, mutuality and cooperation (Ahearn, 2000). To what extent people will use the images related to psychological activism at any point in time while making sense of their experiences and their well-being and whether some cultures give more importance to them than others is a controversial matter open to discussion. As Good (1994) argues, the meaning that an individual attributes to health/illness is *grounded* in, but at the same time *not reducible* to, the network of meanings that health/illness has for a particular culture. In Chapter Seven I briefly discussed the potential role of culture (not only the cultural context the participants currently live in, but also their own cultural background) into shaping the participants' narratives of *hope* and *survival* (where the concepts of stress and coping and of psychological activism indeed emerged). However, claims about the applicability of these concepts into how refugees make sense of their experiences and their well-being need to be explored in greater depth and with a stronger cultural emphasis.

8.3.2 Classification of participants

Another critical point, related to the above, refers to how we classify the migrant groups we study. In the traditional migration and psychological health area, researchers acknowledge that different statuses (e.g. economic migrant, political refugee, asylum seeker etc) can entail differences in the stressors people may experience (because migrants usually *choose* to migrate, while refugees may be forced to), in the resources they will activate and thus differences in their well-being outcomes. Even though in this study I did not explore objective outcomes, but perceptions of post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being, I still considered it important not to regard migrants as a homogeneous group. This is why I focused only on refugees and asylum seekers, and moreover I interviewed only highly educated individuals. I considered their educational level important as a classifying dimension, since highly educated refugees, at least in the U.K., have been frequently considered to face more stressors than other migrants and to have psychological well-being problems. Therefore this should have had an additional significance on how this particular group would perceive their experiences and their well-being. Once again it should be acknowledged that grouping them in terms of their educational status may be interesting for the above, but an exploration of how different *cultural* groups with high educational background perceive their experiences and their well-being can give deeper insight on how the broad cultural context may shape the way people make sense of these issues.

8.3.3 Suggestions for further research

This research study has opened up some very interesting issues, which merit further exploration. The first of these refers to how agencies at the community level shape people's perceptions and consequently influence their actions. The discussion in Chapter Seven highlighted the important influence that local support groups had on predisposing some participants in relation to the experiences they would have in the host country. These participants seemed to have been influenced into believing that their problems would remain unresolved and that there was not "any point in hoping that things will improve". The possibility that these people were not only treated negatively, but perhaps pushed to accept the inevitability of this negative treatment and even blame themselves for it, makes it imperative to explore further-through the participants' perceptions- *how* a local group or

organisation can discourage people to such an extent. Whether this discouragement lies in the negative way gatekeepers may talk to their clients, in the unwillingness they may show to inform and assist them, or possibly in their indifference towards facilitating interaction between established and incoming groups in the community, it is very important to explore it in further depth and then make clear suggestions on how it can be prevented.

Another issue worth of further research attention refers to how refugees' perceptions of the relation between their experiences and their psychosocial well-being are expressed into well-being-related *actions*. In Chapter Six, I briefly discussed how the three stories of *hope*, *survival* and *disappointment* were connected to well-being related actions. For example the story of *hope* was expressed in the way the participants were coping with their post-migration difficulties (i.e. taking jobs that were below their educational level but helped them to sustain themselves, participating in local groups for expanding one's social network etc), in the way they approached other people (i.e. criticising others who are biased towards refugees and keeping in touch with local refugee organisations and/or ethnic group) and in the strong sense of life satisfaction.

A challenging task for the future would be to study how the hopeful, but also the survival-related and the disappointed sense-making ways are connected to specific behaviours and actions. In particular, it would be very interesting to see refugees' perceptions of the relation between their experiences and their psychosocial well-being and what they would or would not do to improve or maintain that well-being, e.g. expand their social networks in the host country or seek social support and what kind of support (ethnic or non-ethnic, psychological or informational). The issue of whether refugee populations would expand their social networks or form enclaves within the host country is relevant and important to contemporary Britain and to most western societies, who are especially worried about social cohesion breaking down as the phenomenon of international migration intensifies.

Finally, another suggestion refers to exploring *comparatively* how different groups perceive the relation between their experiences and their well-being. The findings suggested that some participants emerged as dynamic and active, and this unique profile has the potential to challenge the typical portrayal not only of refugees but also of other "vulnerable" groups. An important emerging issue is to what extent these findings could be relevant also to other populations, which is why a detailed comparative study would provide valuable insight to this question. For example, a refugee population could be compared to another social group, which would have experienced some common stressor, such as unemployment. It

would be challenging then to examine whether some members of this social group would also perceive their experiences and their well-being by using the images of psychological activism and how others in the social context would have influenced these perceptions.

Clearly then, various challenging issues arise in this research area, which are worthy of further exploration. The suggestions for further work highlight the need to better understand how groups and organisations in the community can affect people's perceptions of their situation and their consequent actions and also how perceptions of the relation between post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being are manifested into actions. The insights that have been gained through this study have already taken a major step towards a better understanding of this population's own perceptions of their post-migration experiences and their well-being and of how the context in which they found themselves shaped these perceptions.

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Appendix 1

Interview agenda

- How much did he/ she know about the U.K. before leaving home country.
- What made the U.K. an attractive destination.
- What are the main differences between living in the country of origin and living in the U.K.
- What has been difficult while living in the U.K. and what are the reasons for these difficulties.
- Who helped him/ her to cope with these experienced difficulties.
- If he/she did ask for further help, what kind of help did he/ she ask for and if he/ she did not ask for help, why not.
- Employment history in home country.
- Employment history in the U.K.
- Reasons given for current employment status.
- Has it been stressful being unemployed/ underemployed, yes or no and why.
- Self-esteem since coming to the U.K.
- Does he/ she feel adapted in the U.K.
- Is he/she satisfied with his/her life in the U.K.
- Short-term plans and expectations

Appendix 2

The columns in the table below illustrate the steps that were taken while carrying out thematic networks analysis. First, the main *discussed issues* were written down after transcribing and reading carefully the interview material. Then *codes* (based on the stress and coping framework) were created for condensing the discussed issues. These codes correspond to the *basic themes*, i.e. the first ingredient of a thematic network. The next step was to derive the *organising themes* and then elicit the *global themes*, which correspond to the subjective theories that three subgroups of participants hold.

<u>Issues discussed</u>	<u>Codes/Basic themes</u>	<u>Organising themes</u>	<u>Global themes</u>
Not finding job or good-enough job/Poverty/ No housing/Losing social and occupational roles	Employment-related stressors	Attributing employment problems to inter- or intra ethnic discrimination or sense of pride or lack of skills and turning to ethnic group or local group or to neither group for job advice or education opportunities	The first subgroup makes sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they activated and their increasing well-being
Missing family/Worrying about family's safety and future	Family-related problems	Attributing family and social life problems to social exclusion or legal constraints or loss of motivation and turning to any group for networking	The second subgroup makes sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they activated and their fluctuating well-being
Missing friends and community/ Social isolation	Social life-related problems		The third subgroup makes sense of their experiences and their well-being by talking about stressors, resources they did and did not activate and their decreasing well-being
Lacking meaningful activities/ Plenty of spare and idle time	No time structure as a problem	Attributing mastery and time structure problems to social exclusion or loss of motivation and turning to either group for activities	
Problems with speaking English /Trying to know the place	No environmental mastery as a problem		
Need to get job advice			
Need to socialise			
Need to find education information			
Need to find activities			
Not asking for help			
Losing motivation to socialise			
Too proud to take "lower" job			
Cannot find job or good job because of lack of skills			
Employment-problems due to "being foreign"			
Employment-problems due to "being a refugee"			
Feeling lonely because "asylum is pending" or of exclusion or no interest			
Being idle because of exclusion or no interest			
Determination, strength "comes and goes", feeling non-confident			
Feeling adapted, or only socially adapted or not adapted at all			
High, fluctuating or low life satisfaction			

Appendix 3

Imagery and Themes identified for each section of a narrative-interview-example

“LIFE CHAPTERS”QUESTION

	<u>IMAGERY</u>	<u>THEMES</u>
First months in the U.K.	Self as initially isolated and insecure/ English people as ironic and cold/ ethnic community presented as helpful and supportive	First problems such as language difficulties and housing problems took long to be resolved/meeting other compatriots contributing to the feeling that there is some available support
Current life in the U.K.	Employers discouraging her (“there is no chance you’ll find a job you want”)/ self as tolerant towards British people/ self as unmotivated and often lacking inspiration	Realising ongoing problems but also expressing the will to improve her life in the U.K.

“KEY EVENTS” QUESTION

	<u>IMAGERY</u>	<u>THEMES</u>
Peak experience: receiving help from local advisor with regards to immigration status	Self as initially confused/ others discouraging her that she would ever get her Status granted/ local advisor encouraging her to keep on applying/regaining her confidence	Realising that “there are some good people around and they help”
Worst experience in the U.K.: being discriminated on the basis of her ethnicity	Self as initially dynamic and claiming her rights but then got used to it and decided to give up complaining	“People do not always discriminate but xenophobia is everywhere”
Turning point: getting into contact with ethnic community	Her social life got better after joining the Ethnic community, but the English friends became less because the cross-cultural gap was too wide to bridge	Being able to communicate better with compatriots

“IMPORTANT OTHERS” QUESTION

	<u>IMAGERY</u>	<u>THEMES</u>
British authorities	Positive: “I have heard that people at the Citizens Advice Bureau are good and they help”/ legal advisor helpful with arranging immigration status	Receiving help for important issues such as sorting out immigration status
Other British people	Negative: “I don’t understand this mentality, this coldness. But maybe this makes them neutral and this helps them to survive, so maybe it is not a bad idea to be like this”	Perceiving that there is a lack of communication between English people and foreigners and also discrimination/ but acknowledging that foreigners must respect the English culture and traditions
Ethnic community	Positive: they are open-minded and easier to communicate with not just because of the common language but also because of the similar cultural background	Realising that there is available social support and therefore feeling more relaxed

“LIFE-SATISFACTION” QUESTION

	<u>IMAGERY</u>	<u>THEMES</u>
Current life satisfaction	“I want to make our life better but it is difficult”/ believes it is difficult to adjust to the U.K. but hopes some things will improve with time	Unsatisfied now and worried about the future but looking forward to making changes, e.g. find a job, move to another city

