

Transcending Conflict:  
Exploring Sexual Violence  
Support for Women Seeking  
Asylum in Merseyside

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# **The following has been omitted on request of the university –**

**Image 1.1 (p.34)**

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## **Abstract**

Rape and sexual violence have long been acknowledged in feminist literature as a silenced social problem which requires long term strategies for prevention, prosecution and support. Social sciences more generally, however, have had a more ambivalent relationship with the theoretical and conceptual development of research in this area. Outside of feminist sociology and criminology there has been little engagement, yet sexual violence remains a prevalent social problem in all regions of the globe.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw quick and significant changes to the structures of states as the result of localised and international conflicts, many of which continue or are experiencing post-conflict transformation that has resulted in global growths in refugee populations as a result of forced migration. Alongside this has been an increasing globalisation of rights based approaches related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the Geneva Convention of 1951 and the development of United Nations Resolutions and the establishment of the International Criminal Courts.

Focussing on Merseyside as a case study, a main area of dispersal in the UK, this thesis critically examines domestic responses to women's asylum applications and support for women survivors of conflict related sexual violence. Using qualitative activist methodologies from a feminist standpoint perspective, it explores support available through interviews with local governmental and non-governmental organisations working within sexual violence support, asylum, and/or women's organisations before applying a structural analysis of long term impacts of sexual violence through an oral history with Hawwi, an Ethiopian rape survivor and asylum seeker in Merseyside. It concludes that, despite international developments, women's rights continue to lie marginalised in these arenas within and outside of academia. As such, important gaps in response exist with regard to sexual violence in conflict, but also in Merseyside. It concludes that, like rights based developments, considerations for applications continue to overlook the

gendered experience of conflict, particularly with regard to the widespread perpetration of sexual violence. As such, limited resources for support exist for women survivors in Merseyside which can have detrimental effects on women's emotional, psychological and physical health as well as having wider social impacts beyond the individual.

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## Copyright Information

Several portions of this thesis have appeared in earlier publications, as described below.

Portions of the discussion of sociology and human rights in Chapter Three first appeared in:

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Portions of discussions of problems in practice and support and recommendations in the thesis Conclusion first appeared in

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## Introduction

Rape and sexual violence in war and conflict is not a new phenomenon, yet it is only since the global efforts of women's rights activist movements that it has been truly acknowledged as a deliberate tactic of war rather than an inevitable and unavoidable misdemeanour (Askin, 1997; Bourke, 2007). Although the aftermath of the Second World War led to the Geneva Convention of 1948, which identified sexual violence as a tactic of war, individual responsibility of perpetrators was largely excused and contributed to a failure to convict those responsible.

Since the 1948 Convention, legislation and policy has continued to develop in an attempt to protect women from sexual violence and prosecute those responsible. 'Attempt' is a key word in this context. As conflict and civil unrest rage in many states and countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur, Colombia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Liberia, the numbers of civilian casualties continues to rise. This of course includes the victims and survivors of sexual violence, who are predominantly women and girls (Askin, *ibid*; Kelly, 2000). The United Nations have implemented various resolutions with regard to sexual violence, which will be explored in more depth in this thesis. Discursively, however, there has been a significant amount of time between the development of the Geneva Convention of 1948 and any relevant policies which followed. Indeed, the progress of Human Rights in any context has, at times, been slow and still fails to practically aid or protect many of those most in need of rights. Yet as this thesis will discuss throughout, the rights of women remain marginalised, overlooked and very slowly implemented.

As is the case in most social contexts, the exact level of sexual violence in conflict is impossible to obtain (Jones, 2011). Due to high rates of impunity for perpetrators, potential criminalisation of survivors and lack of convictions when women and girls do come forward, women may be reluctant to speak about sexual violence. In conflict situations, the fact that the authorities who may be there to report to may also be the perpetrators, means that women

may be placed in very real danger of being raped again, or further tortured or killed. The possibility that support or structural authority may not exist at all due to dissolution of infrastructures linked to conflict, while a lack of funding, or simply lack of interest, can also mean that no vehicle for reporting sexual violence exists in the first instance anyway. Nevertheless, there is a growing global awareness of the vast and systematic prevalence of sexual violence, both in and out of conflict situations. As this thesis will explore, however, there remains gaps in knowledge, and in moving from knowledge to action.

Rapes, mass rapes and sexual violence have been described as spoils of war, by-products of conflict and largely inevitable. The historically nonchalant attitude to rape in war is perhaps reflective of the marginalisation of rape as a 'woman's problem', whilst war is a man's terrain. This has become even more significant in changes and escalations in conflicts within and between states and bordering countries (Kelly, 2000; Palmary, 2007), leading the former United Nations Force Commander for the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to declare that, 'it is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflict' (cited in Medical Foundation, 2009: 5). Despite this, it is only recently that the issue of rape in conflict has begun to be identified as a systematic weapon in conflict, and one that should be challenged at both academic and humanitarian levels.

There is on-going debate concerning the reasons for rape in war. Some historians have argued that the violent setting within which soldiers exist 'inevitably' breeds severe aggression (Staub, 1989), whilst psychoanalysis concentrates on sexual desires, seduction and needs of the war-time rapist (Scully, 1990). Although political, ethnic aspects of warfare are elemental in localised conflict situations, such as in Rwanda, (Meštrović, 1994; Shaw, 2003) sexual violence is an act committed globally primarily by men against women (Brownmiller, 1975; Sothill and Walby, 1991; Westmarland, 2005). This thesis examines if, overall, the global oppression and subordination of women lies as the prominent underlying contributor to rape and sexual violence in areas of conflict. Importantly, it explores the effects of sexual

violence in this context, looking to the long term with regard to forced migration and asylum. With ever increasing conflicts and situations of civil unrest has come an increase in refugees and the need for post-conflict support. This is a key area of investigation, looking to the UK's responses in terms of gendered policy development, and Merseyside as a specific case study in support in the aftermath of sexual violence for women seeking asylum.

## **Rape and Sexual Violence: Definitions for this Thesis**

Prior to second wave feminist activism, rape was generally an all-encompassing term for sexual violence which overlooked the wide range of violence that women have been, and are, subjected to across the globe and throughout history. Susan Brownmiller became the first feminist from Western thought to challenge a singular form of violence and acknowledged whole ranges of violation in and outside of conflict (1975). Liz Kelly expanded this realm of thought in establishing a 'continuum of violence' which could range from street harassment to rape to rape murder, all of which lay foundations for the cultural scaffolding of sexual violence as a social problem (1988).

This thesis stems from these sociological interpretations to examine sexual violence in conflict, referring to 'sexual violence' as an all-encompassing term which includes rape, and rape when referring only to forced oral, anal and vaginal penetration by a penis without consent (see Sexual Offences Act 2003). This is not to undermine the subjection to sexual violence many men endure in conflict, but assures the recognition of the gendered element of rape in conflict as violence by men against (mostly) women. It also allows for alignment between the effects of rape as a specific violence in conflict with regard to appropriate response, for example the potential for forced or unwanted pregnancy which has been equated with genocide in some conflicts.

## **Aims, Objectives and Rationale of this Research**

With reflection on this, this research is a move toward filling gaps in local knowledge with regard to access to support for survivors of sexual violence seeking asylum, but also in identifying women's experiences of sexual violence in conflict who are living in Merseyside as a host community whilst seeking asylum. Experiences of violence in conflict are highly gendered, as is migration and post-conflict restoration, yet the kinds of effects that sexual violence may have can be overlooked and underestimated. With these points in mind, the main objectives of this thesis are to:

- investigate the impact sexual violence has on women and communities/society(ies);
- add further analyses to sociological literature regarding global gender inequalities in relation to sexual violence as a manifestation of social and patriarchal control in conflict situations;
- explore how representations and ideologies of sexual violence are socially constructed and mediated and how this impacts on wider social attitudes toward sexual violence and the women who are subjected to it;
- find out how women experience the asylum process in the UK, with a focus on Merseyside as a case study, and if the UK Border Agency's Gender Guidance is effectively used in women's asylum claims, specifically in exploring instances of sexual violence with claimants;
- explore views of the impacts of sexual violence and benefits of support structurally and individually from the perspectives of relevant organisations with comparative focus on the experiences of one survivor;

- investigate what forms of support are available to women in Merseyside who have experienced sexual violence during or whilst fleeing conflict, as well as what is available for women generally in the asylum system in Merseyside, with the aim of providing further recommendations to relevant parties.

As Chapter Five outlines, the process of research saw significant changes as this thesis developed, including methodologies incorporated and the geographical area of study. Through substantial involvement with local and community groups and organisations, there became clear indications that Merseyside, as an area of dispersal and deprivation, lacked research in sexual violence, asylum and asylum support specifically. Therefore although there have been many developmental changes in this research, the aims and objectives have not altered. Attention ultimately lies on the impact of sexual violence, the specific issues associated with conflict sexual violence and how effects have resounding implications for women and societies in the aftermath of rape.

Morrow stated in 2000:

*'Social advocacy, research and activism on violence against women is about to enter its fourth decade, and yet women and girls continue to experience physical and sexual abuse... this fact is the single most important reason for feminist researchers to continue investigating the myriad of social and individual causes of violence and especially violence as both product and producer of women's equality.'*

(2000: 153)

Now having entered the fifth decade of advocacy, research and activism, sexual violence remains a significant area in embedding and reproducing gender inequalities globally and locally. The increase in state conflicts over the past five decades has provided a vehicle for the increased incidence of rape and sexual violence in localised conflict and civil unrest, which in turn has increased forced migration and women's needs for asylum (Kelly, 2000; Palmary, 2005).

In all, sexual violence is largely under-researched, particularly in terms of conflict related sexual violence, with sporadic levels of interest (SVRI founding statement, N.D.). Various forms of feminist research have gradually developed in the UK and USA since the 1970s to incorporate more thorough and systematic studies into sexual violence (for example, Brownmiller, 1975; Enloe, 1987; Kelly, 1988, 2000; Stanko, 1985, 1990) but sociological research that does not stem from feminist epistemologies have been less forthcoming in analyses (Delamont, 2003; Canning, 2010). This too is true in the exploration of sexual violence in conflict, which is often investigated by international Non-Governmental Organisations or gender specific sectors of public bodies (such as in the United Nations). Furthermore, gendered implications of the UK asylum system are also under-researched in academic capacities, with some research developing in public sectors or UK based charities such as Asylum Aid and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture<sup>1</sup>. This gap is multiplied in Merseyside, a major area for dispersal which has seen little research into asylum generally or women specifically. Until this thesis, for example, no research has been undertaken to investigate access to support for women survivors of sexual violence seeking asylum who have fled conflict.

## **Thesis Structure**

To fulfil the aims and objectives laid out above, this thesis is separated into two sections; the first as a critical literature and policy review and the second as empirical research and data. There are many perspectives and disciplinary differences in the study of sexual violence, and as such sociological studies and explanations will be focussed on rather than, for example, psychological and biological studies which take wholly alternative methods of enquiry. Feminist sociology and activist research will be most central to literature reviews as well as in Methodology, and standpoint feminist epistemology forms the basis of this research rationale throughout

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<sup>1</sup> During the development of this thesis the *Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture* changed names to *Freedom from Torture*. This thesis refers to the original name as this was the publishing name of any reports and publications included at the time of printing.

the whole thesis. It is this line of thought that has historically and contemporarily called for the review and prevention of sexual violence as a matter of urgency, and so it is this perspective from which this thesis will build.

As there are separate but concurrent issues identified in the aims and objectives, the first four chapters will be divided to allow for thorough analysis of the literatures and policies relevant to each topic. These will outline areas of concern and gaps in knowledge which will then contribute to the evolution of empirical research in the latter chapters. The final four chapters will move to fill research gaps in terms of the main objectives of this study overall, specifically in applying a range of methodologies in an area not previously investigated with regard to sexual violence in conflict as experienced by some women applying for asylum in Merseyside, and the related support that is available to survivors.

Chapter One lays the foundational discussion of sexual violence as a social problem with regard to definitions, support, legislative responses and social attitudes. In this chapter, social institutions such as the media and the criminal justice system are critically examined, particularly with regard to feminist contributions to knowledge in these areas. Chapter Two builds on sexual violence as a social problem to move to the specific realm of sexual violence in conflict. It outlines historical case studies of rape as a 'weapon of war', and questions dominant theories as to why sexual violence is often so prominent in this social arena. This chapter explores the presence of women's voices in contemporary understandings and applies (albeit mostly Western) standpoint feminist perspectives to wider legislative and sociological discussion. Chapter Three moves to scrutinise international legislative advancements in responding to, and preventing, sexual violence in conflict, and explores the recognition of women in human rights perspectives with specific regard to sexual violence. As a final review of policy and literature, Chapter Four develops from this right based approach to look at domestic responses to conflict related violence with regard to asylum. As a

main focus point, this chapter explores key areas of policy related to women as a Particular Social Group in the granting of asylum on the basis of fear of persecution. Building on literature which has mostly been developed outside of academia by Non- Governmental Organisations, it applies feminist analyses of the implementation of Gender Guidelines in the decision making process for women who have, or may have been, subjected to sexual violence during conflict or conflict resultant situations such as forced migration.

The second part of this thesis begins with an in-depth discussion of methodologies. Chapter Five facilitates this by firstly providing a short analysis of qualitative enquiry, and the uses of methodologies under this category within feminist research. The chapter incorporates reflective experiences of the overall research process, including ethical considerations and issues of gatekeeping, and outlines the uses of activist research approaches, interviews and oral history in the empirical progression of the thesis. Chapter Six lays out the first set of data from interviews with support providers and relevant agencies working with women, asylum seekers, or both, in Merseyside. These are separated into themes as determined by findings and analysis in this project which were categorised with the use of qualitative analysis software *NVivo8*. Overall, these themes are informed by issues outlined and explored throughout the first half of the thesis through reviews of literature, accounts and policy, as well as allowing further critical reflection on the latter. Moving from this, Chapter Seven outlines the key areas of oral history with Hawwi, a rape survivor who fled conflict related persecution during civil unrest in Ethiopia. First, the story of Hawwi's life will be unpacked before examining the impacts and effects of sexual violence, the continuum of gender related violence she experienced as a female and the structural inadequacies related to her asylum application. Chapter Eight then provides a brief comparative analysis between these two sets of information before moving to a final conclusion in the last section of this thesis.

# **1.0 Chapter One – Nobody Asks to be Raped: Attitudes to Sexual Violence and Rape Survivors**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces a number of focal concepts from a range of feminist sociological perspectives. It firstly establishes, and problematises, definitions of rape and sexual violence and outlines feminist developments in this field and moves to discuss the development of rape in social consciousness within the UK context, before exploring some aspects of rape in wider and more global realms. The primary focus will be societal and sociological developments and discourses surrounding rape and social attitudes to rape, including the roles of social institutions in the UK, such as criminal justice and community responses, and a situational analysis of the development of support for rape survivors.

To explore the significance of rape in conflict, as this thesis aims to do, it is vital to first explore the prevalence of rape during 'peacetime', and the attitudes that coexist with this. Many Western feminist arguments highlight that the occurrence of violence against women in almost all societies leaves little opportunity for an actual 'peacetime' for females (Enloe, 1987), and so conflict in international terms and conflict in domestic terms literally clashes. As Bourke (2007) identifies, conflict situations can reinvigorate systems of oppression that pre-exist the war or conflict, and second wave feminist Susan Brownmiller argued that 'A war like culture alone could predict whether men in that society were prone to rape women' (1975: 359), emphasising that escalations in sexual violence as a strategy of conflict develop from social indicators such as patriarchy rather than being stand alone phenomena.

This chapter aims to map sociological developments in understanding and responding to sexual violence. Whilst it does not hold enough scope to provide in-depth analyses of whole historical movements, it will draw outlines and indicate where wider reading may be situated. Many criticisms of responses to sexual violence are prominent in contemporary cultures,

particularly with regard to feminist arguments, movements and even individuals (Redfern and Aune, 2010). This falls further *into* these movements, which themselves incorporate multiplicities in defining sexual violence. Specific disparities include liberal pro-sex work feminism in comparison to more radical feminisms that view sex work and prostitution as a form of sexual violence. This includes, for example, current debates in 'Slutwalking' as a challenge to social attitudes with regard to women's clothing and victim-blaming(see [www.slutwalktoronto.com](http://www.slutwalktoronto.com) for further information).

Further problems have historically been presented in political discourses around pornography, feminism and the objectification of women as a contributor to the prevalence of sexual violence (see for example Dworkin, 1981, 1983; Russell, 1988; Mackinnon, 1987), which generated huge debates in the 1980s and continue to divide feminist movements in pockets across the Europe and North America. Synopsising these ideas from one radical perspective, Gunn and Minch argue:

*'In a society where women can be bought on the street or viewed in pornographic magazines and films (bound, beaten and mutilated) for the enjoyment of men, a belief system has developed which says that this is how females should be treated'*  
(1988: 23)

These are important debates which lay the basis for the feminist epistemologies which will later shape the research methodology, but which require much greater independent analysis than can be given in this chapter. However, it remains important to recognise that they exist in order to develop a fuller understanding of the benefits and restrictions of feminism in challenging sexual violence generally.

Arguments situated within this chapter will lay the basis for later discussions when considering social ostracism and victim blaming when women speak out themselves as (or are identified as being) rape survivors, both in UK contexts and in conflict situations. Many of these discussions stem from UK

based feminisms, as that is the context within which empirical research will be undertaken, and therefore there is an acknowledgement of the limitations in identifying and including many movements and concerns from wider regions globally.

## **1.2 Definitions: Problematizing rape and sexual violence**

Sexual violence is a complex term developed to emphasise the significance of violence (rather than sex) in what was previously outlined as 'sex attacks' (Cook and Jones, 2007, in Walklate, 2007). Whilst the latter term is still prevalent in the UK context, particularly within the tabloid media, 'sexual violence' as a more encompassing definition which 'recognises a gendered phenomenon within the context of patriarchal relations' (Radford et al, 1996: 3, see also Carter and Weaver, 2003; Davies et al, 1987; Millett, 1971) and has been adopted in international legislation, including that developed by the United Nations Security Council and the International Criminal Courts (see chapters Two and Three for further discussion).

Sexual violence incorporates many forms of violence, with the most prominent global definition set by the World Health Organisation as:

*'Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.'*

(Krug et al, 2002: 149).

Although only a short paragraph, this definition encompasses two factors of significance: years of social movements across continents to recognise the diverse and far reaching forms of sexual violence, and changes in legislative acknowledgement of what sexual violence is. Although rape (as defined later) is at the most violent and intrusive end of the spectrum of sexual violence, the inclusion of verbal, psychological, social and physical intimidation, coercion and sex trafficking into sexual violence definitions was necessary to recognise the interlinking web of violence, defined by Kelly as a 'continuum'

of violence (1988). Women's movements have been particularly vocal in pushing for this change, largely because sexual violence is experienced mostly by women and girls at the hands of men and boys (Kelly, 1988; Westmarland, 2005).

As feminists, and those working in legal realms, have pointed out, there is no single definition of rape (Jones and Cook, 2008). Agreements on what rape actually is can change from village to village, jurisdiction to jurisdiction and country to country. In the UK, second wave feminists paved the way for rape to be recognised within marriage in 1991 (see Jones and Cook, *ibid*; Lees, 1996; Russell; 1990) and to be acknowledged beyond vaginal rape in 2003. This transformation, outlined in section one of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (in place since 1st May 2004), shifted to define rape as:

1-(1) A person (A) commits an offence if-

(a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis,

(b) B does not consent to the penetration, and

(c) A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

(2) Whether a belief is reasonable is to be determined having regard to all the circumstances, including any steps A has taken to ascertain whether B consents.

(3) Sections 75 and 76 apply to an offence under this section.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for life.

(see Sexual Offences Act, 2003).

Notable changes include the addition of rape of the anus and mouth, and the specificity of rape by a penis, a factor which indicates recognition that the majority of sexual offences (in this case, rape) are committed by men.

Furthermore, globalised definitions can also be problematic. Localised definitions vary, for example marital rape is not recognised in many parts of Africa, Asia and South America (Seager, 2005) and the gender specific nature of the crime is not always incorporated in legislation. Feminists point out that when international rape legislation is created, the focus can lie on the loss of female honour rather than the infliction of violence (Mackinnon, 2006, see Chapter Three). This links also to a reluctance in recognising rape as a form of injury, physical or otherwise, equating to torture which has and can have on-going physical and emotional effects (Peel, 2004). Nonetheless, some moves toward more inclusive and multi-faceted international legislation are being undertaken, and worldwide campaigns challenging the prevalence of rape and sexual violence have contributed to many legislative victories and some high profile convictions, particularly with regard to rape in conflict (see Chapter Two). Despite changes, rape continues to be perpetrated on massive scales and with significant levels of impunity (Amnesty International, 2004a, 2004b; Coy et al, 2007, 2009; Csaky, 2008; Kelly, 2000; Leatherman, 2011). Social attitudes around sexual violence have not kept pace with legislative changes and advancements. Intricately and historically embedded myths about women, rape and raped women still contribute to cultures of victim blaming in the UK as well as globally (Temkin, 1997). These attitudes, and the vehicles that mediate them, can have severe consequences on individual survivors, limiting legislative effects on conviction rates and perpetuating impunity for perpetrators.

### **1.3 Feminist Challenges: Setting the UK Context**

The feminist movements of the 1960s onwards have, in many ways, been key in laying epistemological foundations in Western research and knowledge of sexual violence as a social, rather than biological or psychological, problem. Whilst detailed accounts of the development of what was to become the Second Wave can be found elsewhere (for example Jones and Cook, 2008), key activists and academics in Western radical feminism have undoubtedly paved the way for the sociological study of sexual violence in the UK and North America as a form of power and

symptom of a gendered social hierarchy within patriarchal structures (Millett, 1971), therefore challenging mainstream biologically essentialist and psychological approaches. US based feminist Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* was ground-breaking in arguing that rape was a social construction and famously stated that rape 'is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear' (1975, 14-15). Whilst this statement caused controversy in implying all men are conscious of their 'ability to rape' (an arguably essentialist claim), Jones and Cook contend this is a partial misreading, in that Brownmiller is highlighting that 'the effect that the danger of rape has on women is to limit our freedom' (2008: 5). Either way, *Against Our Will* provided a new sociological slant on the problem of rape as one embedded in social inequality and power relations, yet Brownmiller's analyses continue to be a point of contention in wider social arenas, as will be discussed in section 1.7.

### 1.3.1 Language, Feminism and Law

Prior to the 1970s, English language added another dimension of limitations to the naming of forms of sexual violence within criminal justice as well as everyday life, and, as such, many women did not identify forms of abuse as being *abuse* (Kelly and Radford, 1996; Wise and Stanley, 1987, Cook and Jones in Walklate, 2007). Feminist researchers and activists sought for the recognition of the everyday occurrences of sexual violence and other forms of violence against women as not being unusual, restricted to public spheres or based on momentary sexual compulsion, but as a common occurrence (Kelly, 1988; Painter, 1991; Russell, 1984; Stanko, 1990). The creation of linguistic frameworks has contributed greatly to the understanding and acceptance of wider forms of violence as abuse, including in encouraging legal frameworks to incorporate a wider scope of violence into definitions of rape and sexual assault (Smart, 1989). The problem of naming with regard to sexual violence remains at the heart of cultural representations and understandings of rape more globally, an issue which this thesis will explore in chapters Five and Six.

In re-focusing on the UK context, naming not only relates to the action or perpetration of violence but how the individual recognises her 'self' in the aftermath. In grappling with the perceptions of the 'victim' during criminal justice processes, feminists challenged commonplace terms to empower women. Walklate synopsis:

*'It is not the definition of victim itself that concerns the feminist, it is the way in which the term is connoted that is seen to be problematic. The link between passivity and powerlessness associated with being a victim and being female, does not for feminists capture how women routinely resist and manage their structural powerlessness, in other words, how they survive.'*

(2007: 120)

Many of these frameworks were produced by, and consequently developed on, the work of the Rape Crisis Movement in North America and the UK. Although Jones and Cook (2008) document the development of the organisations in depth, key areas in its progression included consciousness raising groups, public campaigns and in-depth qualitative and quantitative research (see also Kitzinger, 2009). The significance of this support on the lives of many survivors has been well documented, and the perpetual underfunding of many Rape Crisis centres remains a constant barrier in provision of support in many parts of the UK (Corry et al, 2008, Coy et al, 2007; 2009).

## **1.4 Wider Responses and Studies**

As a hidden crime, the measurability of rape is a complex dilemma. Where quantitative research has been undertaken and data and statistics obtained, the picture illustrates consistently high levels of rape within patriarchal societies (Brownmiller, 1975; Holmes and Holmes, 2009; Kelly, 1988; Painter, 1991; Russell, 1983; Seifert, 1993), which have been defined as 'rape-prone' (Bourke, 2007; Jones, 2011). Although rape statistics vary globally, a common factor indicating patriarchal institutionalisation is poor conviction rates for rapists. In 2011 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) reported a conviction rate of 57%. However, the method of statistical investigation has

been highly criticised by feminist groups over the past decade. The Fawcett Society, for example, point out that this does not include the high number of rapes that go unreported, or high attrition rates. Fawcett point to 2005/06 statistics where 13,712 rapes were reported, with a conviction rate of just 5.6%, if the likely percentages of non-reported rapes are taken into consideration (see the Fawcett Society 2007 for full statistical breakdown). Walby et al (2011) also point to the British Crime Survey (BCS), which indicated in 2007/2008 that approximately 10,000 women are sexually assaulted every week, yet police recordings of sexual offences sat at 57,522 for 2006/07 and 51,488 for 2008/09 (2011: 93-97), highlighting a significant difference between self-reporting in the BCS and reporting to the police.

To some degree, this can reflect the complex nature of proving a rape; the boundaries surrounding the understanding of sexual consent remain blurred (see section 1.6), but this reason is arguably insufficient in explaining dire conviction rates across the globe (Mollman, 2008). Considering rape is a crime that can lead to depression, internal damage or death, and numerous psychological illnesses, attitudes toward rape are arguably lax with high attrition rates (Munro and Kelly, 2009), and cases are often dropped before they are investigated (Fairstein, 1993; Lees, 1996), sometimes without the survivor's knowledge if the case has been 'no-crimed' (not taken any further by police) as can be done in England and Wales (Gregory and Lees, 1999: 69).

In terms of wider research, and leading on from Brownmiller's 1975 study and theoretical analysis of rape, was Groth's study *Men Who Rape* (1979) which cast further light on the use of sexual violence from a psychological perspective, defining 5% of respondents as sadistic rapists, 40% as anger rapists, 55% as power rapists. Whilst this study is problematic in that it is highly deterministic, ignorant of feminist perspective and overly positivistic, it at least reflected the how power has been defined in feminist thought as a primary contributor to the prevalence of rape. The fact that most men were not sexually aroused undermined biologically essentialist arguments that

men who rape need sex or, as outlined by Bohner et al below, 'over-sexed' (2009).

Further challenges were to follow in 1990 when Scully situated results from an earlier study (undertaken alongside Joseph Marolla) in a feminist discourse (1990). In her analysis, Scully separated differing forms of rape, including multiple perpetrator rape<sup>2</sup>, as forms of patriarchal power, and provided discourse analyses of interview responses to highlight the use of misogynistic attitudes of convicted rapists in prison. Scully and Marolla also point to research undertaken by Abel et al who found that 'fewer than 5% of men were psychotic when they raped' (1985 in Bart and Moran, 1993: 27). It is notable that at this point there remained a void in statistics and information such as these studies, which focused on the perpetration of rape and sexual violence rather than the experiences of the survivors. As Chapter Five details in depth, methodological issues in researching sensitive topics have perhaps limited earlier studies of experience (Renzetti and Lee, 1993). However, it remains crucial that women's voices are counted in forming knowledge of sexual violence to avoid what Bourke calls a 'long-standing tradition for blaming women for their own violations' (2007: 5).

## 1.5 Impacts and Responses

As this thesis will go on to investigate, there are many emotional, psychological and social impacts of sexual violence. Gregory and Lees state that:

*'typical reactions include helplessness, sleeplessness, flashbacks, nightmares, anger, suicidal feelings, phobic reactions, depression, mood swings, fear of being alone, relationship problems (in*

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'gang rape' has been, and in many areas continues to be, used to describe rape of individuals or groups with more than one perpetrator. However, the use of the term 'gang rape' is contestable due to connotations of the word 'gang', and does not necessarily reflect group or military dynamics within conflict situations. Therefore, a number of academics, practitioners and activists apply the terms 'group rape' or 'multiple perpetrator rape'. To acknowledge the complexity and diversity of forms of rape internationally, and within and outside of conflict contexts, this thesis will use the term 'multiple perpetrator rape' where discussing this, unless directly quoting from wider sources or interviewees. For full discussions please see Horvath and Kelly (2009) and Ullman (2007).

*particular not enjoying sex), anorexia, loss of concentration and self-esteem and blaming oneself.'*

(1999: 136)

In sum, women and men who survive sexual violence can experience many issues directly and indirectly resultant from their subjection.

How sexual violence is responded to in terms of support has differed historically across societies and contemporarily across cultures and institutions. In wider contexts, rape is shrouded in silence and often women who are raped are silenced through legislation, social ostracism, marginalisation and stigmatisation. Although countless examples exist beyond the scope of this chapter, many countries, states and cultures perpetuate stigma in shaming the victim/survivor, which in turn perpetuates silence and lack of convictions. Women can find themselves directly criminalised in countries such as Sudan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia if raped as they may be accused of adultery and face the death penalty unless they can prove their violation (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 78, see also Amnesty International, 2004a).

### **1.5.1 Rape Crisis versus State and Medical Responses: a Complex Relationship**

Campbell and Yancey Martin demonstrate the differences in medical and legal responses to sexual violence, often adopted by state agencies, in contrast to Rape Crisis (2002). Whilst Rape Crisis counsellors and volunteers in Merseyside, for example, offer counselling and emotional support in the first instance, the state funded Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) acts as a medical/legal centre to increase the possibility of conviction through collection and storage of evidence ([www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)). During this time, the centre (SAFEPlace in Liverpool) offers Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) who can support female and male survivors through making a complaint and continuing through to trial. This is a positive and welcome advancement in the eyes of feminists and women's support groups. However, it is worth noting that currently in the UK complainants are not

entitled to receive counselling for the on-going duration of a rape trial as, it is suggested, any external input may affect the objectivity of the survivor and therefore undermine the reliability of the testimony (see Chapter Six).

There are therefore strengths and weaknesses in feminist responses, such as those at Rape Crisis, and wider responses to the support of sexual violence survivors. Campbell et al (1999, in Campbell and Yancey Martin, 2002: 260) studied the positive impacts of receiving post-sexual violence support from Rape Crisis advocates in comparison to the experiences of women who have internalised self-blame which can be reaffirmed by victim blaming responses in medical/legal units, an issue Campbell et al argue has detrimental consequences. Likewise, Jones and Cook have highlighted the positive outcomes of Rape Crisis responses, where women are approached as survivors, in contrast to legal models where women may be viewed as 'the primary witness by police, she may experience disbelief and harsh treatment' (2008: 37). Nonetheless, if conviction rates are to improve and perpetrators are to be recognised and criminalised, there remains a necessity for women to report to police, creating the possibility of conflict between the state and Rape Crisis groups. On the flip side of this again remains the fact that the English and Welsh criminal justice system is adversarial rather than inquisitorial and as such respond to the victim/survivor as a witness, challenging testimony and often undermining the complainant's story (Gregory and Lees, 1999; Lees, 1996; Temkin, 1997) hence arguably deterring victims and survivors from reporting.

Medical responses can also follow this adversarial model. Looking at medical frameworks in response to sexual violence, there have been historical disparities in the acceptance of medicalised impacts of rape on women and men, namely Rape Trauma Syndrome (Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As an overview, the basic premise lies in the identifying of certain psychological problems attributable to surviving rape or sexual violence, for example anxiety or loss of confidence (World Health Organisation, 2011), although the second relates to wider form

of violence and/or torture. Social models and feminist responses have often been critical of these (Jones and Cook, *ibid*), as survivors who do not outwardly show signs related to syndromes have since had extra medical weight added to their fight for justice, as they may not embody the 'perfect victim' (Du Mont et al, 2003; Burgess and Holmstrom; 1974). Feminist academics such as Liz Kelly have also highlighted the limitations this sets in recognising the multiplicity in women's responses to rape or sexual violence, and that this requires a range of responses available in relation to the victim/survivor (1988, 2011). Joanna Bourke has been highly critical of the concept of PTSD, arguing in one conference that it was developed to protect soldiers returning from Vietnam in the 1970s from facing justice over forms of extreme and sexual violence (Bourke, 2009). On the other hand, however, is the point that 'proving' an individual is 'suffering' from a particular syndrome which can be backed by medical evidence can also provide weight in rape cases on the side of the complainant (Boesch et al, 1998). There remain, then, some tensions and contradictions between medical, legal and social responses and priorities with regard to sexual violence.

### **1.5.2 Societal Responses: the Truth About Rape?**

Whilst there have been important progressions, as mentioned above, sexual violence in the UK, as in many other areas, is an issue draped in a kind of social silence. Although media report sexual violence, and although it is estimated that one in four women will experience sexual violence in her lifetime (Russell, 1983; Painter, 1991), serious discussion around sexual violence is marred in what feminist groups call 'rape myths'. Rape Crisis England and Wales give some of the following as examples:

- It cannot be rape if she doesn't fight back
- Men who are sexually aroused cannot help themselves and have to have sex
- Men who rape are sick or are monsters

(Adapted from Rape Crisis England and Wales, 2011)

Bohner et al expand on further myths which can affect the ways in which society and institutions within society respond to women as victims and survivors:

- *Blame the victim for their rape* (e.g. 'women have an unconscious desire to be raped', 'women often provoke rape through their appearance or behaviour');
- Express a *disbelief in claims of rape* (e.g. 'most charges of rape are unfounded', 'women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them');
- *Exonerate the perpetrator* (e.g. 'most rapists are over-sexed', 'rape happens when a man's sex drive gets out of control) and;
- Allude that *only certain types of women are raped* (e.g. 'a woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex', 'usually it is women who hang out in bars and sleep around are raped')

(2009: 19)

These assumptions and pervasive myths continue to influence media reports, police, civil society and wider criminal justice processes. In terms of alcohol consumption, Bourke argues that the concept of women being more vulnerable to rape when drunk makes them more likely to be seen as responsible if they are raped, whilst perceptions exist that alcohol consumption makes men less responsible for their actions (2007: 57, see also Bachar and Koss, in Renzetti et al, 2001). Relating to other actions, comments from Judges during rape trials have included, 'Women who say no do not always mean no... If she doesn't want it she only has to keep her legs shut and she would not get it,' and 'It is the height of imprudence for any girl to hitchhike at night. That is plain, it isn't really worth stating. She is in the true sense asking for it' (both cited in Tomaselli and Porter, 1986: 19-20). Although such a small number of misguided quotes cannot be deemed truly representative of wider attitudes, research undertaken by Amnesty International in 2005 showed that:

- More than a third of people believe that a woman is totally or partially responsible for being raped if she has behaved in a flirtatious manner;
- 26 per cent of adults believed that a woman is was partially or totally to blame for being raped if she was wearing sexy or revealing clothing;
- 22 per cent held the same view if a woman had had many sexual partners;
- 30 per cent said that a woman was partially or totally responsible for being raped if she was drunk

(Amnesty International, 2005a: 5-7, cited also in Walklate, 2007: 180)

Brown et al (2010) argue a decline in victim-blaming attitudes in a comparative study (with one commissioned by the Daily Mail in 1977), which resulted in 15 per cent of 2057 respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly that if a woman gets raped it is her own fault (Brown et al, 2010: 5). Although Brown et al's report demonstrates some positive changes in attitudes, the continuation of victim-focussed attitudes in self-awareness campaigns reiterate the prevalence of victim-blaming, as will be illustrated below.

### **1.5.3 Self-awareness Strategies: the Public Remains Political**

Although it is necessary for social institutions and governmental organisations to take some responsibility in challenging attitudes toward sexual violence, particularly in education and in tackling institutional sexism, ignoring the role of the perpetrator can only limit the ways in which action can be taken. It may therefore be necessary to combine both institutional responsibilities on a macro level with responsibility of the perpetrator on a micro-social basis to provide a more rounded approach to systematically tackling sexual violence. Linking back to section 1.3, the limitations in gendered spatiality have permeated into wider discourses, particularly in Criminology, Human Geography and Victimology. Researchers such as Walklate (1995, 2001, 2007) and Valentine (1992, 1996) have undertaken in-depth studies of 'fear of crime' in public spaces, usually concluding that women (particularly elderly women) have disproportionate fears of crime (Box et al, 1988). In the UK, men are significantly more likely to be the victim

of violent crime in public areas whilst women are more likely to experience violence at the hands of someone they know in their own home (Dobash and Dobash, 1998; Banyard, 2010; Redfern and Aune, 2010). Nevertheless, Gunn and Minch argue that, 'sexual assault enforces a restricted lifestyle on *all* women. The ever-conscious threat of an attack limits the behaviour and activities of females throughout their lives' (1988: vii). As many feminists and Rape Crisis activists have pointed out, it is particularly important to acknowledge the impact that focusing on the victim of crime, rather than perpetration, has had on representations and perceptions of rape and sexual violence. Cameron and Frazer summarise, 'Victimology... leaves male violence intact and demands that women prevent themselves becoming victims of rape and murder' (1987: 110). This is a significant issue and, considering the overall outline of social attitudes within this chapter, it is one that needs to be challenged and altered in a practical and socially effective manner.

To concentrate on accepted ideals of responsibility of sexual violence prevention, Banyard pinpoints the issue of self-awareness campaigns in arguing 'Rape isn't a 'natural hazard' like a cliff edge that women must be careful to avoid when drunk – it is wilful act of violence perpetrated by another human being and the responsibility lies with the perpetrator, not the victim' (2010: 127). The examples below demonstrate prominent discourses in state-funded self-awareness campaigns, emphasising an onus on the 'potential victim' to be fully aware of her surroundings and take extraordinary measures to ensure her safety when socialising, including ensuring her minicab is licensed, keeping watch on herself, her drink, her friends and booking a taxi in advance. Most importantly however, these demonstrate the extent to which the social regulation and prevention of sexual violence is based on women's actions rather than those of (usually male) perpetrators:

Image1.1:

Image1.2

Image 1.3:

The continual focus on the behaviour and choices of the victim unwaveringly suggest self-regulation, forms of panopticism and synopticism that can affect wider legal ideologies (Canning and Coleman, 2011). The choice of images and messages is perhaps of even more concern, notably the voyeuristic use of dramatised and sensationalist depictions of violence in Image 1.2, and the equally traumatised portrayal in Image 1.3.

## **1.6 Sexual Violence and Criminal Justice**

This leads to the more formalised responses to sexual violence, namely criminal law and criminal justice, as have been touched upon in varying degrees throughout this chapter. As Brownmiller pointed out, the legal identification and outlawing of rape in Britain was initially through property laws by Richard the Second in 1385, and have been linked with this notion of

'ownership' since (1975: 34). Legislative responses have made marked expressions in the UK, specifically the English and Welsh criminal justice system. Despite this, and despite the recognition of rape in marriage in 1991, there remain informal discourses within patriarchal structures which continue to situate women as the property of men. In some societies, rape in marriage is yet to be made illegal (Seager, 2005), a barrier related to similar cultural attitudes of the sexual submission of women through matrimonial vows. Further indications of the prevalence and detrimental impact of 'women as property' belief systems are arguably evidenced in the extreme through retaliatory rape in gang relations and during conflict and unrest (see chapters Two, Three and Six).

Although many positive advances have been made in England and Wales, the criminal justice system remains one of the most substantial challenges to responses to sexual violence. However, in considering the advancements, it is also essential to cast a critical eye on the English and Welsh criminal justice system to promote further improvement and therefore ensuring optimum responses for survivors. In the UK, particularly England and Wales, much research, policy review and recommendation was undertaken by Professor Sue Lees until her death in 2002. Many significant changes are the result of Lees' work, and other academics and activists (Gregory and Lees, 1999; Kelly, 1988; Kennedy, 2005; Lees; 1996; Smart, 1990) who remained constructively critical in advising legislative and judicial improvements.

As well as criminalising marital rape, advancements have been made in the acknowledgment of acquaintance rape and partner rape in the British criminal justice system (Frith, 2009). Another important recognition by police in particular has been that most rapes are not reported, therefore the validity of conviction rates may be skewed, although rates of recording have recently increased. For example, the British Crime Survey of 2010/11 noted that 'Police recorded rapes of a female increased by five per cent to 14,624 offences and sexual assaults on a female increased by four per cent to 20,659 offences' (Home Office, 2011b), suggesting more survivors have

chosen to report. These factors possibly indicate two advancements in the Criminal Justice System: that victims/survivors may be more willing to report, perhaps as a result of slowly improving police attitudes; and that the Home Office now recognised that this number is a 'scratching of the surface' of sexual violence perpetrations. However, it also serves as a reminder that this figure remains far off those demonstrated in wider studies in England and Wales, which calculate anything up to 80,000 rapes a year (Sen and Kelly, 2007; Walby and Allen, 2004). In 2008, Assistant Commissioner John Yates publicly acknowledged that police generally do not receive more than 15 per cent of rapes as reports (BBC, 2008b).

### **1.6.1 Moving beyond 'Real Rape' Discourses**

In terms of legal categorisation of severity, Kelly and Radford (1996: 21) challenge the tiering of the severity of sexual violence, as suggested by Lord Lane in 1986, a guideline which was to allow two separate degrees of rape to reflect the 'seriousness' of the offence. They highlight that 'the 'real' rape model' includes 'use of 'excessive' violence; use of a weapon; repeated rape; rape of elderly women or young children. In the process, the majority of rapes are once again defined as 'less serious' and therefore even less likely to come to court' (ibid, see also Horvath and Brown, 2009). The problem in this, of course, is the overshadowing of the everyday banality of sexual violence: that it is usually perpetrated in the domestic sphere with elements of coercion by someone that the victim/survivor knows, as outlined above. This tiering was not left in the 1980s. For example, consider Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke's use of terms including 'proper rape' and 'classic rape' in attempting to define rape (see BBC, 2011a).

This idea of 'real rape' permeates wider social institutions, particularly in the media and parts of criminal justice (Horvath and Brown, 2009). At a recent conference promoting 'SAFEPlace', a 'one stop' support facility for rape counselling and forensic examination in Merseyside, terms such as 'this was a particularly nasty, vicious rape' was how a rape counsellor described a public rape, whilst a Detective Inspector outlined that his team were not

always involved in domestic cases as they were 'looking for the Peter Sutcliffes of the world' and stopping 'deviants and perverts preying on society' (Canning and Coleman, 2011). Whilst on the surface these are justifiable remarks in that the women raped and/or murdered by Sutcliffe deserved protection and justice, and that a rape can be 'nasty and vicious', this use of language continues to draw distinctions between rapes that use no violence other than the violence of rape rather than acknowledging this as belonging within the continuum of sexual violence identified by Kelly (1988). This reproduces the public/private divide in defining 'real rape' as aggressively violent, despite arguments that domestic rape is more common and can have different but equally powerful effects on individuals who survive it as they may have to continuously negotiate everyday space, protect family or receive further emotional abuses from the perpetrator. Furthermore, it resituates men who rape as the animalised and 'perverted other' rather than an abuser of power (see Soothill and Walby, 1991).

This public/private divide in Criminal Justice perspectives also reflects, and perhaps influences, media responses to the coverage of sexual violence reports. The idea that rape is more common in public remains a common myth (as outlined above), and police responses often reinforce this discourse in promoting self-awareness techniques and strategies for women to avoid sexual violence. To provide an example, Merseyside Police regularly advise women:

*'I would remind women and teenagers to always take care when they go out at night and avoid walking through isolated or unlit areas and ensure you always walk home in pairs or a group and not go unaccompanied'*

(BBC News, 2009; see also Appendix One<sup>3</sup>)

This statement is used repeatedly in varying contexts and with small modifications in numerous stories linked with stranger rape in the public

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix One is a petition undertaken by the author as part of a local activist strategy with Merseyside Women's Movement and Merseyside Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre

sphere, an echoing of the campaigns discussed earlier, yet media rarely covers the issue of domestic or historical rape unless a conviction occurs.

### **1.6.2 Victim Blaming, 'Consent' and Criminal 'Justice'**

As with societal attitudes, victim blaming discourses have long been evidenced in court procedures as well as by police. This ranges from suggesting responsibility lies with the victim, as outlined previously, to formally accusing survivors of fabricating accounts or using sexual history of the complainant to undermine her case (Lees, 1995; Meyers, 1997; Naylor, 2011).

More recently, section 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act (1999) limited the circumstances under which a review of sexual history evidence could be introduced in court. Although a step in the right direction, research by Kelly et al (2007) found that history is fleetingly referred to so as to 'sow the seeds of doubt', that over one third still included references to sexual history, and the proper procedures to request information on previous behaviour were not followed in most cases (Kelly et al, 2007). A further issue in a similar area is that the use of character references as evidence, which continues to hold weight in rape trials in England and Wales, as well as further afield. In the UK women are often repeatedly questioned in terms of their wider characteristics or experiences (Gunn and Minch, 1988).

One controversial international example is perhaps the recent case of the 'collapse' of a rape investigation against French International Monetary Fund ex-leader Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who stood accused of raping a hotel maid (Pilkington and Rushe, 2011). The accuser's history of lying in an immigration statement and wider association with a drug dealer cast doubt on her character, but again forges questionable links between wider history and being subject to rape. This approach can then be further problematised by the use of positive character references for accused perpetrators. Although a jury is not always privy to access information on previous convictions or accusations that may be set against them, character references in favour of

the defendant continue to be particularly significant in rape cases, where the accused may not fit the socially endorsed stereotype of 'rapist', which often continues to exude the role of 'perverted other' (Meyers, 1997; Soothill and Walby, 1991).

Linking to the assumption that rape is unusual is the idea that all rape includes physical violence, rather than recognising the importance of coercion, complicating the possibility of proving rape (see section 1.6). As Gunn and Minch argue, 'the victim is placed in the precarious position of having to prove that her reaction was sufficient to establish non-consent. The tell tale signs of non-consent then become the physical injuries, even though cases of forced consent in the presence of threats (either verbal or by use of a weapon) are no less intimidating to the victim' (1988: 29). As Frith (2009) goes on to highlight, more recent legislation has attempted to change the focus from survivor to perpetrator by addressing the issue of obtaining consent (2009: 115).

Whilst Frith goes on to recognise this positive move, she points out that 'it is still too early to say whether this has been effective in making changes in public attitudes or within the criminal justice system' (ibid). This discussion can be furthered to question the regular referral to consent in proving 'beyond reasonable doubt' in rape cases, as is regularly evidenced in media reports. For example, some reports have indicated that, when evidence of sexual intercourse has been obtained and a defendant claims consensual sex has taken place, the process of conviction for rape can be complicated unless other physical indicators of violence are evident (see for example BBC, 2005; BBC, 2011c; Jones, 2010). Two decades ago, Soothill and Walby highlighted media representations of rape in newspapers where, 'it's women who are the problem, not men. The woman is either the temptress or is lying about her consent' (1991: 83, see also Carter and Weaver, 2003; Davies et al, 1987). Arguably, there has been little shift in this mentality, particularly if the complainant has consumed alcohol (see Lovett and Horvath, in Horvath and Brown, 2009: 125-160).

## 1.7 Limitations of Western Feminism

The 1980s onwards saw a sustained backlash against feminist principles, particularly embraced by popular media and probably most well-documented and contended by Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1992), a comprehensive and intricately detailed challenge to mainstream resentment toward feminism in the West. Feminists have long fought this backlash, and Radford et al point out that 'it is not difficult to identify specific illustrations of anti-feminism' (1996: 8). Indeed contemporary media and politics offer many examples, from false representations of separatist dunghereed man-haters to shoe obsessed post-feminist narcissists. However, it is arguable that a focus against feminism in popular culture may work against anti-rape movements by undermining wider feminist arguments, providing challenges to those related to sexual violence. For example, when British MP Harriet Harman temporarily took Gordon Brown's (then) role as Prime Minister in 2009 whilst he holidayed, she vetoed a review of rape law stating that it failed to address the concerns of women (Elliott et al, 2009). In response, Harman received ridicule by her peers, including Jack Straw, for her feminist challenge to the law and faced various onslaughts of abuse in the media that included having 'comedic' false diaries in the Daily Mail and Rod Liddle of *The Spectator* declaring he wouldn't sleep with her, even after a few drinks (Sutherland, *The Guardian*, 2009). One consequence of all this included the delay of the rape law review. In sum, this example reflects the more detrimental side of a cultural 'backlash' toward feminism: that social attitudes affect the delivery of legislative review and ultimately permeate approaches to sexual violence within the criminal justice system and beyond.

Nonetheless, since the 1980s academics and activists have provided many critical analyses of Western feminism which have carried more legitimacy than mainstream backlashes (Davis, 1982; Edwards, 1976; hooks, 1981; 1984; Jones). Concerns over the extent of Eurocentrism and assumptions of racial and ethnic uniformity and application of middle class experience have proven complicated in responding to sexual violence and gender inequality more generally. Waylen problematizes 1970s feminism in stating, 'They had

often taken for granted the notion of 'woman' as a unitary and ahistorical category. Some had treated women as a homogenous group, making the assumption that it was both possible and unproblematic to generalise about all women and their interests' (1996: 7).

Looking to one of the founders of Black feminist criticism, Angela Y. Davis pointed out the commonplace occurrences of sexual abuse perpetrated against Black women household workers by the 'man of the house' (1982: 91), usually white, but the over-representation of the 'myth of the Black rapist' (ibid: 172-201). Essentially she highlighted the misrepresentation of rape as a problem steeped in racism in the US, and criticised the white feminist movements for overlooking the divisions in race and class in their challenges to patriarchy. The issue of capitalism and racial and ethnic inequalities has since intermittently raised its head, possibly the most recent being the case against Strauss-Kahn (outlined above) which exposed 'epidemic' perpetrations of sexual violence against women, often African American or Latin American and working class, employed in domestic and hotel services (for example see Walters, *The Guardian*, 2011). High profile instances such as these can serve as a reminder of continuing inequalities against women, but also that feminist movements may not always be successful in reaching all parts of society, particularly those where women can be most vulnerable, as Davis argued.

Other feminists went on to contribute to the critical discourse set by Davis in the early 1980s. The growing recognition that prominent writers in Western feminism had been focussed on white, middle class experiences of subordination and oppression (for example Brownmiller, 1975; Friedan, 1963) has provided scope for further activist and academic engagement from non-white women (see Edwards, 1976 for an in-depth challenge to Brownmiller's work). The Western feminist lenses of radical and socialist feminism have also been challenged in Britain where Amos and Parmar argued:

*'Few white feminists in Britain or elsewhere have elevated the question of racism to the level of primacy, within their practical political activities or in their intellectual work. The women's movement has unquestionably been premised on a celebration of 'sisterhood' with its implicit assumption that women qua women have a necessary basis for unity and solidarity.'*

(1984, cited in Bhavnani, 2001: 19)

While Western feminism responded with wider inclusions of ethnic experience in some areas, there remained (and remains) a concern related to the over-simplification of the experiences of non-white, non-Western women in the UK, as well as Western feminist responses to those globally. Spelman (1988), for example, reiterates Davis' and Amos and Parmar's criticisms in the tiering of racism and sexism by problematising the idea that all women will experience sexism but not all will experience racism (in Bhavnani, 2001: 76). This perception can further marginalise the experiences of Black women who, as Larasi argues, may feel that the daily experiences of racism in varying capacities can have more regular impacts on everyday life than sexism (Larasi, 2011). Cases are therefore made in many areas of feminist politics, theory and research for the consideration of intersectionality, incorporating recognition of the dimensions of inequality that women can experience and subject to beyond gender as a definitive factor (see McCall, 2005).

Arguably it is the issue of 'difference' that remains at the heart of domestic or global feminisms in collectively challenging understandings of sexual violence. The 1990s brought a recognition that the experiences of women can differ in relation to where they live, the point in their lives at which they are, whether they live in a state of conflict or civil unrest, the socio-economic status to which their lives reflect or the ethnic group to which they are ascribed or ascribe to (see Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1996, for fuller discussion). Theoretically and epistemologically, the ideology of 'difference' continues to be challenged and further debates have been generated (Maynard, 1994, Sen, 1999). Helliwell, for example, sets out arguments related to perceptions and studies of rape as a 'fate worse than death' for

some women (Bart and O'Brien, 1985 in Helliwell, 2000) although not all societies may hold similar perceptions. Helliwell documents studies in Papua New Guinea and Indonesian Borneo which suggest that women do not hold the same fear of space as documented in other areas (ibid: 789-792). It is in part issues such as these that can add to the complexity of defining sexual violence, or particularly in responding to it. As this thesis will identify later (in chapters Five, Six and Seven) Eurocentric feminisms can further convolute existing problems in providing support services for women seeking asylum in the UK who are fleeing conflict or civil unrest and have been subjected to sexual violence. But to quote Purna Sen:

*'The need to recognise difference is clear – without it there is pressure to conform to a dominant culture, and a denial of prejudice and discrimination. But what does concern me is where difference becomes an absolute organising principle, a fundamental tenet of separateness.'*

(1999, in Cameron and Scanlon, 2010: 81)

## **1.8 Globalising the Lens: Sexual Violence and International Responses**

As the UN definition stated earlier evidences, there are many forms of sexual violence committed against individuals and groups. Bourke (2007), Brownmiller (1975) and Kelly (1988) have argued that the foundations of sexual violence lie in patriarchal power. However, wider transformations in globalisation, border changes and capitalism have also facilitated increases in specific types of violence against women. This can include national and international sexual trafficking, a partial response to urbanisation and global tourism (Richardson et al; 2009), increased production of legal, illegal and extreme pornography related to increased distribution through the growth of the World Wide Web (Banyard, 2010) and rape as a weapon in war and conflict. It is upon the latter that this thesis will continue to focus, but it remains essential to emphasise that sexual violence is prevalent in many forms across global spheres, and that women continue to be the primary victims of perpetration.

Although the exponential growth in the World Wide Web has incorporated many exploitative attributes, more positive outcomes of its development have included social networking sites and mailing lists dedicated to challenging sexual violence in parts of North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South America and Asia. The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), for example, is based in South Africa but accumulates articles and legislative developments from across the globe by promoting world-wide networks for groups and individuals working in the field of sexual violence response and prevention (see [www.svri.org](http://www.svri.org)). Networks such as this can play key roles in information sharing, toolkit distribution and promoting political activism in response to sexual violence. However there remains a limitation in access to web based resources in areas which may most benefit from them, including less economically developed countries and conflict zones where support may remain minimal but where sexual violence is frequently widespread.

Many areas have seen a mushrooming of sexual violence responses similar to those instigated by feminists in the UK and US. It is worth recognising the concern that some anti-rape movements continue to model localised responses in the form of Western responses rather than developing more culturally specific practices (Fox, 2003; Ibhawoh, 2006). This is particularly resonant in criticisms regarding (for example) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which received inter-continental adjustments such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003). Localised feminist and women's rights collectives in parts of Africa, Asia and South America have been particularly successful in challenging misogynistic attitudes and harmful cultural practises which endorse forms of violence, such as child marriage or female genital mutilation, as ways of regulating and maintaining female honour (Dorkenoo and Elworthy, 1992, 1996). For example, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) have led sustained campaigns to support challenges to Mugabe's dictatorial regime, whilst highlighting the systematic use of rape against oppositional women or wives of oppositional candidates (website and information available at <http://wozazimbabwe.org/> see also Amnesty

International, 2007 and IRIN, 2003). Shtrii Shakti stand as another prominent contemporary example of pioneers in sexual violence responses by creating safe spaces for women who have been subjected to abuse through sexual trafficking in Nepal (see <http://www.shtriishakti.org/>). Again, however, these remain more internationally recognised than smaller independent organisations.

## **1.9 Chapter Conclusion**

In recognising the complexity of sexual violence, this chapter has provided an outline of some key issues relating to responses in the UK, as well as wider arenas. It has considered the social marginalisation of the subject of rape, and the gaps that linger in responding to, or preventing, sexual violence from a number of sociological perspectives. Another significant issue which permeates literature and policy overall is again the issue of difference. Whilst this has been outlined here, chapters Four and Five will grapple with this area more thoroughly, specifically in relation to non-white women seeking asylum in Merseyside and my own position as a white researcher in this area. Understandably, where there has not been full scope to examine the intricacy of perpetration, survival and responses around sexual violence in every global context, the overview provided sets the context of an in-depth analysis of sexual violence in conflict.

Ultimately this chapter has problematised sexual violence in varying contexts, pinpointing some of the most prominent issues in social institutions and highlighting two things: the need for further research-instigated social and institutional changes, particularly in relation to attitudes and criminal justice; and has laid a foundation for understanding some historical and contemporary discussions related to sexual violence. How and why women (on the most part) are subjected to sexual violence can differ from area to area, community groups and ethnic regions, as do legal and social responses.

It is this final point that leads this study into the next chapter. Having laid a feminist framework in theorising rape, the next step will be to shift an analytical lens to a specific form of perpetration: rape and sexual violence in war, conflict and civil unrest, a problem which will lay the foundations for the rest of this thesis.

## **2.0 Chapter Two: Rape and Sexual Violence in War and Conflict**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide a brief conceptual outline of sexual violence in various wars and conflict situations, discussing the prevalence of rape as a weapon of war in global contexts, both presently and historically. It identifies three case studies for discussing rape and sexual violence in conflict: the Rwandan Genocide; the Bosnian War; and the Second World War, and references accounts from Vietnam, Nanking, Bangladesh and Darfur. These case studies have been chosen specifically as they provide strong contrasts historically, geographically and politically, yet still experienced high levels of sexual violence during each period of conflict. Furthermore, the three conflicts to be studied each contributed to international developments in rights at varying historical points, and as such provide indicators of the acknowledgement of the impacts of rape in conflict in international legislation. Each case study will briefly outline the context of the conflict and discuss specific instances of sexual violence.

A more contemporary look to ongoing conflicts will be included, particularly with reference to the Democratic Republic of Congo, although most recent references will focus on conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. This is largely related to the reporting of the prevalence of rape in conflict in some areas, but is also as a way of maintaining consistent subject themes with remaining chapters. As this thesis develops, asylum in Merseyside will become more of a focal point and, as chapters Four and Six illustrate, a high proportion of women seeking asylum in this area have fled conflict in parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The final section will point to some common themes notable in the conflicts included. Unlike Chapter One, this chapter does not engage heavily in theory or responses regarding sexual violence: these areas are addressed in Chapter Three. Instead, it scrutinizes examples and highlights experience,

particularly in the inclusion of secondary accounts from women survivors. Again, this goes on to draw parallels with chapters Five, Six and Seven to highlight the gravity of women's violations, the impact and effects that sexual violence can have on women and communities and allows for a critique of domestic and international responses to women fleeing conflict situations.

The rationale for the design of this chapter is twofold: firstly; one chapter cannot detail to any degree the full context of a war, but can outline the conflict situation and highlight qualitative examples of rape and sexual violence. This is important to demonstrate similarities and differences in each conflict in context with similarities and differences in sexual violence in conflict, particularly in incorporating a multidisciplinary approach in studying these. Secondly, rape in war and conflict has been largely omitted from academic study, humanitarian legislation or historical analyses of war until quite recently, and so accounts are often vague or insufficiently researched or documented (Mullins, 2009; Bastick et al, 2007). Therefore, it is beneficial to examine those accounts which have been effective in exploring rape and sexual violence in conflict before undertaking any kind of research to add to literature around this subject.

## **2.2 Definitions: War, Conflict and Civil Unrest**

In Western philosophy, politics and sociology, war and conflict have been framed in many contexts. Historians such as Anthony Beevor (2002; 2003; 2007), Adam Jones (2002; 2006, 2010) and Norman Naimark (1995) have pieced together many accounts of modern history and have in some ways worked to include otherwise silenced voices, including women. Other Western theorists who discuss more recent conflicts, particularly the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have offered significant philosophical challenges to Eurocentric notions of the impacts and reality of 'war' by dismantling discourses of the 'Other'. Noam Chomsky (2006; 2011) and Judith Butler (2009) for example have highlighted racist and Islamophobic responses in Western media's 'framing of war' as justifiable if and when it challenges

mainstream ideologies which otherwise justify attack. With relation to this chapter and thesis, important points that Butler makes lay in the justification of state crimes and in state responses to the losses of life (2004; 2009). Although largely focussed on US policy and approach, her arguments permeate into wider discussions of 'the Other' when considering political asylum in the UK, as well as slow responses to global atrocities such as the Bosnian War and the Rwandan genocide.

Within this chapter, the use of the term 'conflict' includes official wars, conflict and civil unrest, unless otherwise specified. Each of these is significant as all can include systematic violence, and incorporate violence perpetuated by militia, armies, police, and civilians themselves. More sociologically, concepts of genocide and conflict in the scope of this chapter are based to some extent on the works of Martin Shaw (2003), Adam Jones (2006) and Alex Alvarez (2010). Shaw defines war as 'an act of force by an organised social power to compel an enemy to submit to its will' (2003: 18).

As discussed in the previous chapter, many women are subjected to sexual violence by men they know and often trust. In conflict, as this chapter goes on to discuss, women also experience rape in the domestic sphere, or at the hands of traffickers and smugglers who are otherwise aiding escape. In Rwanda for example, perpetrators of rape (and genocide more widely) were often not enemies, but neighbours and friends. It is perhaps these points that render feminist thought on uses of violence by men known to the victim even more significant, a point which both Shaw and Alvarez overlook in some ways, demonstrating that the application of feminist epistemology is crucial.

### **2.3 Global Violations: a Brief History of Conflict Related Sexual Violence**

Rapes, mass rapes and sexual violence have periodically been described as spoils of war, by-products of conflict and largely inevitable (Bourke, 2007). This chapter focuses on the United Nation's definition of rape and sexual violence as outlined in Chapter One, but acknowledges that the reality of

rape in conflict is extremely complex, and that sexual violence includes many forms of cultural, social and individual violence. 'Mass rape' in the context of this chapter indicates vast numbers of women raped during conflict and unrest, such as in Rwanda but also the rapes of groups of women, as was reported in rape-death camps in Bosnia Herzegovina and systematic rapes of women in particular areas, as has been evident in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The complex consequences that rape has on the relationship between the individual woman and local and global society will be discussed below.

Sexual violence has been perpetrated during most conflicts with few exceptions (see Wood, 2009b for exceptions), and is predominantly evident historically in the British invasions during colonisation (Leatherman, 2011), throughout both World Wars (perpetrated by allies as well as German, French and Japanese forces), the Japanese invasion of Nanking and the Pakistani invasion of Bangladesh (Askin, 1997; Brownmiller, 1975; Mookherajee, 2010), the Vietnam War (Brownmiller, 1975; Bilton and Sim, 1992; Wood, 2009a), The Bosnian War (Kelly, 2000; Hansen, 2001; Stiglmeier, 1992), and The Rwandan Genocide (Caplan, 2007; Dallaire, 2003; Jones, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 1996; Magnarella, 2005). Lesser known instances of academic explorations of sexual violence during conflict have included the rapes of Chechnyan women during the two civil wars (Regamey and Le Huérou, 2008), mass rapes of women during civil conflict in Nigeria in the early 1990s (Odoemene, 2009) and the seven year dictatorship in Greece between 1967 and 1974 (Stefanos, 2009).

As a number of social theorists, anthropologists and historians have indicated, the nature of conflict in global regions has changed along with the division of states and countries and their ever-shifting borders (Kelly, 2000; Palmary, 2007). This has arguably ricocheted through social groups and localised communities in regions perforated by conflict or civil unrest, impacting on more people beyond the survivors. Escalations in public violence often result in escalations in private violence (Standing et al,

forthcoming) or indeed public group violence including public rape, against women. This may include private violence committed by partners or acquaintances, but also includes violence in private and domestic spheres committed by strangers in the absence of male 'protectors' who have fled in the wake of conflict and/or genocide, a problem particularly common in displacement camps and asylum refuges (Bastick et al, 2007; Newland, 2004).

The historically nonchalant attitude to rape in conflict is perhaps reflective of the marginalisation of rape as a 'woman's problem', whilst war is a 'man's terrain'. Escalations in violence against women within and between states and bordering countries has led to the former United Nations Force Commander for the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to declare that, 'it is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflict' (Cammaert, 2008, cited in Medical Foundation, 2009: 5). Despite this, it is only recently that rape in conflict has been identified as a systematic weapon of war and genocide and a human rights issue to be challenged at academic and humanitarian levels.

Although regional and global conflicts differ immensely in context, geographic position and historical era (as is evidenced in the three chosen case studies), examining corroborating sources and qualitative accounts regarding rape in conflict provides some scope of the extent of rape in war and of the nature in which it is perpetrated, with specific focus on rape as systematic violations of women's bodies and rights. This chapter will also discuss the idea that the nature of rape is changing in line with contemporary warfare, particularly in view of the fact that the Refugee Council claims that "'war rape' has reached epidemic proportions, as the nature of war has changed. Most conflicts are now civil wars fought mainly with small arms, with civilians accounting for more than 80% deaths" (2009a: 4). It questions the variations of rape (Wood, 2006) and whether the change in warfare has had an impact upon the prevalence of sexual violence as a tool of war.

Richters (1998) puts forward a number of sociological explanations for why rape manifests so deeply during wartime, stating that it is;

- A right mainly conceded to the victors (rape as reward)
- A consequence of the macho culture of armies, where it is used for initiation and social bonding (rape to boost morale)
- A way of damaging both men and women in communities (rape to inflict terror)
- A means of humiliating male opponents who were not able to protect 'their' women (rape as the messenger of defeat)
- A method of destroying the opposing community and culture (rape as cultural warfare)
- A means of ethnic cleansing through impregnating women with mixed-race offspring (rape as genocide)

(Richters, 1998, cited in Peel, 2004)

This chapter and the next will draw on all of these arguments to some extent, elaborating in particular on the social bonding process resulting from and instigating rape during war in Chapter Three. Firstly, however, it is important to draw attention to the lack of any mention of rape as a specific violation of women, on both individual and group levels, which has been committed essentially because it *can* be committed. This is particularly important as all social factors that contribute to rape in war should be combined in considering the motivations and effects of rape in war and conflict, and this has, so far, not always been the case in academia. Academic discussions outside of feminist thought regarding sexual violence in conflict can be without any real focus on the effects on women, for example Shaw states, 'Women... may be targeted for rape because of the humiliation that their violation will bring on the society as a whole, and especially on their menfolk' (2003: 179). This reiterates Richters' focus, but again fails to demonstrate any consideration of the impact or effect that rape and sexual violence has on the women on whom it is perpetrated, even suggesting the impact is greater for men. This inevitably leaves significant gaps for feminist criticism

and analysis, and suggests indicators for why practical research may be sparse (WHO, 2002; Refugee Council, 2009a) and support minimal for women surviving such violence.

## **2.4 Sexual Violence Historically: Looking to Case Studies**

There are clear benefits of looking historically to analyse rape in conflict, particularly in relation to the creation of collective memory and experience (Wenk, 2006). As feminists have long noted, the experiences of women are often silenced in the creation and documentation of history (Wallach Scott, 1996), and only recently have those of women during war and conflicts from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and before gained significant attention, often through meticulous examination and study of materials in national archives such as by Joanna Bourke (1999; 2007; 2009). For example, despite widespread sexual violence during the Second World War, few accounts were made public until the late 1940s and early 1950s. There have been sporadic levels of interest in reports since then, and media and development of international organisations has facilitated more in-depth and systematic study, such as in Bosnia and Rwanda. Nonetheless, considering the impact and prevalence of rape in conflict, this chapter, and the next, argue that there remain gaps in women's voices in contemporary conflicts, and that many reports that do exist remain situated in a discourse of rape as a by-product of war, an inevitability that transcends prevention.

### **2.4.1 The Second World War: 1939-1945**

During World War Two, spanning from Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 until the Siege of Berlin in 1945, rape and sexual violence was documented on individualistic and mass scales by all sides including the Soviet Invasion of Berlin, German occupation of France, French troops in Germany and Italy and British forces in France and Germany (Brownmiller, 1975; Leatherman, 2011; Naimark, 1995). Although not occurring simultaneously with the Second World War, the Japanese (allies of Germany) invasion of Nanking in 1937 also documented one of the most horrific and extensive occurrences of mass rapes, with up to 900,000 women raped (Chang, 1997) and thousands

more forced to work as 'comfort women' for the Japanese army throughout the war (Hicks, 1995).

The German occupation of the Soviet Union has largely been accepted as having been without sexual violence. For example, Beck (1999) found that no military orders were in place to systematically rape women and that racial hygiene laws in place to prevent pollution of the Aryan master-race forbade any kind of sexual relation, rape or otherwise. More recent studies, such as that undertaken by Mulhauser (2009) have found that, whilst this may have been the case during initial stages of the occupation, sexual violence became more commonplace and even seemed ordered as time went on (ibid). House checks, whereby Nazi soldiers would search for Jews and loot, often included sexual violence in numerous forms, ranging from the physically extreme, such as multiple perpetrator rape, to less violent but still humiliating acts such as forcing Jewish women to clean stairs dressed in underwear whilst officers watched. Mulhauser equates this with pornography, but also highlights the state of powerlessness that spectators, whether male or female, are forced to feel when they can do nothing to stop such humiliation.

Likewise, accounts of rapes perpetrated by Soviet soldiers against German women are well established, particularly during the fall of Berlin where hundreds of thousands of rapes were reported during the final days of World War Two (Beevor, 2003; Naimark, 1995; Seifert, 1996). One of the few publicly printed primary sources, the anonymous diary of a German woman during the siege, entitled, 'A Woman in Berlin' (1945) accounts (fictitiously or otherwise<sup>4</sup>) the systematic use of rape against German women by Russian military, and also highlighted the problem of 'sex for goods' or 'sex for survival', an issue contested amongst different strands of feminists, where some emphasise power and autonomy in gaining goods, whilst others

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<sup>4</sup> After initial and subsequent publications, debates have taken place amongst scholars regarding the authenticity due to alleged historical inaccuracies as well as the extent and prevalence of rape noted in the diary. Without thorough analysis, it is not appropriate to comment on the former, but from a feminist perspective it is interesting to consider the discourse of immediate disbelief with regard to the extent of sexual violence discussed in the book, particularly with regard to how it publicises German women spoke out about rape at the time.

(including Canning, 2011d) problematise the level of choice women can have if the alternative is an even more physically violent rape. The diary describes individual rapes, multiple perpetrator rapes, retaliatory rapes, everyday harassment from soldiers, humiliation, and sex for goods, commenting, 'sleeping for food is another new concept, a new vocabulary with its own specialised jargon' (Anonymous: 222). Brownmiller also documents one order by Russian commanders was to 'Use force and break the racial pride of these Germanic women. Take them as your lawful booty... you gallant soldiers of the Red Army' (memoirs of Admiral Doenitz, in Brownmiller, 1975: 70). Again, the role of women as reproducers of a nation or race is reinforced, whilst the commanding tone of the statement also indicates that impunity is not the only factor allowing rapes to occur, but orders fully condone 'lawful' systematic raping of enemy women. The encouraging use of the phrase 'gallant soldiers' clearly reiterates Richters' argument that rape can be a reward for the victors, as they are at leisure to take, if even by force, anything that they want, further reducing the status of women to possessions and objects. Likewise, Naimark emphasises the acceptance of rape during the Fall of Berlin, and points to an interview with Lieutenant General V.D. Sokolovskii:

*'Of course... a lot of nasty things have happened. But what do you expect?... in the first flush of victory our fellows no doubt derived a certain satisfaction for making it hot for those Herrenvolk women. However, that stage is over. Our main worry is the awful spread of clap among our troops.'*

(Cited in Naimark, 1995: 79)

Herein lays an accepted inevitability, a dismissal of any notion of violence in 'making it hot' and a greater concern for the wellbeing of the perpetrators rather than the victims.

LeGac (2008) further identifies similar tactics during the break through of the Gustav line by French troops invading Italy. Impunity, she argues, existed for French soldiers who committed mass rapes to spread fear amongst the enemy. The use of condoned sexual violence against Italian women was

blamed on a lack of prostitutes (ibid), essentialising sexual violence as a biological rather than social construct.

As many historians have highlighted, propaganda expanded dramatically during this period (largely a result of Goebbels's Nazi propaganda machine) and contributed greatly to creating identities of Jews in Germany as subhuman, the *Judenrat*. During warfare, propaganda is often employed as a tactic to identify 'us' and 'them', to ensure consensus of who 'the other' actually is (Chomsky, 2006; 2011), and it is arguable that rape was a vehicle for encouraging this on all sides during the Second World War, and may even have resulted in retaliatory rapes against 'enemy women' (Wood, 2009a). The public humiliation of Jewish women, Jewish men who had relations with Christian women and German women who had relations with Jewish men, evidenced in the following images, indicates ideas of entitlement and ownership by 'dominant' men of women, and the importance of racial 'purity' which rests as women's responsibility as child bearer.

Image 2.1:

Image 2.2:

Image 2.3:

Roughly translates as, '*I have been involved with a Pole*'.

(All primary sources available at *Topographies des Terrors*, Berlin. Pictures of images taken by Canning, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2010).

What remains at the basis of this, however, is the globalised cultural perceptions of women as socially inferior property, penetrable and ultimately 'naturally' weaker. As research has increased in the subject of sexual violence subject over the last decade (particularly since mass rapes in Bosnia and Rwanda) more examples of similar forms of gendered violence continue to filter into academic consciousness.

#### **2.4.2 Bosnia Herzegovina: 1992-1995**

To give a very brief history of the lead-up to the war in Bosnia (1992-1995), it is best to consider key points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that lead to the genocide of over 150,000 people, the majority of whom were Bosnian Muslims. Historically, the country first became a part of (the now Former) Yugoslavia, a state consisting of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina,

Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia, an area where Western ideologies often viewed Bosnia as a successful example of multiculturalism before the war. However, ethnic divisions in parts of the former Yugoslavia were evident throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, including mass killing of Serbian people in civil conflict, laying the foundations of what was to become the fall of Yugoslavia and resulting in tens of thousands of deaths (Stiglmeier, 1994).

During and after the Bosnian War, soldiers from all sides claimed to have been ordered to rape by commanding officers (Gutman, 1993; Stiglmeier, 1994) who sometimes participated or instigated rapes themselves, exposing the systematic nature of sexual violence. To motivate soldiers, a method of employing propaganda was widely used, again both publicly and in the relaying of stories. For example, Mackinnon documents Serbian soldiers group raping and torturing Bosnian and Croatian women and presenting the women as Serbian being raped by Bosnian and Croatian men on national news (1994). This reiterates what LeGac calls 'rumour', as discussed, to further demonise the enemy and reinstate the use of rape as a legitimate method with which the enemy can be undermined and retaliated against.

The levels of systematic violence against women were not only on a mass scale, but the case of Bosnia was the first mediated recent Western example. Forced insemination of Bosnian women by Serbian soldiers was carried out by holding women captive in concentration camps, mostly schools or community halls, and raping them continuously. Most known cases were of multiple perpetrator rapes, with women being forced to 'sexually service' up to 20 men (Gutman, 1993; Stiglmeier, 1994), including the perpetrations of violent acts of rape systematically and for sustained periods of time. One 28 year old Bosnian survivor, Melisa, details,

*'Two of them held me down and two of them raped me. They forced me to do it with my mouth. I was awfully scared, and they kicked me around and beat me... I don't remember exactly how many there were 'cause I fainted.'*

(in Stiglmeier, 1994: 136)

Other accounts state, 'uniformed soldiers gang raped her [a Bosnian woman in a concentration camp] and other women. I counted 29 of them. Then I lost consciousness' (in Gutman, 1993: 166) and that, 'One woman at Partizan [an identified concentration camp] said she was raped more than 100 times in two months. A gynaecologist who examined her shortly after her release told *Newsday* her account was entirely credible' (ibid: 164).

Although it should not have to be said, these accounts not only detail rape, but highlight horrific levels of physical torture, in both beatings and through repeated rape; two instances severe enough to induce unconsciousness. Also, for a gynaecologist to acknowledge physical damage through rape is not uncommon, but many instances leave no physical impact or scarring. To corroborate the likelihood of over 100 rapes connotes a level of severe torture.

Multiple perpetrator rapesis evidenced in all three of these accounts, and is reiterated within most documentation of wartime rapes in Bosnia (Hansen, 2001; Mackinnon, 1994). There are potentially three motives linked to this: the exercising of force and domination to spread fear amongst the enemy; the dynamics of group violence (see Chapter Three for an in-depth discussion); and ensuring forced pregnancy of Bosnian women through multiple partners as a method of ethnic cleansing. In all, the abuse and degradation of women is central.

Although multiple perpetrator rape is amongst the most common form of rape in some conflicts, the strategy of ethnic cleansing through forced pregnancy is quite unique in the case of Bosnia, as camps were specifically created to imprison women, impregnate (through rape) with Serbian patrilineage and keep women incarcerated until the child was born, or until the woman was in the late stages of pregnancy and could not receive an abortion legally (Allen, 1996). The use of both physical and coercive force and fear also seems to be a major part of ensuring that systematic multiple perpetrator and mass rapes are perpetrated. Intimidating or beating women, many of whom may have

witnessed the murder of their relatives or other women in the camps, whilst wearing army uniform symbolises the group in charge, and of who the enemy is. This, along with the constant psychological torture of being kept in a camp, with no real knowledge of what is happening but bearing witness to mass and multiple perpetrator rapes and beatings (even if not experiencing them) allowed small groups of soldiers to maintain absolute control.

The immediate annihilation of Bosnian Muslim men was an overall objective during the Serbian invasion of Bosnia Herzegovina, and ethnic cleansing was an aim of mass rapes and forced pregnancy (Jones, 2006: 217). The age of the women 'chosen' to be raped is, in the case of Bosnia, a significant factor in relation to the attempted genocide of a people. Although women of all ages were raped during the war, the majority were specifically targeted as 'young', 'beautiful' or 'honest-looking' (Gutman, 1993: 71). What was happening, as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia argued, was that Serbian soldiers had been given commands to undertake the mass raping of women of child-bearing age as another measure to ensure ethnic cleansing through forced impregnation (Allen, 1996; ICTY, ND).

During the war, and as is reflective of the previous example of World War Two, Bosnian women were not the only group subjected to rape and torture. Although on a much lesser scale, Serbian and Croat women were also raped. One Serbian survivor remembers,

*'They locked us up in a dirty, damp cellar. They raped us right off; they raped us in gangs and beat us too. I spent two days there... When they let me go they also released the five young women who were held prisoner along with me. Two of them committed suicide as soon as they arrived back in their villages.'*

(in Stiglmayer, 1994: 139)

The many cases of suicide of raped women after the Bosnian war have been inextricably linked to the social demoralisation of women in Serbian and Bosnian communities, where the sexual honour of women is highly regarded

and virginity essential before marriage (particularly for Bosnian Muslim women). Gutman outlines;

*'The deepest hurt seems to be the moral shame. These women were from the countryside where premarital sex is prohibited... Most of them think they have been ruined for life.'*

(1993: 72)

This is clearly ingrained both socially and psychologically; the social expectations of women's sexual honour interlinks with the individual woman's feeling of self-worth. This is not completely disconnected from the trauma of rape and sexual violence, but emphasises the effect that restrictive and unrealistic social expectations of female honour can have on women in that community.

Furthermore, this provides an optimum arena for which one side can exploit the other: through the social ostracism of women through sexual humiliation. As one woman stated, 'They [Serbian rapists] didn't want sex. They were gloating because they were humiliating Bosnian women' (Stiglmayer, 1994: 121). This statement derails the idea that rape in war happens because men do not have access to consensual sex, an argument based on biologically essentialist perceptions of men as being in need of physical sexual release to function adequately (for example, Thornhill and Palmer, 2000) or they may lose all control. On the contrary, the case of mass raping during the Bosnian war was, on one hand, a controlled and systematic attempt to end the Bosnian Muslim bloodline and on the other, the humiliation and undermining of rival groups by exploiting their social weakness; the women of each community who were unprotected, either due to their husbands fighting for the Serbian army or, for Bosnian women, their husbands having been incarcerated or murdered through the gendered nature of Serbian killing.

### **2.4.3 Rwanda: 1994**

Despite significant historical and contextual differences, since the mid-1990s the wars in both Bosnia and Rwanda have been closely linked in coverage

and international response, not only due to the timing of the separate conflicts, but also due to the genocidal nature of warfare in both countries.

The 1994 war in the sub-Saharan African country of Rwanda was fought largely between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic tribes, and came to be named *The Rwandan Genocide* despite initial resistance from the US, UK and the UN, all of whom rejected the term at the time as sensationalism (Dallaire, 2003). A long history of inequality and confrontation is evident, with colonialism playing a significant part in dividing the two ethnic groups into social hierarchies and enforcing identity cards, with Tutsis being deemed by Belgian settlers to be more worthy by colonialists, resulting in Tutsis being marginalised when colonialism came to an end and the majority ethnic group, the Hutus, sanctioning a kind of ethnic apartheid. These factors contributed to numerous ethnic conflicts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Magnerella, 2005).

The 1994 genocide itself was largely instigated by Hutu resistance to the rise of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a political (and at times, militant) group led by Tutsis and moderate Hutus which demanded political independence for Tutsi people. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, the Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a plane crash, suspected to have been a Tutsi attack, resulting in an overnight uprising and the beginning of the 100 day genocide which led to the deaths of almost one million Rwandans, around 94 per cent of whom were Tutsi, and the rapes of up to half a million women (Dallaire, 2003; Jones, 2010; Magnarella, 2003).

Rape during the Rwandan genocide was, it has since been evidenced, carried out systematically, 'implemented as a state policy as part of the wider genocide plan' (Survivor's Fund, ND). Propaganda was widely circulated to demonise the Tutsi population, and images of Tutsi women as seductresses, sleeping with enemy and UN forces, began to appear, reinforcing the sexual stereotype of the women, for example the sexualised depiction of Tutsi women with the head of UNAMIR, General Romeo Dallaire:

Image 2.4:

During rapes, women were told by soldiers that they wanted to 'rape you and taste Tutsi women' (Mullins, 2009: 719), or that they were no longer able to turn away Hutu men as they usually would, all perceptions that are possibly derivative of colonial attitudes toward the two ethnicities.

During the genocide, women were forced to watch the murder of their families, often raped in public and told 'You alone are being allowed to live, so that you will die of sadness' (Survivor's Fund, *ibid*). For example, after hearing that her three children and husband had been murdered, and after finding one of her dead children lying at the side of a road after she was kidnapped by Interahamwe soldiers, one woman recounted:

*'They stripped me naked and took all my money. At the house, they killed the baby on my back and then five of them raped me. They said, "we want to see how a Tutsi can die."'*

(Human Rights Watch, 1996)

This string of horrific events is not unique, but is echoed throughout similar stories collected by Human Rights Watch (1996) and Amnesty International (2004c) regarding the Rwandan genocide, and echoes other case studies and accounts in this chapter. What these actions perpetrated demonstrate is not that soldiers rape for sexual pleasure, but because sexual access exists to abuse and rape women because of their social position which, in turn, has been developed from cultural notions regarding their ethnicity and gender.

In the case of Rwanda, as of that in Darfur, Nanking and the Democratic Republic of Congo, objects and weapons were often utilised to cause severe internal injuries or death, such as penetration by guns, sticks and, in some cases, machetes. The account below indicates both the level of violence used during multiple perpetrator rape, and the degradation of the female body through vaginal mutilation;

*'About ten of them came. They picked two of the women in the group: a twenty-five year old and a thirty year old and then gang-raped them. When they finished, they cut them with knives all over while Interahamwe watched. Then they took the food from the table and stuffed it into their vaginas. The women died. They were left dead with their legs spread apart.'*

(Human Rights Watch, 1996: 45)

Similar to the invasion of Nanking in 1937, the act of mutilating women's vaginas and leaving the evidence exposed, was not uncommon during the Rwandan genocide, a violation which could be interpreted as representing a domineering hatred of women, as French (1992) had argued previously. It may also redefine an already established way of humiliating the enemy women in the most basic and demoralising way; by undermining their role of reproducer, and diminishing their perceived status as sexually pure. Something which is quite important, and which is often overlooked in non-feminist literature is that such mutilation is not aimed only at the official enemy, that is, the soldier or the 'menfolk' of a nation or community. It is an attack on the enemy women, undermining or even killing individual women, and again should not be overlooked as such.

A tactic during the genocide was also forced marriage; some women and girls were kidnapped by militia after watching their families or husbands murdered (embedding the element of gendercide and the removal of security), kept with the soldiers to be raped repeatedly and then chosen by one to live as a wife. One survivor, now living with HIV as a result of her ordeal, stated:

*'Members of the militia came each night to rape me, until one night a militia member announced that I was his, that he was my "husband"... A few years later, an RPF soldier came to my house and wanted to have sex with me....He wanted to marry me, and since he was a soldier I felt I had no choice. I married him against my will.'*

(Amnesty International, 2004c: 1)

The irony notable here is the protection of the survivor: systematic rape continued until one man chose her as a wife, therefore protecting her from further rapes by other soldiers, but condemning her to what could be considered legitimate rape, as women can be expected to submit sexually on the whim of their husband, or as is evident in his case, by the perpetrator. This tactic has been evidenced in other conflicts, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and is also noted in women's asylum applications, which will be further discussed in chapters Four, Six and Eight.

Women in Rwanda have been subjected to sexual violence before, during and since the genocide demonstrating gender power binaries and violence transcending conflict. As Amnesty International argue:

*'Women [in Rwanda] find themselves vulnerable to soldiers, Local Defence Forces, neighbours and male relatives who demand sex or wish to exchange food or other goods for sex. Following rape, survivors rarely bring their cases to the police, but rather families will find a financial solution to compensate for the abuse; the survivor may even be forced to marry the perpetrator in order to "normalize" relations between the families concerned.'*

(2004c: 4)

Again, the subject of forced marriage is evident, whereby women are vulnerable to sexual violence by strangers. Another issue brought to attention is a need to 'normalise' relations. Relations between families and communities are jeopardised when a rape occurs, and yet the woman raped is largely the bearer of responsibility, forced into a marriage with a man who has subjected her to sexual violence and who may continue to do so, an issue that relates also to peacetime practices (Amnesty International, 2004c; Human Rights Watch, 1996).

## **2.5 Sexual Violence in Contemporary Conflicts: The Emerging Voices of Women**

Contemporarily, sexual violence continues to be perpetrated in many global conflicts, as outlined earlier, whilst many others, such as Nepal, Liberia and Sri Lanka, struggle in responding to sexual violence post conflict. The ordering of sexual violence is widely reported, as is opportunistic sexual violence, in many areas of sub-Saharan Africa, central and South East Asia and South America. In the Ivory Coast, for example, where recent uprisings ousted long time dictatorial President Laurent Gbagbo, reports have emerged that 'the rebels have guns. They kill people and rape women' (cited in Stevenson and Ford, 2011).

An increase in violence and civil unrest across parts of North Africa and the Middle East, deemed 'The Arab Spring', has been slowly followed with reports of rape, mass rape and the rape of women by multiple perpetrators, as well as increased perpetration of sexual violence against men. Hala Jaber reported the case of a woman being raped by Colonel Gadaffi's soldiers in Misrata, Libya, and that doctors informed him of many similar cases, including multiple perpetrator rapes (Jabar, 2011). Similar reports have emerged from Syria, Tunisia and Egypt, where the public rape of US news correspondent Lara Logan by multiple perpetrators in Tahrir Square instigated national outcry in North America. Interestingly, the discourse within which many reports were set reiterated the 'framing' of conflict discussed

earlier, and public responses, including a now infamous blog by Conservative Jim Hoft, largely included questioning what a pretty blonde reporter was doing there in the first place, prompting feminist blogs to create petitions denouncing this reaction (for a response see Galpan, 2011). In some ways there seems an acceptance that sexual violence against women who live in conflict zones is in some way inevitable, despite the fact that few women have been involved in perpetrating violence during the Arab Spring, indeed most conflicts, with exceptions such as Sierra Leone where up to 25 per cent of combatants were women (Kay Cohen, 2009).

In other parts of the African continent, areas which have long been experiencing internal unrest and conflict including Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea have also relayed more frequent accounts of sexual violence into Western consciousness. In Sudan, the Darfur region has been a main focus for international aid due to a conflict raging for almost 10 years, claiming up to 300,000 lives, suggestively a genocide of ethnic Africans by Omar al-Bashir's Arab dictatorship arguably undertaken by government backed Janjawid militia (Bastick et al, 2007; MSF, 2005). Bastick et al (2007) highlight that:

*'The extent and cruelty of acts of sexual violence committed in the Darfur region have sent shock waves round the world. Acts of sexual violence occur mainly during attacks on villages by Janjaweed forces, who rape women and girls as they move from house to house, or during flight, or at roadblocks and checkpoints.'*  
(ibid: 63)

Likewise, Amnesty International (2004a), Hagan et al (2005) and Wagner (2005) all point to the systematic use of rape as a form of torture, with Hagan et al also emphasising the intention of 'breeding out' black Africans as a potential form of genocide, although this claim is yet to be substantiated in international tribunals.

As Leatherman notes, 'women's activism and advocacy for women's human rights can place them at risk, too' (2011: 76). Leatherman uses the example

of Nepal, but Zimbabwe is another prime example of rape for political retribution. Whilst individual women have been deliberately targeted for rape if they are affiliated with the political opposition *Movement for Democratic Change*, likewise if their spouse is a known or suspected advocate, the vulnerability of female asylum seekers fleeing the country has also been a major concern over the past few years, with reports of rape at the border as well as trafficking, primarily to South Africa (Amnesty International, 2007). This remains an issue that has not been addressed sufficiently by global organisations and humanitarian agencies.

### **2.5.1 A Contemporary Case Study: the Democratic Republic of Congo**

The quantification of sexual violence has been historically problematic within feminist research. However, in the case of conflict, to quote Helen Jones:

*'Do statistics even matter? What is the difference between one million rapes and two million in the context of war? Why count rapes in war (or in peace for that matter?)... by making even just the best estimate possible, we can acknowledge their value as human beings... and take the first steps to trying to support the survivors.'*

(2011: 191)

The prevalence of rape in conflict becomes important in terms of recognition and response. In this case, the use of sexual violence against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo over the past decade is a major area of concern, seeing as it has been deemed the 'rape capital of the world' (Wallstrom, quoted by Karumba, 2010) and amongst the most dangerous places to be a woman. Wakabi highlights: 'Although cases of sexual violence against women have been widespread in eastern DRC over the past decade, humanitarian workers say rape is becoming more violent and more common' (2008: 16).

As was evidenced in Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia, increases in research by international agencies, as well as advances in communication

technology and media, has meant that reports from conflict zones are more accessible than perhaps ever before. As such, more accounts of rape and sexual violence are filtering through from areas like the DRC, where women's voices have become an important focus in building a picture of wartime atrocities in the region.

Accounts given to researchers and reporters paint a consistently grim picture of violence against women, illustrating rapes from men on all sides of the decade long conflict (Amnesty International, 2004b; Arieff, 2009; Karumba, 2010; Wakabi, 2010) and again extreme levels of physical brutality. Although many accounts exist, the following excerpts from a report by Human Rights Watch highlight the experiences of three women, the first raped by Mai-Mai militia, the second by the army and the third an account by the mother of a twenty year old woman, Monique, raped and murdered by Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD) soldiers:

*'There were eight Mai-Mai. Two of them held me down and the others raped me. They put two knives in my eyes and told me that if I cried, they would cut my eyes out.'*

(Sophie W., in Human Rights Watch, 2002: 41)

*'I was in bed. When the door opened I cried out. They said they needed the girl. Three of them raped me... It was the first time I had ever slept with men. They said if I refused, they'd kill me.'*

(Delphine W. in Human Rights Watch, *ibid*: 53)

*'They went after my daughter... she resisted and said she would rather die than have relations with them. They cut off her left breast and put it in her hand. They said, 'Are you still resisting us?' She said she would rather die than be with them. They cut off her genital labia and showed her. She said, 'please kill me'. They took a knife and put it to her neck and then made a long vertical incision down her chest and split her body open. She was crying but finally she dies. She died with her breast in her hand.'*

(Mother of Monique B., in Human Rights Watch, *ibid*: 55)

The motivations for sexual violence in this particular area are often questioned, with answers including rape as a tactic for ensuring further

instability, a way to force women and families to flee and as a way to shatter communities, as families and husbands often exclude raped women. In her ground-breaking documentary *The Greatest Silence*, Lisa F. Jackson interviewed soldiers asking why they raped women. Responses included, 'It's all about control'; 'We stayed too long in the bush, and that induced us to rape. For an approximate number, maybe 25 [rapes perpetrated]'; one even remarked that the magic potion he uses to defeat the enemy required him to rape to 'make it work' (Jackson, 2007). Still, despite admitting to perpetrating sexual violence many soldiers, Mai Mai included, argued that the worst atrocities were being perpetrated on 'their' own women for example by 'foreigners [Hutus] living in this area' (interview with Mai Mai soldier in Jackson, *ibid*), echoing earlier discussions about patriarchal ownership of women.

The scale with which sexual violence is being perpetrated is having an inevitable affect on individuals and communities in the most affected areas, particularly around the Eastern Kivu Province. Bastick et al (2007) draw attention to the numbers of women treated in Panzi Hospital in the region for fistula, which reached 540 in 2005, 80 per cent of which was resultant from sexual violence (p41). It is widely acknowledged that many women are not able to make it to a hospital or clinic in rural areas and as such this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg. Increased transmission of HIV also remains a concern.

### **2.5.2 Rape, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation by Peacekeepers**

Although deployed as a strategy for protection, reports from conflict zones have increasingly shown rape and sexual abuse perpetrated by United Nations (UN) peacekeeping troops. This has included evidence of raping, trading food for sex from local children and women, as well as the mushrooming of brothels in areas that the UN control (Annan, 2005; BBC News, 2008a, Holt and Hughes, 2007; Csaky, 2008). Such abuse, including the rape of girls as young as six and pregnancies that lead to the social exclusion of local women from their communities (Csaky, *ibid*; see also Elliott

and Elkins, 2007), happens so regularly and systematically that the then UN Secretary General addressed the problem in a lengthy report entitled 'A Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Future Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations' (Annan, 2005). The document determined that UN peacekeeping forces sexually exploited, trafficked and raped women and children, who were under their protection, in countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Bosnia and Cambodia. Women and children even described 'rape disguised as prostitution', and 'peacekeeper babies', (2005: 8). To further highlight the vulnerability of woman and children, the report states, 'Once young girls are in this situation, a situation of dependency is created which tends to result in a continued downward spiral of further prostitution, with its attendant violence, desperation, disease and further dependency' (ibid: 8). Nonetheless, accounts continue to surface, such a 2008 report of a 13 year old raped by a group of perpetrators in the Ivory Coast by 10 UN peacekeepers (BBC, 2008a) and similar instances in Sudan (Holt and Hughes, 2007).

To draw on this, the systematic abuse, rape, trafficking and prostitution by peacekeepers are not isolated claims, but have surfaced and resurfaced continuously. In discussing the presence of the UN in the former Yugoslavia, Mackinnon outlines, 'In the streets of Zagreb, UN troops often ask local women how much they cost. There are reports of refugee women being forced to sexually service the UN to receive aid' (1993: 183). This was more recently reinforced in an expose by Bolkovic (2011), whose independent investigation uncovered sexual trafficking by members of the United Nations in the Former Yugoslavia who engaged in forced prostitution in brothels during and after the war. Considering that trafficking includes force and coercive circumstances, and that many trafficked women report having been repeatedly raped, the connections between sexual exploitation and perpetration of rape by peacekeeping troops are strongly intertwined.

This case is particularly interesting, obviously due in part to the irony which lies in the protectors becoming perpetrators, but also because it seems to

send a clear message that women serve to provide physical sexual services to soldiers, reiterating and strongly reinforcing the biological notions that must be moved away from.

## **2.6 Correlations in Accounts**

The correlations throughout these case studies denote wider social and structural motivations to rape, in that all have differences and similarities despite being situated very differently either geographically, in context and nature of warfare, and the historical position of each conflict. There are a number of similarities that can be drawn, particularly the escalation of multiple perpetrator rapes, mass rapes and rape-murders in some situations. Although these are not exclusive to conflict, they are much more common and, as evidenced throughout this chapter, in some cases of rape are the preferred method. Emerging themes which will become primary focuses in this thesis include:

- Gendered power binaries and the spectacle of rape
- Gendercide, genocide and sexual violence as a state crime
- Element of torture

### **2.6.1 Gender Power Orders and the Spectacle of Rape**

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Richters identified six sociologically based explanations for the systematic occurrence of rape in war and conflict. As outlined, the impact that this has on women was not a primary focus, and is often seen as more of a 'women's issue', despite the fact that it is largely perpetrated by men. What has been greatly evident in all of the cases explored in this chapter is the importance of gender relations within social and institutional settings on both micro (each individual account of rape) and macro (the systematic use of rape and in particular multiple perpetrator rape) levels.

Brownmiller argued in *Against Our Will* that rape was more likely to be used during war and conflict if rape was common during 'peacetime', and if power binaries strongly favoured men (1975). One researcher, quoted by Bourke, also stated that "'a war-like culture alone' could predict whether men in that society were prone to rape women" (2007: 259). These factors suggest that the social perception and value of women, and the power that they hold (or in most cases, do not hold) can determine whether or not they are 'rapeable' entities during war<sup>5</sup>. This is emphasised by Wood (2009b) who clearly demonstrates that not all armed forces rape as a strategy of conflict, and as such sexual violence is not an inevitability.

In the cases of Rwanda and Bosnia, rapes were often perpetrated, not by a perceptively 'foreign' invader, but often by neighbours and friends. It could be argued, then, that although ethnic and religious factors may impact on cultural beliefs or values, attitudes toward women in the community may be shared as the gendered experiences are similar, for example, the value of women's honour. It is interesting to consider that sexual violence is chosen to target enemy women, as in these cases, again challenging the idea that rape is the result of physical and emotional desires. This is even more contradictory when the women are considered to be inferior to the point of subhuman, as was the case of rape and sexual violence against Jewish women by German soldiers. These factors correlate with Richters' explanations, but also indicate that feminist approaches should be more thoroughly incorporated to fill gaps in the literature which can sometimes lack either in the exploration of gender orders (Canning, 2010) or in the sociological investigation of gendered culture and violence against women during conflict. These factors will be more thoroughly investigated in the following chapter.

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<sup>5</sup>Without focussing too much on male rape during conflict, as it is itself a huge and separate study, correlations can be drawn in the demonstration of hierarchal power. To 'prove' weakness and demonstrate bravado, men who are perceived as socially inferior or weaker can sometimes be subjected to sexual violence during war and conflict (Leatherman, 2011). Likewise, men who are leaders in the context of conflict may be targeted for sexual violence as a way to 'feminise' and demoralise the leader and his group (Sivakumaran, 2007). It is a way to reinstate power binaries by affiliating the abused with women, who are, quite universally, socially and economically less powerful than men.

Throughout these accounts and theoretical analyses, a common occurrence is public rape, public sexual humiliation and, in the case of multiple perpetrator rape, group exhibitionism. Mulhauser (2009) details the pornographic humiliation of Jewish women, MacKinnon (1992) highlights the use of cameras to film and broadcast violent rapes of Bosnian women, and in all cases of multiple perpetrator rape is the spectacle of power demonstrated by the rapist, either publically or amongst his comrades. This continuum is compounded by the possibility of forced marriage in some areas when women have been raped.

This method of sexual violence serves at least three purposes. It acts as a reminder for spectators of who is in control (Shaw, 2003), similar to public execution, and is also a means to humiliate both the female enemy as well as her community. Lastly, it is a way to undermine the values of a society by publicly removing any essence of honour that the enemy hold by 'polluting' women and forcibly removing the veil of silence that otherwise hides rape in communities, instigating ostracism and social and familial breakdown. Again, it is important to consider that this means of humiliation would not be quite so effective if such high significance on honour were not placed on women, or if women were not blamed or labelled seductresses if and when they are raped.

### **2.6.2 Gendercide, Genocide and Sexual Violence as a State Crime**

The Refugee Council points out, 'Sexual crimes are committed with impunity in conflict situations for similar reasons as in other contexts, exacerbated by a breakdown in the institutions, family and other structures that would normally protect women' (2009a: 6). This is a problematic argument, since it overlooks that most sexual violence outside of conflict situations is perpetrated within exactly these institutions, and often by partners or family members. However, the concept of 'Gendercide', the targeted killing of a group on the basis of gender, is useful in considering the facilitation of rape

and sexual violence by opposition groups in ethnic conflict. Although the term was coined by Warren (1985) to describe the systematic gendered killing of women, she highlighted the need for a sex-neutral term. Authors on genocide (such as Shaw, 2003 and Jones, 2006) have pointed out the gendered killing of men as a way to eliminate the power holders of a society whilst exposing women and children to exploitation and sexual violence (beyond that perpetrated by families, partners and acquaintances) and providing looting opportunities.

One example can be seen in the following account of a rape in Darfur in Sudan, where Amnesty international (2004a) and The Refugee Council (2009a) have both estimated that hundreds of girls and women are raped every day:

*“They took K.M., who is 12 years old in the open air. Her father was killed by the Janjawid in Um Baru, the rest of the family ran away and she was captured by the Janjawid who were on horseback. More than six people used her as a wife; she stayed with the Janjawid and the military more than 10 days.”*

(account of rape published in Amnesty International, 2004a: 12)

As well as highlighting the humiliation aspect of public rape, this example, one of many included in the 2004(a) Amnesty report, is reflective of the ease with which abduction and stranger rape can be carried out if the male protectors of a society are eliminated first. Therefore, indicators of gendercide can be seen for both genders, and with differing consequences on society. What is worth considering, nonetheless, is that women’s role as a social entity or body is perceived as in need of protection before, during and after conflict.

Genocide, on the other hand, carries very specific internationally endorsed meanings. As discussed earlier, the ‘international community’ has at times had reservations in declaring certain conflicts as genocides due to the specific definition which must be adhered to in order to warrant a use of the term. Article II of the 1948 UN Genocide Convention states:

In the present Convention genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

(Geneva Convention, 1948)

As Jones points out, theoretically genocide does not have to constitute any killing at all, yet 'genocide without mass killing has remained marginal in the debate, and in international law' (2008: 28-29). This argument adds further dimensions to the question of rape as a form of genocide in terms of intent to destroy. As Drakulic wrote about the mass rapes in the Former Yugoslavia, 'What seems to be unprecedented about the rapes of Muslim women in Bosnia (and to a lesser extent the Croat women too) is that there is clear political purpose behind the practice' (1992-3, cited in Jones, 2008: 108). Even beyond deliberate impregnation, literature suggests that orders and policies are often in place for the variety of political or social reasons outlined throughout this chapter, however, the Convention does not specifically state rape or mass rape as a form of genocide (Canning, 2010; De Vito et al, 2009; Holman Jones, 2008; Sharlach, 2000).

What has also become relevant in contemporary conflicts which was not applicable to those prior to the 1980s, is the question of 'intent to destroy' in terms of the spread of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) which may or may not be the premeditated intent, such as has been alleged in the DRC (Mills and Nachegea, 2006). Determining intent in the case of conflict is

essentially impossible, and the prevalence of HIV prior to, during or post-conflict is seldom accurate due to stigma and a lack of testing facilities in many areas, yet the long-term consequences of HIV exposure and increased pervasiveness is yet to be recognised in current conflicts. Rwanda in particular has had increased prevalence, disproportionately affecting women and impacting on partners and children (WHO, 2004).

In all, despite many contextual differences, one of the most resounding factors in the cases discussed (perhaps with the exception of peacekeeper perpetration) is sexual violence as an organised form of state crime (Green and Ward, 2009), whether intended as a form of genocide or otherwise. As Tilly argues, the formation of states can be driven by war (in Green and Ward, *ibid*) and as many new states have formed in short spaces of time, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, forms of violence have changed to impact on civilians more than soldiers (Kelly, 2000, Green and Ward, *ibid*). Again, high levels of impunity indicate a level of disinterest or disregard in the impact of rape, and arguably in some cases approval or even ordering by states. As the following chapter will go on to explore, the identification of rape as a systematic or planned campaign now falls under the category of 'crimes against humanity' and may be tried by the International Criminal Courts as such. However, this form of state crime, although evident in many conflicts and civil unrest and well accounted by survivors and international organisations, is seldom a key focus for prosecutors (Sharlach, 2000: 90).

### **2.6.3 Rape as Torture**

Just as levels of rape evidently increase during conflict and war, so the use of wider forms of violence during rape intensifies. Strands of feminist thought have long identified rape as a sexual manifestation of violence and power (Brownmiller, 1975; Gunn and Minch, 1988; Seifert, 1994; Holmes and Holmes, 2009). However, counter arguments have situated heteronormative sex (consensual or otherwise) as innately linked with, and reflective of, violence. This includes, for example, a perception of rape that 'men violating women has a sexual component... men rape women because they get off on

it in a way that fuses dominance with sexuality' (Mackinnon, 1981: 92), and as such rape is recognised as an eroticised form of sex, rather than being situated as a separate entity.

In terms of conflict related sexual violence, the use of power and violence is evidenced in the use of weapons for penetration, rather than penetrating women for physical sexual gratification in the way that biological essentialist notions of rape have tended to view the act. However, as arguments put forward by MacKinnon (1981) and later Dworkin (1987) suggest, there remains an integral eroticisation and sexualisation of these forms of rape and sexual abuse. Whilst this section recognises these latter arguments, it goes on to consider rape as method of power assertion during conflict, facilitated by gender power ordering, and considers the wider forms of violence that can be perpetrated in tandem.

Violence in conflict can be particularly brutal and rape regularly includes multiple perpetrator rape, rape/death and penetration of the vagina with weapons and other materials. In an analysis of one hundred accounts of women from countries in conflict who had been raped during conflict, Clarke (2004) outlines further torture against women. Out of the 100, only nine women stated that no other violence occurred other than the rape (although this is in itself an act of violence) and types of violence ranged from 'sticks and guns pushed into vagina/told to have sex with a dead body', 'truncheon pushed into vagina when pregnant' and 'eldest son forced to rape her'. Furthermore, 35 of the women reported one episode of rape with more than one man, and another 35 indicated more than one episode of rape, with more than one man, many times (ibid: 49, see also Clark, 2004, Appendix Two).

Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* (1997) pioneered in exposing, both visually and literarily, the violent sexual penetration of women with such objects. Images included Chinese women tied to chairs with bamboo forced into their vaginas, and stories included penetration by rifles and other weapons, mostly perpetrated by male Japanese invaders. One Japanese

soldier recollects from the invasion, or rape, of Nanking, 'So many bodies on the street, victims of group rape and murder. They were all stripped naked, their breasts cut off leaving a terrible dark brown hole... Some has a roll of paper or a piece of wood stuffed in their vaginas' (cited in Jones, 1996: 329). Such methods (as well as the violent nature of rape itself) can undoubtedly be equated with torture.

To draw correlations, Susan Brownmiller (1975) described various situations when similar tactics have been adopted, including the cutting off of breasts by British and German soldiers infected with syphilis during the Second World War as a method of branding, and as a way to warn other soldiers of possible transmission, also reminiscent of the violent strategy detailed in the account by Monique B.'s mother (in section 2.5.1) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Brownmiller goes on to highlight instances by American soldiers during The Vietnam War, Pakistani soldiers in Bangladesh and, in *Mass Rapes* (1994), Serbian soldiers in Bosnia. The act of branding as a reminder of humiliation has since been identified as a tactic used by the Janjawid against women who have been raped by groups of perpetrators in the Darfur region of Sudan (Amnesty International, 2004a, Flint and De Waal, 2005) and numerous other accounts of physical torture have since filtered through reports from Amnesty International (2007; 2008), World Health Organisation (2000) and Human Rights Watch (1996). In cultures where women's sexual honour is valued (sometimes even more than her life) a branded woman symbolises failure and impurity. In Libya, for example, reports are currently permeating global media of 'honour suicides' by raped women, advocated in some instances by family members (Jabar, 2011).

Whilst many humanitarian organisations have historically targeted governments and institutions that engage in torture against, or persecute individuals on the basis of their religion, ethnic identity or nationality, recognising the torture and genocide of women as a group has been a long time coming. Although action has not been fully taken to prevent racial, ethnic or religious torture, as evidenced in the lack of international

intervention of the Rwandan or Bosnia genocides, it is still discussed and condemned more widely by the international community than systematic sexual violence, despite mass abuses of women based on their gender. Furthermore, sexual violence arguably still takes a back seat, or is considered a separate entity to other forms of torture in conflict.

## **2.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter intricately details sexual violence as a strategy of warfare in varying conflicts, wars and civil unrest historically, recently and currently. Accounts still remain minimal in comparison with the indicated prevalence of rape in conflict settings, but those which are made available through research in conflict and post-conflict regions demonstrate a bleak picture of abuse of women and girls. Whether as ascribed demands, official or unofficial policy or opportunistic violence, rape is evident on mass scales globally. From a feminist perspective, it is arguable that the terms 'mass' should not be used to undermine individualistic experience of violence subjection, yet to push for adequate response to sexual violence there evidently remains a necessity to highlight the systematic nature of many rapes with impunity, as is seen also in peacetime. Importantly, the impact of sexual violence on levels such as those indicated throughout arguably adds pressure to prevent rather than respond. Sociologically, this lies in questioning social attitudes to women in and out of conflict and, as the next chapter will explore, in challenging legislation and the social motivation regarding sexual violence in conflict. Central to this is the need to move away from biological essentialism, which continues to legitimise rape and forced prostitution during conflict or accept it as inevitable.

Perhaps one of the most pervasive arguments in this chapter is the need to recognise similarity in experience to legitimise the focus on 'variation' of violence, as has been a focus in the work of Elisabeth Wood (2006, 2009a). Wood has importantly indicated that not all conflicts are similar in context, and that forms of violence against women and girls (such as rape, forced marriage or sexual slavery) vary depending on social attitudes or wider uses

of violence and opportunity, as well as on militaristic orders (Wood 2009a). This is evidenced also in Wood's research indicating that not all armed forces choose to rape, and as such this is not an inevitability (2009b).

This chapter has also highlighted that despite different contexts, historical eras or styles of conflict, the way in which women are subjected to violence and humiliation remains similar. This is reflective of the gendering of shame (see Enander, 2010), where the value of women can be deeply embedded in honour, and where self-worth is undermined by social stigmatisation and internalisation of shame resultant from male violence. Violation of this can instigate socially and individually internalised silencing, shame and marginalisation. For example, the public humiliation of German women is resonant in community rejection of rape survivors in Rwanda, while the cutting of women's breasts and bodies during the Second World War is echoed in the death of Monique B. in contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo. The spectacle of sexual humiliation in uses of pornography in Bosnia maintains an essence of the pornification of women's bodies outlined by Mulhauser in Russia. These similarities transcend each conflict but underscore the commonality of violence against women in varying cultures and contexts globally and historically.

In all, this chapter has explored a range of literature, including feminist responses, individual accounts made available through international organisations, genocide literature, history and, to some degree, philosophy. Much of this literature outlines varying forms of conflict, and the prevalence of rape and sexual violence within this. However, this chapter has also emphasised that literature without a feminist or woman-centred focus continues to overlook the most common correlating factor in the rape and mass rapes of women: gendered perpetration and victimisation.

The following chapters will highlight the volatile relationship between survivors of sexual violence and the society or community they live in, looking specifically at impacts on wider communities and the legislative responses

implemented, or not, to improve women's situations and security. As this thesis will continue to argue, these factors should be more closely connected and, as such, more thoroughly considered by relevant governmental bodies, beyond the realm of those concerned with 'gender issues' and feminism to push violence against women further in social and international consciousness. To draw from this chapter and provide a deeper theoretical perspective on sexual violence in conflict, the next chapter will develop a sociological analysis of women's rights, specifically as human rights, outlining gaps in knowledge and perspective and exploring the development of legislation to protect women and challenge state sanctioned impunity.

## **3.0 Chapter Three: Women's Right's, Human Rights and Sociology**

*'To understand such crimes [violent crimes perpetrated by the state] it is necessary to integrate macro-social accounts of state formation with micro-social accounts of individual motivation and emotion.'*

(Green and Ward, 2009: 117)

### **3.1 Introduction**

As has been established, the use of sexual violence against women as a state sanctioned form of warfare is evident contemporarily and historically. Simultaneous to academic acknowledgment of rape in conflict has been academic interest in human rights discourses and approaches. Sociology, for example, has seen slowly emerging input to human rights discourses (Hynes et al, 2011) and there now exists a gradually firming contribution specifically with regard to academia in the United Kingdom and internationally.

However, there remain gaps in varying forms of literature within social sciences, including sociology and its sub-disciplines, with regard to human rights. They have been slow to respond to otherwise globally acknowledged atrocities, as well as to sexual violence, in conflict in particular. The aim of this chapter is to implement the use of macro and micro sociological perspectives in this arena of study, and to critically analyse the engagement of sociology in the subject of sexual violence in conflict as well as women's rights as human rights. It outlines the expansion of human rights discourses within sociology as a discipline and again emphasises the marginalisation of women within this literature. Overall it will gauge developments in international recognition of rape as a deliberate tactic of warfare and the implementation of legislation surrounding this. Following from Chapter Two, it acknowledges the effects of rape in conflict as outlined by Peel (2004) and in scoping the significance of these effects at localised and international levels, discusses three sociological perspectives which work as examples of sociological engagement on a theoretical level and in methodological

development of research strategies. In doing this, this chapter calls for sociological approaches to engage more thoroughly in research and policy development/implementation regarding the human rights of women raped in conflict.

### **3.2 Sociology of Rights: Emerging Perspectives**

As Bryan Turner (1993), Damien Short (2009) and Michael Goodhart (2009) outline, discourses around human rights and rights legislation are multifaceted. Whilst human rights are often documented in a positive and inclusive light, the social process of the institutionalisation of rights is embedded with complex power negotiations and hegemonic understandings of what 'rights' actually means, and whose rights are included in these discourses. The issue of sexual violence in conflict perfectly illustrates the exclusionary practices that can result from hierarchal developments of human rights policies, practices and legislation. As socio-cultural feminists have long argued, cultures which reproduce patriarchal structures are globally dominant in most societies (Brownmiller, 1975; Bourke, 2007). In systematically reproducing gender power orders, they continue to exclude or marginalise issues, such as sexual violence, that largely affect women, despite the rippling effects for all of society. This has created a chasm in women's rights to the 'equal moral respect and the social status, support, and protection necessary to achieve that respect' (Goodhart, *ibid*: 4) that human rights ideologically allow. Rights are seldom exclusively produced by and for women, or with due consideration of gender specific issues that largely affect women (Copelon, 2004; Mackinnon, 1999). As such, legislation and political strategies can omit or side-line sexual violence as a human rights issue. This affects prevention, response and support for women who have experienced, or may experience, rape and sexual violence in war, conflict and civil unrest, which then resonates to impact on women's rights to asylum, protection and justice.

As a number of feminist writers have argued, clear divisions are perpetuated in both sociological approaches and multi-disciplinary approaches to sexual

violence. Although Richter's model (1998 in Peel, 2004), outlined in Chapter Two, is all encompassing as a multi-disciplinary approach to wartime rape, it does not itself provide a thorough focus on feminist interpretations of the act of rape against women. This may be because other non-feminist discourses, including mainstream or traditional sociological approaches, seldom engage in discussion around the rights of women or sexual violence (MacKinnon, 1994), but also because sociology and other social sciences may focus on issues for society structurally rather than individually, such as those indicated in Richter's outline.

To highlight one example of this, in discussing rape and genocide Martin Shaw states, 'Women... may be targeted for rape because of the humiliation that their violation will bring as a society as a whole, and especially on their menfolk' (2003: 179). Whilst this may well be true, and although women's bodies may be utilised as pawns in undermining enemy groups, the reiteration of a sense of side-lining is evident in considering the position of the woman in the perpetration of rape. Societies, communities and indeed men are greatly affected by rape in conflict, particularly as public rape is common in conflict, as was evident during the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian War and presently in the South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, further instilling fear. As discussed, the impact of rape can have a rippling effect through social structures and institutions, as well as increasing displacement and asylum for all members of a social group or community. This does not, however, need to erase or overshadow the significant social, physical, emotional and psychological effects that rape and rape in conflict has on the individual women who survive it, especially since the number of individual survivors run well into the millions. To shift focus from the significance of this is to further side-line the human rights of millions of people, and reinstates patriarchal definitions of what is and is not of highest importance in assessing and implementing strategies regarding these rights. By preventing violence against the individual, and in providing sustained and thorough support, protection and counselling to those who survive it, the interests of wider society are already protected. It is often first

responses and prevention for individuals that curb the aftermath of sexual violence.

Gaining a rounded approach to understanding, researching and challenging rape and sexual violence in conflict is a vital yet complicated objective: whilst feminism may have paved the way in research, the complexities surrounding conflict environments are vast. As Shaw points out, 'War as a social practice is highly institutionalised' (2003: 21), therefore actions which occur during war are not always individualised acts and do not exist within a vacuum, but as part of an overarching social and institutional entity. Rape and sexual violence within this environment are no exception but, like other forms of extreme violence which occur during such times, social influences encouraging or condoning sexual violence are processes that should be critically addressed.

Despite the interlinking of societal concepts with the prevalence and, arguably, normalisation of rape during conflict, sociology is arguably fairly disengaged from focusing on rape as a crime against humanity, or women's human rights in general (Fudge, 1987; Westmarland, 2005). This may of course link to the lack of sociological discourse surrounding human rights more generally, as outlined first by Bryan Turner (1993) and more recently by Michael Goodhart (2009) and Damien Short (2009). As human rights develop into political practice (Woodiwiss, 2003), those who have been overlooked within practices and policy, including for example immigrants and forced migrants, asylum seekers and stateless people, human rights can be both inclusive and exclusionary. This is furthered when considering the rights of women, who have been, and continue to be, significantly overlooked in discourses around rights and citizenship. This has been evidenced in the UK, for example, by feminist sociologists such as Nicole Westmarland, who outlined the lack of rights based prosecutions from survivors of rape in the UK (2005). This gap in rights based approaches to sexual violence is widely noted, including in more general sociological studies in the global North (Bunch, 1990; Copelon, 1994, 2004; Mackinnon, 2006).

As Delamont argues, 'The relations between feminist sociology and the malestream has frequently been stormy... At best, there is an ambivalence about grounding feminist sociology in ideas originally produced by men whose theoretical and personal views on women are, by contemporary standards, unsound' (2003: 14). 'Traditional' streams in sociology may continue to avoid discussion on violence against women, or feminist discourses in general. However, and as discussed below, this disassociation with women's rights as human rights ebbs into legislative practices regarding sexual violence in conflict and impacts practically on the external effects that develop from this violence, including the gendered experience of asylum and migration. Outside of major contributions made by feminist sociologists and studies, such as those by Susan Brownmiller (1975) Liz Kelly (1988; 2000) and Cynthia Enloe (1987) women's rights have been marginalised in Western sociology more generally.

As developments are made in sociological engagement with human rights or international perspectives on, for example, genocide, gender is not always fully and intricately embedded in general sociological analyses of rights violations. Although theorists such as Daniela De Vito et al (2009) Lisa Sharlach (2000) and Janie Leatherman (2011) do provide gendered analyses, this is often again from an approach specifically focussed on rape as genocide. This concern, a need for gendered review of human rights legislation and implementation, is argued by academics and activists such as Bunch (1990), Elson (2006) and Mackinnon (1999). As outlined in the previous chapter, other genocide theorists, such as Martin Shaw (1993) and Alex Alvarez (2010) discuss many issues relevant to human rights in terms of genocidal crimes, but still incorporate little in regard to women's experiences of genocide or the gendered experiences of displacement and asylum. This is of great concern, especially considering that underlying societal influences which breed cultures of violence against women as well as cultures that perpetuate gendered power binaries and women's subordination, are inextricably tied to sociological concerns.

To illustrate this, it is worth considering points that are strongly related to creating and perpetuating societal norms and socially agreed values. Relevant points will be considered to highlight the significance of sociological concerns in issues entwined with rape in conflict. These include military cultures, specifically multiple perpetrator rape and masculinity; consideration of relevant sociological perspectives; shortcomings in legislation and policy development; and complexities in sociological research into sexual violence in war and conflict.

### **3.2.1 Masculinity, Multiple Perpetrator Rape and Fratriarchy**

A significant aspect of rape in conflict, and one which has often been overlooked by feminism, is the construction of masculinity through external social institutions and the broader socialisation process. Whilst constructions of femininity are widely focused on, particularly media representation (McRobbie, 1990; Mulvey, 1989), Western feminist thought does not always focus strongly on constructions of masculinity, and yet military environments within which rape and sexual violence occur are overwhelmingly (and for some, exclusively) male institutions. This lack of focus may have many bases, and those engaging in discussion or research regarding sexual violence in any social realm have various difficulties. Before even scraping the surface of perpetration, low conviction rates, wide scale impunity for perpetrators globally and little or no support for survivors, reproduce constant emphasis on the survivor. However, to quote Helen Jones, 'it is, in fact, all about the men' (2010).

To bring further sociological focus to the perpetration of rape and sexual violence during conflict, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (1987) whereby man is powerful, physically and sexually dominant, a binary to the perceptively weak female, is enforced within numerous settings. Perhaps this is never more so than within gangs or military units. Second wave feminists, in particular Susan Brownmiller, were indeed first to identify rape and sexual violence as both a symptom and a product of power relations and binaries

rather than a singularly psychological or biological deviation (Brownmiller, 1975; Jones and Cook, 2008). These same forms of power are evidently exerted in the extreme when particularly violent forms of rape are perpetuated in social groups, most notably multiple perpetrator rape and rape-murder.

As discussed in Chapter Two, and as determined in research undertaken by numerous (largely feminist) scholars, non-governmental organisations and aid agencies, multiple perpetrator rape is a particularly common form of rape in conflicts. Although multiple perpetrator and gang rape are also evident in non-conflict situations, feminist scholars such as Joanna Bourke note that the increase in multiple perpetrator rape during war and unrest is partially due to the comrade nature of being in the armed forces and living as 'buddies' or in close cultural structures (Brownmiller, *ibid*; Bourke, 2007). Reports from agencies and organisations such as the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (2009) and the Refugee Council (2009a) indicate that multiple perpetrator rape can be as common in conflict, and sometimes more so in some conflicts, as rape by an individual man. This problematises mainstream approaches to sexual violence, as the social dynamic of multiple perpetrator rape removes rape from the individualistic private sphere in which it can often reside and places it in a public domain that is influenced and perpetuated by gendered social processes. When an individual man chooses to rape a woman, it can be easy to label him deviant, a loner, pervert, psychopath, all labels which can, if incorrectly applied, ignore that the act itself is embedded in a complex web of socialisation processes and institutional power structures. For example, Soothill and Walby highlighted the UK media's inaccurate labelling of rapists as deviants and psychopaths, yet it continues to be evident in reports on sexual violence. This vastly undermines the perpetrator's social autonomy, or the structures and gender dichotomies produced in societies that harbour violence against women (1991). Multiple perpetrator rape, on the other hand, cannot be explained away, since an agreement of values must be reached between more than

one (subjection to rape by 29 male perpetrators is documented in an account in Roy Gutman's *A Witness to Genocide*, 1993) man to perpetrate the rape.

Living within a social setting with similar daily experiences often results in shared values and norms and, as Scully and Marolla point out, 'Feminists see rape as an extension of normative male behaviour, the result of conformity or over-conformity to the values and prerogatives that define the traditional sex role' (1985: 28). Some level of acceptance of rape as a normative element of hegemonic masculinity must then exist for more than one man to rape one woman, and this becomes more complex when multiple perpetrator rape becomes as common as individual rape (1993: 28). Wood refers to this as 'Small Unit Dynamics' whereby individuals enter armed groups with norms concerning violence, usually agreeing that extreme violence is morally 'wrong', but that this changes through specific socialisation processes which are employed throughout training (2009a, also see Bourke, 2007; Sanday, 2007). Wood considers obedience and conformity to be the most significant forms of control, as each employs tactics that form small social units such as collective punishment and drill regimes, tightening and strengthening social bonds within these groups. Therefore, decisions made and actions taken involve the input of, and agreement between, the whole immediate group. Wood describes this as 'Primary Group Cohesion', which is perhaps a significant factor when considering impunity for perpetrators, a huge issue in both preventing and responding to rape and sexual violence in war and conflict.

Therefore, drawing on sociological models and theoretical perspectives may be beneficial to feminist discourses of multiple perpetrator rape in conflict, for example in considering the varying degrees in different contexts, but also in addressing the human rights of the women targeted. For the purpose of this chapter, relevant sections of sociological perspectives and theories will be highlighted, including Social Action, hypermasculinity and fratriarchy, and Symbolic Interaction as three perspectives that could, in differing degrees and diverse contexts, be relevant to the theoretical and practical

development of studies into rape in conflict. Each has been chosen based on the relevance to other discussions within this particular contribution. Whilst a full critical analysis of each of these theories and approaches is not possible within the scope of this chapter, and although each is not without its flaws, various points are applicable to some instances where rapes in conflict are evident on a mass scale.

Focussing firstly at this point on mass rapes ordered and perpetrated against women during the Rwandan genocide, fundamental elements of Social Action, and more specifically the interlinking of the micro and macro forms of Structure and Agency and their relationship with crime (Messerschmidt, 1997), are relevant in part. Consider the deliberate annihilation and humiliation of an ethnic group, in this case Tutsis and some moderate Hutus, as a form of rational action that combines the complex negotiation in processes between micro and macro. Although the consequences would be extreme, a rational decision was made both by groups and individuals to commit rapes as part of a larger scale of combat (Magnarella, 2005). Numerous accounts from both perpetrators and survivors correlate in acknowledging the structural offsetting of the Genocide and mass rapes. Citing socio-historical and socio-political influences such as the 'othering' which stemmed, if not largely then at least in part, from the introduction of ethnic identity cards between 1933-1934 (Magnarella, *ibid*; Hatzfeld, 2005), the bombing of Hutu President Habyarimana's plane and the influence of the media (Magnarella, *ibid*; Hatzfeld, *ibid*) demonstrates structural influences toward ethnic annihilation by any means, including rape and rape murder (Hatzfeld, *ibid*). Considering that there was a clear historical and contemporary drive to eliminate a rival people, deliberate and premeditated steps were taken on individualistic and structural levels to 'kill every Tutsi without exception' (quote from a Rwandan genocide participant, *Fulgence*, in Hatzfeld, *ibid*: 9), leading to an agreed and predetermined goal.

### 3.2.2 Hypermasculinity and Fratriarchy

This does not take away from two issues: that rape is still actively perpetrated by individuals within a group, and that the decision to rape is still reflective of women's socially imposed status as less powerful, and that the macro effects of this are felt on micro levels by the individual woman raped. To question then, how and why this is a chosen strategy that individuals engage in collectively, feminist discussions regarding women's social position as subordinate and oppressed, combined with the prevalent existence of a hypermasculinity within fraternities in many conflict situations, may provide one possible indicator for the high rate of multiple perpetrator rape during conflict situations. To focus in again, Mosher and Sirkin's model of the hypermasculine as characteristically viewing violence as 'manly', perceiving danger as 'exciting' and displaying a 'callousness toward women' (Mosher and Sirkin, 1984: 150-164) are evident in the perpetration of multiple perpetrator rape and to a degree tie in with the fratriarchal (Remy, 1990) elements of multiple perpetrator rape (see Sanday, 2007 for similar discussion with regard to fraternities in the US). Drawing out agreed norms of masculine interaction with feminine (see Hearn and Morgan, 1990), and combining a degree of the socially constructed power binaries between male and female which clearly manifests at a time when impunity exists for the perpetrators, with a climate of indifference with regard to violence against women (Medical Foundation, 2010) perpetuates violent sexual crimes. Blending these contributors in an already violent environment seems to expose to some degree a traditionally hegemonic power structure that embraces sexual power and force as a form of self-expression and bonding process between victors. Even if an army unit is not militaristically superior, morale and power can be sought through exerting power to those who are perceptively penetrable and therefore perceptively weaker, rendering rape a normative strategy in developing a 'buddies' culture (Bilton and Sim, 1992; Brownmiller, 1975). As Bourke argues, 'Gang rape was seen as essential in the process of bonding men together as men' (2007: 364).

A hierarchy of power is integral within military units. Whilst this can indeed refer to gendered power binaries, often themselves reflective of 'peacetime' structures, another focus can be placed on the hierarchal ranking systems within military regimes, and the effects that this has on the continuation of rape and sexual violence. Drawing from Remy's idea of 'fratriarchy' (1990), structures within the military are reflective both of patriarchy in the 'traditional' sense of a father figure as the head of a family or institution (Connell, 1987, see also Hearn and Morgan, 1990) in terms of official ranks (from brigades and divisions to commands) as well as the unofficial hierarchies within these structures. For example, in her on-going study of multiple perpetrator rapes of Jewish women by German soldiers during the Second World War, Mulhauser (2009) highlights that instances of rapes increased as the War progressed. This was contrary to orders expressed *not* to rape the perceptively inferior 'Judenrat', a derogatory term used against Jews and particularly Jewish women during rapes, as the women were deemed too 'unclean' for German Aryans. Nonetheless, Mulhauser argues, multiple perpetrator rapes became more frequent and were often perpetrated in hierarchal orders with the commander leading, whilst others 'celebrate and follow'. This hierarchal raping is echoed in accounts of rapes of Bosnian women documented by Stiglmeier (1994) and Gutman (1993) (see Chapter Two for a fuller discussion).

It is here that the idea of 'fratriarchy' is a relevant model of masculine and hypermasculine engagement in the social development and perpetration of rape and sexual violence during war and conflict. A structural setting which 'reflects the demand of a group of lads to have the freedom to do what they please' (Remy, 1990: 45) allows space for men to undertake activities that are perhaps deviant from social ideals of moralistic 'norms' but which reaffirm the individual's willingness to both command and follow. Remy further outlines,

*'The experience of the members of the fraternity undergoing a special ceremony involving the collective symbolic shedding of blood, as may happen most strikingly in war... It is an easy step*

*for the fraternity, particularly if it is a blood brotherhood, to develop a full blown secret society.'*

(Ibid: 45)

Applying this idea of a ritualistic 'ceremony' to rape and sexual violence is indicative of the kind of brotherhood configuration of militaristic groups; including peacekeeping forces, rebel militia and army factions. A socially agreed act is performed to establish inclusion, exclusion and leadership, in this case, multiple perpetrator rape and rape-murder. The concept of a 'secret society' further establishes bonds of trust, separating one social structure from another, helping to create a veil of impenetrability whereby perpetrators are neither accused nor convicted of their crimes.

These strategies are not only effective as a tactic to maintain an air of domination within military units but, as Bourke points out regarding the Vietnam War, 'Raping and killing civilians sent out a warning to the guerrillas... that these units were indomitable' (2007, 362). That these acts are often committed publicly and in front of family members works to humiliate the woman and her community (particularly in compromising her 'virtue', and therefore perceived femininity) and undermines the masculinity of men from that community who have not been capable of protecting 'their' women from rape. Considering the localised ethnic and nationalistic elements of conflicts in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, this may be a contributing factor, particularly in shattering communities and forcing migration, and therefore asylum. Raping and/or raping and murdering 'other' women indeed reinforces the dominance of the perpetrator; men who are capable of killing those who are perceptively innocent or defenceless are clearly a ruthless and powerful force. Nonetheless, the impact of rape on the woman, and the social position she holds for which she is targeted, should still remain in focus. Certainly, in the cases of Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, one reason women were targeted was because of ethnic origin. This does not, however, account for the many instances where localised historical ethnic divisions are not paramount in conflict and the rape and mass rape of women. To highlight examples, 'peacekeeping' troops who rape or rape women in groups do not

fall into this category, nor do the mass rape-murders perpetrated in My Lai by American troops. It is highlighting these differences in contexts that strengthen the one common correlation: that girls and women can be, and are, raped because of their gender.

Along with individual rape, women are recurrently maimed, terrorised and raped by multiple perpetrators before being shot, beheaded or butchered (Bilton and Sim, 1992; Bourke, 2007; Chang, 1997). While this may be analysed as particularly deviant or atypical behaviour, Bauermeister described the actions of the soldier rapist-murderer as, 'rational, flexible with the circumstances, supported by his peers, deliberately executed', and thus showing 'all the traits of 'normal behaviour' (Bauermeister, 1977 in Bourke, 2007: 381). Violence against women and femicide itself are, like rape, not exclusive to conflict situations but are manifest in all patriarchal societies (Brownmiller, 1975), and therefore can be seen as an (albeit horrifically violent and particularly systematic) extension of a pre-existing normative social phenomenon. Although this may seem like a contradiction in terms, the indication is that, although not all men engage in either rape or rape murder, neither are absent from any patriarchal society. To reiterate, some level of normativity or acceptability must exist to allow such vast numbers of rapes and rape murders to take place during conflict, largely stemming from power binaries, agreed social perceptions of women and overall subordination.

### **3.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism**

Drawing on a final perspective, and reaffirming that all perspectives are not globally applicable to every conflict or instance of civil unrest, Symbolic Interaction can at some level apply to the decision making process in choosing to rape women individually or in groups. As Brownmiller (ibid) Enloe (1987) and Mackinnon (1999) have discussed at length, woman is ideologically signified as penetrable and even insignificant. This ideology is evidenced in the actual raping of a woman, with insignificance being exemplified both in the physical perpetration and the on-going social attitudes and disregard of her and her violation. This is relevant to the lack of support

available for the survivor, lack of community understanding if those within society disregard her, and more politically, the lack of regard for her survivor status in human rights legislation, criminal justice or asylum policies. Rape is further entwined in symbolism metaphorically with historical discourses referring to the 'rape' of an invaded country or state (Spivak, 1999).

With reflection on this, and shifting back to a wider sociological level, both Symbolic Interaction and Social Action can be located and applied (in tandem with an acknowledgement of the subordinate status of women) in varying degrees to both macro and micro perpetrations of sexual violence on mass scales during conflict. If men are expected or encouraged to dominate in all forms, this increases the likelihood of one of these forms being sexual domination. If impunity exists and sexual violence is visibly and socially normative and accepted, a social role as rapist, outside of private spheres, is created. To echo Goffman's *Presentation of Self* (1959; 1990, for a feminist criticism of Goffman see Delamont, 2003: 117), each actor takes his role, in this case as a dominant militant aggressor, with rape as a deliberate and militaristically approved strategy.

One disenchanting issue in applying these areas of sociology to the perpetration of rape in conflict may be that the examination of social contributors or external influences reinstates some level of excuse for perpetration, as though no choice exists for the rapist to not engage in sexual violence. Considering the levels of impunity that exist on a global scale for rapists and, in this case wartime rapists, this is a valid concern. Perhaps by focussing too sociologically on the acts of perpetrators, autonomy for the individual's decision to rape, under whatever circumstance, is taken away. This leaves an opportunity for social or militaristic environments to be used as a scapegoat for individual perpetrations. This was perhaps evident in the aftermath of the mass rapes and rape-murders of Vietnamese women by American GIs when Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was used as an excuse for anyone who raped during the destruction of, for example, My Lai, which

Bourke has been particularly critical of, deeming it an escape route for soldier perpetrators of sexual violence (2007: 384, see also Chapter Two).

On the other hand, if the same sociological theories were to be applied with feminist approaches to preventative strategies and human rights, some impact might be made at grassroots levels to prevent (to some degree) the environments that aid in the perpetuation of the mass raping of women in conflict situations. This may be particularly beneficial in challenging understandings and acceptances of masculinity in social institutions (including education) and by practically implementing policy and legislation regarding justice for war rape survivors. One danger remains, however, in the application of Westernised concepts to non-Western contexts. As discussed in Chapter One, Westernised feminist approaches can have problematic consequences if attempts are made to explain localised issues or social phenomena. Western approaches to violence against women have received critical responses in some areas and regions, specifically with regard to international legislation or organisations such as UN's Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

To draw back to the need for theoretical development of rape and sexual violence in war and conflict, as briefly outlined in Chapter Two, Wood (2009a) identifies a number of theories which have been developed separately within sociology, psychology and feminism, but argues that all are incomplete. Whilst Richter (1998, see Chapter Two) outlines reasons behind the incidence of rape in war, in a plenary conference presentation, Wood highlighted the theories that exist to explain it, concluding that all are incomplete:

- ‘Type of Conflict’ theory, for example guerilla warfare;
- ‘Co-variation’ theory i.e. sexual violence is high when instances of other violence is high;
- ‘Strategy of War’ theory, which is particularly prominent in most writings around rape and sexual violence in war and conflict and has been discussed throughout Chapter Three;
- Biologically essentialist theories, which see rape as a form of masculine physical release;
- Opportunity theory, which refers to men choosing to rape if there appears opportunity with impunity;
- ‘Substitution’ theory, where rape is a substitute for consensual sex;
- ‘Revenge’ theory, where rape is used as a tactic to avenge wrongdoings by the enemy, which may include rape itself;
- ‘Militarized Masculinity’ theory, as discussed in earlier in relation to patriarchy;
- ‘Combat Socialisation’ theory.

(2009a)

Throughout this chapter and the last, all of these theories are notable (if not also sociologically contestable, particularly biological theory) suggesting that Wood’s claim that one approach is not adequate is legitimate. What must be considered, as demonstrated through the contextualisation of conflicts in Chapter Two, is that although similarities exist in the instances of wartime rape and as a strategy of oppression and domination, conflicts do still differ in context, geographic position and time. This links back also to the challenge of dominant Western discourses in international response. Therefore, overarching concepts should not always be applied from any one theoretical approach, but should adopt as wide and far-reaching interdisciplinary approaches to allow for the dynamics of warfare on micro and macro levels to be thoroughly considered.

### 3.3 Legislative Responses

Human rights policies, legislation and resolutions have been developing to incorporate gender-specific models over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The inability for international communities to ignore mass rapes of women during the Second World War, including the pre-Second World War invasion of Nanking (Chang, 1997) meant that the Geneva Convention could not overlook sexual violence, and incorporated the 'special protection' of women in Article 27. Nonetheless, this did not result in anything near adequate results in terms of conviction or further prevention (Kelly, 2000).

More relevant and specific policies have been developed since the mass rapes of women in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the early-mid 1990s. The ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) acknowledged rape as a crime against humanity, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998 was a marked milestone for human rights. Since then, the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 (2000) addresses the gender specific impact of war and conflict on women, whilst Resolution 1820 (2008) finally identifies rape and sexual violence during war and conflict as a threat to international peace and security and a war crime.

Nonetheless, systematic sexual violence in conflict remains a global atrocity which continues to be committed with large scale impunity. Despite being recognised as a crime against humanity, and although prohibited under international law, rape is not specifically identified as an international crime, complicating systematic prosecution. Furthermore, when rape is incorporated into humanitarian law it is often associated with honour rather than violence, which in itself perpetuates ideologies around honour may then be reinforced when women are ostracised for being 'dishonoured' through rape (DeVito et al, 2009; Mackinnon, 2006).

Whilst developments in legislation, including the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 and Resolution 1820, as well as the ICTR, are indeed

indicative of marked progress, largely on the back of feminist and women's rights campaigns and organisations, the continuation of the mass violations of women's human rights provides serious challenges to the reality of success in policy implementation. The ICC has made many successful steps in acknowledging rape as a crime against humanity, incorporating the charge into some successful high profile prosecutions and arrests of war criminals and those suspected of war crimes. Indeed, this potentially serves a function of deterrence for high ranking officers to order or incite mass rapes, but does not directly challenge the micro or macro social structures and orders which support sexual violence (Dallman, 2009), as discussed throughout. Less militaristically powerful perpetrators (including civilians) mostly escape the ICC's mandate, and yet all rapes can have severe consequences. The macro structures perpetuating sexual violence and gender power binaries do not stand alone, but are intricately linked to the micro levels and individual perpetration of rape and therefore require systematic dissolution at every level.

Leading on from this, it is of course important to acknowledge, and not undermine, the complexities in responding to crisis situations. Certainly, when conflict occurs, significant problems arise on many levels. The international community can indeed be challenged in reacting to the many forms of support that are required, from medical aid, to economic support, sustenance, and asylum. Prioritising support is no doubt a complex process. Nonetheless, the likelihood that systematic public sexual violence will escalate, as it often does when protective barriers are removed from women (Refugee Council, 2009a), should remain in focus during first responses to prevention of sexual violence in conflict. Acknowledgement in the first response allows implementation of strategies for prevention, which may come in the form of physical protection, asylum or refuge. Whilst this can be effective, the main issue here is that these forms of protection are not always successful in preventing sexual violence. The root causes in the violation of women's bodies are embedded beyond refuge. To illustrate, the protection of 'peacekeepers' has proven unsuccessful in many instances where reports of

rape, forced prostitution and transactional sex are made and, reiterating a previous point, various organisations have identified the prevalence of rape during displacement or asylum processes.

So again the question arises, 'What can be done to *prevent* sexual violence in conflict?' Whilst this is evidently not an easy question to answer, recommendations have been made time and again by organisations working at grassroots levels (for example NSVRC, 2004; Médecins Sans Frontières , 2005; Medical Foundation, 2009). Suggestions include ending impunity for *all* perpetrators and accomplices, which may act as a deterrent to other potential perpetrators and exercise justice for the survivor(s). Recommendations call for the end to stigma and persecution of the survivor, and for practical development in educational models promoting gender equality and women's rights, on global scales, to effectively challenge normative attitudes regarding sexual violence and gender power dichotomies (for example South Africa Medical Research Council, 2010 for preventative measures).

These recommendations exist, yet are seldom implemented at ground level. If they continue to be ignored, overlooked or side-lined in the first responses to conflict or crisis, the on-going effects on the individual, society and international community documented earlier will continue to be avoidably reproduced. Violence against women is not inevitable, yet it will continue on mass scales as already proven in the current cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur, to name a few.

### **3.4 Ongoing Genocide and Post-Conflict issues**

A significant proportion of current civil conflicts are on-going in economically unstable and/or developing countries (Elbe, 2002; Mills and Nachegea, 2006). Within some of these countries, particularly sub-Saharan regions, HIV rates are endemic. As an example, consider that Zimbabwe has 1.6 million people living with HIV (around 25% of the population: HRW, 2003), some of whom are not aware of their condition due to the cost of HIV testing or the lack of

medical aid in rural regions. This potentially results in unknown transmission of the virus during both consensual sex and rape.

With reflection on the discussion of the prevalence of multiple perpetrator rape within conflicts, the chances of contracting HIV may be greatly increased in proportion to the number of 'participants', some of whom may not be raping for the first time (Elbe, 2002). This adds to the issue of an on-going genocide in specific regions such as the Rwandan genocide, or the mass rapes in the former Yugoslavia, as transmission of the virus is practically unavoidable, particularly as many women will not be able to determine if they have been infected for some time. Although Jewkes (2007) emphasises the lack of empirical data that would be necessary to be able to make accurate assumptions of the overall statistics in terms of HIV transmission, deliberate or otherwise, there remains post-conflict effects reflective of genocidal intent. If genocide is a systematic 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group', (Article Two of the Genocide Convention) through (amongst other means) killing or 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part' (ibid) then acts committed almost twenty years ago have had an on-going impact on, for example, contemporary Rwanda. Without even focussing on the political complications contributing to present day conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (such as displaced Rwandan persons in the DRC impacting on the ethnic and political conflict between Congolese and Hutu opposition which has, in part, contributed to the conflict since 1997) the aftermath of genocide is still visible in Rwanda. As aforementioned, HIV has been a part of this, leading to the deaths of those raped as well as mother-baby transmission and sexual transmission. However, the social balance of post-conflict Rwanda has transformed quite dramatically, specifically power relations and gender roles (Powley, 2004). The deliberate elimination of men during the conflict, identified as a form of gendercide (see Chapter Two), has contributed to a society comprising 70 per cent women (HRW, 1996), and a governmental structure of 56 per cent women, the highest in the world (Palmary, 2006;

Powley, 2004; World Focus, 2008). Whilst some political changes have been arguably positive, there remains enormous post-conflict pressure on the economy and healthcare, particularly regarding regional increases in HIV.

Furthermore, the use of rape as a tool to prevent the reproduction of a specific ethnicity has been another prevalent problem in on-going genocide, for example Rwanda, Bosnia and Bangladesh (1971/72, see Brownmiller, 1975). Although all are equally horrific in their own ways, the case of Bosnia is particularly notable as it has been so significant in highlighting the extent to which rapes have been organised and systematically carried out to transform the ethnicity of a generation as a form of genocide. The implementation of rape camps from 1991-1995, whereby (mostly Muslim) women were transported en masse to large sites, such as old schools or hospitals, and selected individually to be raped and group raped by up to 30 men (Gutman, 1993) at a time, emphasises the level of planning and methodical execution of a complex strategy of war targeted against 'the other'. As in Rwanda, the effects of rape were further exacerbated in the long term if, and when, women become pregnant as a result of rape, particularly with regard to genocide in terms of ethnic cleansing where deep rooted intolerances exist amongst groups (Meštrović, 1994). The implications again range from physical, in the woman's carrying of a potentially unwanted foetus or through abortion, to emotional with regard to feeling for her child, abortion or rape, and social in terms of ostracism of 'rape babies' (McKay, 2009; Mills and Nachegea, 2006; Mookherajee, 2007; 2008; 2010), all of which can act as contributors to forced migration, women's marginalisation and the abuse of women's rights.

### **3.5 Chapter Conclusion**

It is worth concluding that rape and sexual violence as strategies of warfare are significant problems in conflict and, even more concerning, that they are successful tactics in warfare. Feminism has historically focussed on the power orders that exist within patriarchal societies as a breeding ground for what has often been dubbed 'War Against Women' (French, 1992; Kelly,

2000; Stiglmer, 1994) to account for rapes and mass rapes. Considering the legal (in relation to low conviction rates) and social accessibility for men to rape, and in view of the fact that rape is an act committed primarily by men against women (Brownmiller, 1975; Soothill and Walby, 1991), the global oppression and subordination of women should be scrutinized as a key contributor to rape and sexual violence in areas of conflict, but in a way that will bring rape and sexual violence as a social and global issue to the forefront of more permanent systematic sociological study.

As Liz Kelly argues (2000), creating international policies and legislation regarding sexual violence in war and conflict may not stamp out its occurrence completely, but it does provide a framework within which perpetrators can be held accountable and steps can be taken to challenge and prevent rape and sexual violence during conflict. This has been made evident in the conviction of some wartime rapists at the International War Tribunals for both the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, however the ratio between those held accountable and the mass records of rape is massively inadequate.

A final concluding thought sits with the effects of sexual violence post-conflict. As this chapter evidences, the long term effects of HIV transmission, rape as a form of genocide and the birth of 'rape babies' have shattering implications for women and communities. However, one issue related to, and stemming from, these is the forcing of migration, potentially resulting in the need for asylum, which remains an issue to be considered beyond the context of the localised conflict itself. Fleeing one's country of origin leaves gaps for wider socio-cultural issues to evolve, including for the women and their families living within host communities. The following chapter moves on from discussions around specific international legislation regarding sexual violence and women's rights during conflict to scrutinize women's rights after they have fled conflict zones or situations of unrest and now reside in the United Kingdom, with particular focus on the treatment of women asylum seekers who have survived sexual violence in their country of origin.

## 4.0 Chapter Four: Women and Asylum in the UK

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on, and develops from, the previous chapter in focusing on policy and legislation in asylum, an issue usually resultant from, and related to, civil unrest, conflict and forced migration. It will situate the definitions of asylum and other related legal and political statuses and outline domestic and international responses to the protection of individuals and groups. From this, Chapter Four also moves forward to outline the stance and structure of the UK Border Agency, which reviews and determines someone's right to protection from their application. It will discuss the process and procedures of applying for asylum, and define entitlement for people during that process before drawing in a synopsis of asylum in Merseyside. Importantly, it will adopt a critical theoretical perspective in applying sociological discussions of the politics of exclusion and will offer a short review of literature on the topic of asylum.

In terms of gendered patterns in asylum, this chapter will situate the issue of rape in conflict with asylum, asylum legislation, and women's dual position as rape survivors and asylum seekers in the UK. This is largely reflective of previous research of forced asylum (Refugee Council, 2009a; 2009b), the gendered nature of conflict and asylum (Collier, 2007) and, in particular, the UKBA's approach to women's asylum claims. Although it will mainly focus on some key policies<sup>6</sup> and responses in the UK to women asylum applicants, it incorporates a gendered analysis based on policy recommendations and investigations undertaken and offered by national and international non-governmental organisations, to allow for critical scope and challenging of mainstream beliefs around the UK asylum system, and in particular, the UK Border Agency.

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the nature of policy, many changes are being made quickly and in short spaces of time, particularly since the 2010 change of government to a Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition which has affected policy. As such, this analysis is up to date as of August 2011, but does not act as a definitive description of asylum law or policy.

## **4.2 Asylum, Refugees and Internal Displacement**

Asylum is a widely debated topic nationally, with whole spectrums of political responses across countries and, in view of changes in the management of asylum in Europe and the USA, whole continents. Representations of asylum seekers and refugees are in themselves strongly politicised, and can arguably serve to inform or misinform members of the general public (for example, see Coole, 2002; Kenyon, 2010; Smart et al, 2005).

Firstly, it should be recognised that due to the changing of states and increases in internal and border conflicts (as discussed by Kelly, 2000 and expanded upon in Chapter Two), as well as increases in avenues of transport and communication, the number of refugees and people seeking political asylum has increased. Bohmer and Shuman point out that asylum statistics are 'a mirror of politics' and reflect the extent and prevalence of war and conflict globally (2008: 30; see also Bloch and Schuster, 2002). Although the UK is one of the world's richest economies, 2008 statistics showed that less than 0.5% of the overall population is made up of refugees, and only 3.84% of those fleeing persecution receive refuge in the UK, with most applying to neighbouring, less prosperous countries (UNHCR, 2010).

### **4.2.1 Definitions: Separating Facts and Categories in Asylum**

Definitions of refugee, asylum and internal displacement are often inaccurately used interchangeably, due in part to misrepresentation and misuse of the terms in print and media (Clough, 1992; Smart et al, 2005), particularly tabloid newspapers (Kenyon, 2010). Although the term 'refugee' is more widely used in mainland Europe to identify asylum seekers, the UK usage is more specific in distinguishing those granted asylum and those awaiting decision. This distinction has led arguably to the (mis)identification of 'bogus' asylum seekers, a term which has no ontological reality, with illegal immigrants. Therefore, there are significant differences in the definitions and each has a bearing on the level of protection and access to rights that the individual is likely to receive.

The key definition in understanding or applying refugee legislation or policy is outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (known as the Geneva Convention or Refugee Convention). To expand on definitions in Chapter Three, the central and most important definition in relation to this thesis can be found in Article 1 Part 2 of the convention:

*(2) 'As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for 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 as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (own emphasis added).'*

(UNHCR, 1951)

As will be expanded upon later, the gendered language (his, himself) is an underlying indication of the global assumption of persecution, conflict and refugee experience at the time it was written, as well as being reflective of the gendered nature of language more generally (Spender, 1980; Cameron, 1992, 1998; see also Whittaker, 2006 for further examples of gendered misrepresentation in academic literature on asylum) and law specifically (Kennedy, 2005; Smart, 1989, 1990). What it also indicates is that, although the extent of sexual violence had been recognised during the Nuremburg trials, to which both the Declaration of Human Rights and the 1948/1951 Geneva Convention were partial responses, 'gender' was not applied as a reason to apply for refugee status. This response has trickled into contemporary perceptions of asylum, an issue at the heart of the latter half of this chapter and the thesis overall.

#### **4.2.2 Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

People who are within their Country or State of Origin but have been forced into migration for any of a number of reasons are identified as being internally displaced, known as Internally Displaced Persons or IDP:

*'persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border.'*

(Deng, 1998, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org))

Murphy-Lawless and Kennedy expand upon these reasons to specify examples, including:

- Military/political upheavals, including the collapse of old borders (e.g. Afghanistan, DR Congo, Nigeria, Former Yugoslavia)
- Forced migration or eviction (e.g. the Kurds, East Timorese)
- Famine (e.g. Ethiopia, Somalia)
- Natural/environmental disasters (e.g. Ukraine – Chernobyl, Bangladesh)
- Environmental degradation and pollution (e.g. Romania, Czech Republic)
- Land scarcity (e.g. Kenya, Rwanda)

(1998: 18)

This again overlooks the gendered nature of conflict and victimisation since, as discussed in depth in Chapter Two, many women are forced to flee due to sexual violence and ostracism. The period of uncertainty in forced migration or displacement often also entails a lack of protection and can create further vulnerability for women. This is particularly visible in increases in sexual violence in IDP camps and sex trafficking (Refugee Council, 2009a) which can lead to further reasons for forced migration. Wider research in Human Rights raises concerns over individual's access to internationally established rights during or after migration, particularly where internal displacement has occurred or changes in borders results in individuals identifying themselves as stateless (Weissbrodt and Collins, 2006).

Asylum differs from this in terms of locale; people who are seeking asylum are doing so outside of their country of origin and under the Geneva Convention. Again, reasons for seeking asylum are based in persecution and

forced displacement as a result of the terms laid out in the Convention. The term 'asylum seeker' grew in usage in the UK during the 1990s and, as Tyler identifies, 'In contrast to the term refugee, which names a (legal) status arrived at, 'asylum seeker' invokes the non-status of a person who has not yet been recognised as a refugee' (2006: 189). It therefore becomes essential that the individual *prove* their legal right to asylum in the UK.

### **4.2.3 Refugee**

In the UK, a refugee is an individual who has had their application for asylum approved under the Geneva Convention, in that the UK Border Agency have (in the most part) accepted the applicant's story as legitimate and agree they have a well-founded fear of persecution. In the UK, refugees are reinstated with the right to work, claim benefits and enrol in Higher Education. Refugee status can be given in four forms:

- *'Refugee Status' allows a stay of up to five years in the UK before review, after which the applicant may receive indefinite permission to stay;*
  - *'Limited leave to remain' allows refuge on a temporary basis;*
  - *'Indefinite leave to remain' with humanitarian protection allows the applicant full refugee status and permanent residence (unless they live for more than two years outside of the UK);*
  - *'Discretionary leave to remain' does not recognise the person as a refugee under humanitarian protection but allows a stay of up to three years under exceptional circumstances, which can then be reviewed.*
- (UKBA, N.D.a)

These are dependent on the terms of the applicant's case and again emphasises the political dimension of protection for the individual, based on policies and procedures outlined and identified by a state institution (see also 4.33 for further discussion).

### **4.2.4 Refused Asylum Seeker**

As is suggested in the name, a refused asylum seeker has not been granted asylum under the Geneva Convention for reasons that may include lack of evidence, credibility or disbelief, and any subsequent appeals against this

decision have been unsuccessful (Maternity Action, 2010: 1). In the UK, around 72% of both women and men who apply for asylum are refused (Asylum Aid; 2011; UKBA, 2011a). Whilst there is debate around whether the UK has an unofficial (and illegal) cap on asylum (Patel and Tyrer, 2011) the numbers of refusals remain consistent. If refused, right to asylum support is withdrawn after 21 days and if the applicant can prove destitution after having taken 'reasonable steps to leave' they may apply for 'Section 4' to receive accommodation and vouchers for food (Maternity Action, 2010). If not, refused asylum seekers can become homeless and/or destitute, dependent on charities such as the Red Cross and Oxfam, assuming these NGOs are available in the applicant's area (Crawley et al, 2011a). On reviewing asylum post-New Labour, Burnett goes as far as to argue that 'destitution would become a central facet of asylum policy' (2009: 3). Challenging criticism about forced destitution, Hugh Ind, of the UKBA, has stated: 'no asylum seeker need be destitute while they have a valid reason to be here' (BBC News, 2011b).

### **4.3 Asylum, Decision Making and the UKBA: a Background**

The very nature of asylum has changed substantially over the past century, particularly the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in terms of response to post-conflict resolution. The two World Wars exposed voids in international responses to victims and survivors of conflict, making way for policy developments (Canning, 2010; Morris, 2006; Woodiwiss, 2003, 2005). As was discussed in more depth in the previous chapter, the most significant of these remain the Nuremburg Trials, which tried major war criminals (particularly Nazi German Officials) which has subsequently influenced later trials after the Rwandan Genocide, Bosnian War and has influenced the development of the International Criminal Courts (Woodiwiss, 2005). The International Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the Geneva Convention in 1949/1951 followed. However, the extent of rape in conflict remained shadowed by other war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The UK's initial response to Jewish refugees up to during and after the Second World War led to severe criticisms and forced a rethink on defining 'asylum' in terms of persecution as opposed to immigration (Bohmer and Shuman, 2008). The Thatcher led 1980s saw widening concerns for increases in non-white immigration and asylum (Shah, 2000). This continued, into the 1990s when post-conflict resettlement increased, with the tightening of border controls and policies as a result, particularly in relation to the post-9/11 security responses from Western Europe and North America (Patel and Tyrer, 2011). In 2008, the UK Border Agency was established as part of the Home Office out of the Border and Immigration Agency and HM Revenue and Customs (Bohmer and Shuman, *ibid*).

#### **4.3.1 UKBA and Home Office**

The United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) is a Home Office, and therefore state, run public enforcement agency which is 'responsible for securing the UK border and controlling migration in the UK' (Home Office, 2011a). This includes staffing border points across the UK's main entry points for travellers, immigrants and asylum seekers. Whilst all points of entry, for example all airports, have a Border Agency Passport control, Croydon is the only point in the UK in which an individual can make a claim for asylum. This was recently centralised from dual points, Croydon and Liverpool (Refugee Council, 2009b).

Request for asylum can initially be applied for at any port of entry, but applications are made in Croydon where the applicant will be interviewed, or 'screened', at the asylum Screening Unit (UKBA, N.D.b). Applicants are expected to provide a range of documents, including passports, birth certificates, police registration certificates, other (unspecified) supporting documents and evidence of accommodation (UKBA, N.D.c). A basic outline of the procedure is documented below:

Figure 4.1

\_\_\_\_\_

### 4.3.2 How decisions are made

*'Once an asylum-seeker is identified, they are issued with an asylum seeker's identity card, become subject to detention, dispersal and electronic tagging, barred from access to paid work and have limited (if any) access to education, health care, social housing and income support. For the asylum-seeker, the first and most critical stage moment in this process is being identified as an asylum-seeker.'*

(Tyler, 2006: 188)

On making an application for asylum in Croydon, the first interview is undertaken during the 'screening' process, an interview which may include discussing reasons for the application, including forms of persecution. During this, fingerprints and photographs are taken and the individual's passport and any documentation will be retained (UKBA, N.D.b). Under the 2007 New Asylum model, the applicant should, in theory, be offered an interviewer of the same gender (UKBA, 2007; Asylum Aid, 2011). At this point, asylum seekers are given their asylum registration card (ARC) and all individuals should be allocated a 'case owner' who is, again in theory, responsible for their application until the final decision (UKBA, N.D.d). Subsequent meetings should occur in the period leading up to the main interview, the significance of which is highlighted by the UKBA in stating:

*'The full interview is your only chance to tell us why you fear return to your country... It is vital that you give your case owner all the information you wish to be considered. He/she will use this information to make the decision on your application'*

(UKBA, N.D.e).

Once the initial statements are taken and the interview has been completed, the account given becomes dependent on what the UKBA deem as 'merits' and consistency in the story, such as the depth in which information is given and consistency through multiple interviews.

As well as extracting the information given by the applicant, a case owner has access to 'Country of Origin Information' (COI, see National Archives, 2010), which is meant to provide current, reliable and up to date information

regarding the country from which the applicant has fled. These should be contemporary and cover a wide range of political issues, including status of women. Some are particularly substantial, for example the COI for Zimbabwe is currently a 249 page document (see UKBA, 2011b) however other country profiles remain less up to date in the National Archives. For example, as it is not yet a country with the highest rate of asylum applications, at the time of writing Libya had not been updated since 2008 (see National Archives, 2010). This may relate to wider problems in the future if the current political crisis is not properly documented considering the government's recent indictment for Crimes Against Humanity by the ICC, including crimes such as state ordered rape and multiple perpetrator rape and 'honour killings' of rape survivors under the rule of Muammar Muhammad al-Gaddafi, before his execution (Pilkington, 2011). Lack of COI may, for example, result in inadequately reviewed cases as has independently been found in other cases by Smith (2004) and Asylum Aid (2011). Likewise, COI documents with substantive information may still omit in-depth information on women's rights in that country, as has been highlighted by Crawley et al (2011b) who found that some significant gaps exist, and which the UKBA have agreed to reconsider.

### **4.3.3 Entitlement**

Whilst awaiting an asylum decision, or if the decision taken has been a refusal, asylum seekers are not entitled to work in the UK unless they have been resident or the application has been on-going for more than one year, despite access to employment being a basic human right (Article 23 of the Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Even then, dependents (most of whom are women and/or children) of the main applicant cannot apply to work. Briscoe and Lavender argue that this further increases social exclusion and ability to integrate (2009) but also ultimately renders individuals state dependent and increases poverty within asylum communities (Burnett and Whyte, 2010). In terms of depriving asylum seekers the right to work and increasing the likelihood of destitution, the Joint Committee on Human Rights went as far as to say that, 'the government's treatment of asylum seekers

breaches the Article 3 ECHR (European Convention on Human Rights) threshold of inhuman and degrading treatment' (2007: 5).

At the time of writing, individual asylum seekers receive the equivalent of £5 per day for food, travel and clothing with an extra £5 per week for children under one, £3 for children over one and £5 in clothing vouchers for each child (Maternity Action, 2010). Although some food is included in accommodation packages, this is not usually the case. If and when these resources are given to applicants, gaps remain in accessing funds for dependents, further marginalising women in the asylum process. Applicants and dependents are entitled to housing whilst awaiting decision, but as research undertaken by Churchill and Canning has indicated, this is often in impoverished areas (2011). In Merseyside, for example, housing is provided by the UKBA but sub-contracted to private companies in Merseyside who receive pay per head for the number of inhabitants, a worrying consideration in terms of tenant rights if accommodation is not adequate. Furthermore, the overall project by Churchill and Canning focussed on access to maternity care for women in Merseyside, accommodation was found to be a consistent worry, with three focus group respondents having mouse and cockroach infestations and another with severe rat infestation. These problems can massively exacerbate existing traumas and issues, as well as affecting the health of the women and children living in these conditions.

#### **4.4 Asylum in Merseyside**

As mentioned earlier, Merseyside was until 2009 a main entry point for asylum, one of two in the UK until it was centralised to Croydon. Liverpool, and the Merseyside area more generally, remains an area for asylum dispersal (ICAR, 2009) and continues to have a 'further submissions unit' for refused asylum seekers where applicants can make appeals. In 2009 there were 1375 asylum seekers living in Liverpool (centre) in supported accommodation, with a further 25 on subsistence only (ICAR, 2009). Whilst this does not include refugees, it is still a substantial number in comparison

with other areas, such as Newcastle holding 630 and 980 in Cardiff (a capital city) during the same period (ICAR, *ibid*). Considering also that Liverpool's local authority rated highest in the most recent English Indices of Deprivation (Noble et al, 2008), there are wider debates to be had about access to adequate care and support, mirroring back to the issue of specific support for survivors of sexual violence in the asylum system in Merseyside.

Despite the issues outlined above, little research (academic or otherwise) has been undertaken in the asylum system in Merseyside, and less so regarding women, with none so far related to impacts of sexual violence and access to support. One project which was undertaken by England and Wales's leading mental health charity, MIND, to assess healthcare provision for asylum seekers and refugees across England and Wales (including Liverpool) found 'a lack of therapeutic and psychosocial services available to refugees and asylum-seekers to address intermediate mental health needs' and that 'there is limited availability of specialist services to treat those who have experienced torture', but did not refer directly to Merseyside or Liverpool in the final report (MIND, 2009: 2). This is a significant gap in terms of women's experiences, particularly where sexual violence is concerned, where specific forms of gender sensitive support should be available.

To ensure anonymity in chapters related to interviews and oral history, this chapter does not refer specifically to the local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and agencies related to supporting or working with asylum seekers in Merseyside. However, there are few agencies existing primarily to support asylum seekers and more specifically women in the asylum system. Most are underfunded or unfunded officially, with one organisation receiving funds from the UKBA by which it is directed. Agencies that do exist are stretched with minimal resources, little space for women and children and usually without women interpreters (Canning, 2011b). The masculinisation of asylum space can also affect if and how women engage in services available generally, as some can feel threatened and/or vulnerable (*ibid*).

## 4.5 Asylum and the Politics of Exclusion

In reflecting on asylum policy and sociological approaches to asylum, it is possible to apply a seemingly endless range of concepts and theories. The intersections of race and exclusion within the system, for example, carry whole separate discourses regarding the politics of citizenship and belonging (see, for example, Crowley, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 2006a). Likewise, issues around nationality, nation state and community ideologies are significant in recognising how or why states, countries and regions respond to 'the other', in this case asylum seekers, in ways that they do (Anderson, 1983). Although this cannot be documented in any great depth here, as much theory would merit its own chapter and analysis, it remains important to highlight marginalising and exclusionary practices in the UK to set a foundational basis of the multiple disadvantages that women can face in the UK asylum system. One key example within this is the British media.

As with many other factors of exclusion, whole discourses exist, are reproduced and represented in the UK media. As with sexual violence (see Chapter One) layers of misinformation and assumption can be found in media discourse, but also interpretations of social policy and government legislation regarding asylum. Headlines often circle around welfare 'grave trains' (Jeory, Sunday Express, 2011) and 'bogus asylum seekers', with one quote in media regarding refused applicants stating: 'Failed asylum seekers ought not to be here. They should never have come here in the first place' (Lord Justice Ward quoted in Siva, 2008). Sivanandan encapsulates these politics of exclusion and moral panic in arguing:

*'the racist tradition of demonisation and exclusion has become a tool in the hands of the state to keep out the refugees and asylum seekers so displaced even if they are white on the grounds that they are scroungers and aliens come to prey on the wealth of the West and confound its national identities.'*

(2001: 2)

Amnesty International had made previous contentions that politicians use high rejection rates to argue that asylum seekers are 'undeserving' economic migrants rather than in need of refuge (1997: 10). Where women are represented, there is often misrepresentation of sexual violence, for example one article entitled, 'Asylum seeker who claimed to have been gang raped and witnessed family's murder in Somalia exposed as £250k benefit fraudster' (Seamark and Cohen, Daily Mail, 2011). This over emphasis illustration of an irregularity in the asylum system is one example of how dominant media can choose what to 'expose' and without reflection on the reality of women's situations in fleeing conflict – that significant numbers have experienced sexual violence, an issue not accurately reflected in mainstream and tabloid media.

#### **4.5.1 Wider Exclusions: Gendering the Focus in the UK Asylum System**

As Bethany Collier argued, there remains a lack of focus on women's cases in the UK asylum system which has resulted in a chasm in knowledge and awareness (2007: 4). There have been more recent surges in research and consciousness raising which has largely been undertaken by Non-Governmental Organisations with an asylum specific purpose, such as the Refugee Council, Refugee Action and Asylum Aid. Wider women's organisations, including the Southall Black Sisters, have increased awareness of the specific issues faced by women in the asylum system in the UK, but academic focus has been less forthcoming. Although researchers such as Nira Yuval Davis, Alice Bloch and Lydia Morris have drawn attention, further empirical work remains necessary in highlighting women and asylum, particularly in pocketed areas of dispersal such as Merseyside.

Johnstone (2008) argues that refugee women are more affected by violence against women than any other women's population in the world due to conflict related violence and violence during migration (in Refugee Council, 2009a, see also Burnett and Peel, 2001). Indeed there are a number of population groups who may be disproportionately affected by certain forms of

sexual violence (such as trafficked or disabled women). In the case of refugee women, it is notable that thousands of women in the UK asylum system have fled conflict regions where sexual violence is identified as being at epidemic levels, including Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Darfur, often as victims of state sanctioned rape, as discussed in Chapter Two. The impacts of sexual violence are significant, encompassing social, physical and emotional harms with the potential to span the duration of the survivor's life. Furthermore, the use of public and systematic sexual violence in conflict can instigate further social harms for women, resulting in social ostracism, shame and stigma, shattering communities and potentially forcing migration, therefore increasing the need for asylum.

Globally and domestically, there are more male asylum seekers and refugees than there are women, perhaps contributing to the male orientated focus in asylum related discourses. Many reasons exist for this and each is dependent on the country of origin from which the person stems, as well as in the nature of flight. Limited access to rights can impact on whether women can leave a country without a male, for example there are limitations on travel in areas such as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. Likewise, social and cultural expectations including childcare and familial care can lessen the likelihood of women choosing or being able to migrate, alongside the potential for a lack of independent resources (Newland, 2004). Nonetheless, as outlined in Chapter Two, women make up high percentages of residents in Internal Displacement Persons camps and remain amongst the group most affected by conflict due to changes in patterns.

Statistics from the UKBA reflect a gendering of movement between the male/female ratio difference in those seeking asylum. In 2009, around two thirds were male (16065) however refusal rates reached similar percentages regardless of gender, perhaps suggesting an unofficial cap as highlighted earlier (see table 4.2).

Figure 4.2

Women are also more likely to apply as dependents of the main applicant, further compromising access to support, particularly in cases of Domestic Violence (Amnesty International and Southall Black Sisters, 2008).

#### **4.6 Intersections of Identity: Ethnicity, Women and Asylum Seekers**

Gendered persecution is not recognised as specific grounds for seeking refugee status in the 1948/1951 Geneva Convention. Women can, however, apply for protection as a member of a Particular Social Group (PSG), which does not specify group status but can encompass women fleeing sexual violence, amongst other social, religious, ethnic and political demographics. This also does not guarantee refugee status, and the rates of non-disclosure, particularly in the initial interview, can affect women's likelihood of being granted asylum or believed (Asylum Aid, 2011).

In acknowledgment of women's experiences of persecution as part of a PSG, in 2004 the UK Border Agency issued the document *Gender Issues in the Asylum Claim* (renewed in the New Asylum Model, 2007) to introduce a gendered focus when assessing women's claims, particularly in relation to approaching sensitive issues such as rape, sexual violence and domestic abuse. The document outlines some key points to consider during interviews, such as offering a female interpreter, and highlights socio-cultural norms that may be common in women's countries of origin which are not in

the UK (UKBA, 2004). Whilst this is certainly a positive development, research consistently shows that women are routinely disbelieved, receive little if any support in the aftermath of sexual violence and are still expected to discuss instances of sexual violence in the first interview in an official environment with a stranger (Asylum Aid, 2011; Medical Foundation, 2009; Rights of Women, 2010). Credibility of the applicant's account is also questioned if sexual violence is not discussed in the interview which in turn reduces the possibility of being granted asylum, and therefore increases the chances of refoulement (forced return). This can be undermined if women (or men) are not able to speak about persecution or abuse due to a lack of same gender interviewing or appropriate interview space for revealing instances of sexual violence. Likewise, the individual may decide not to discuss instances of sexual violence, as a strategy for self-protection if they are returned to their country of origin where they may fear further persecution based on this disclosure of information during asylum applications.

In the UK asylum system, both women and men can experience rights violations through detention, forced destitution and forced state dependence through the denial of the right to work. The issue of detention (or 'immigration removal centres') without crime or wrong doing has been of particular concern for policy makers and Human Rights organisations in international spheres, with the UK's system of detention whilst awaiting appeal for refused asylum seekers considered to breach international laws and protocols (Burnett, 2009; House of Lords, 2007). Patel and Tyrer argue that this results in statelessness, and that, 'This condition of statelessness is spatialised through detention in detention centres which imprison asylum seekers outside the normal rule of criminal law, and without proper judicial oversight' (2011:91). This form of spatialised exclusion is also seen in dispersal areas, which 'takes away asylum seekers' freedom to choose where they settle in Britain and so doing it removes them from kinship and other social networks as well as community organizations' (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 493).

As some feminists have established, inequality and exclusion can be experienced by women in differing ways from men, going beyond the second wave feminist assumption that race and gender were separate or unconnected entities (hooks, 1981, 1984; Yuval-Davis, 2006b). Intersections of race and gender also exist within whole areas of rights framed approaches and policy voids, as was identified and discussed in chapters One and Three. Life in asylum can add a further form of oppression and exclusion for women, potentially having serious effects on working through conflict related trauma. As indicated above, dispersal, for example, can be particularly precarious for women who have been able to access support for traumatic experiences including sexual violence, as well as informal support networks that are often set up with women of similar COI or experience (Asylum Aid, 2008c).

Detention of women results in a form of victimisation of someone already responding to trauma, and can lead to re-traumatisation<sup>7</sup> in stimulating memory of previous assaults by officials or in detention prior to arriving in the UK (see Human Rights Watch, 2010). Whilst these may also be issues for some men, as was identified in the previous three chapters, the majority of sexual violence is perpetrated by men against women and significant proportions of women seeking asylum have been subjected to sexual abuse. To further this point, as the Refugee Council highlight in *The Vulnerable Women's Project* (2009a) many women fear contact with authorities if they are seeking asylum. This can be for numerous reasons, including fear of having their children taken from them or of being extradited; therefore women may not make complaints of sexual violence or rape (ibid: 48). It should not go without saying that women may also feel fear or animosity for government officials or authority figures, as it is often those formally charged with protecting women, including police, government militia, aid workers and peacekeepers, who perpetrate sexual violence and other abuses (Amnesty International, 2004a; Refugee Council, 2009). As such, detention and

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<sup>7</sup> Follette and Duckworth define re-traumatisation as 'traumatic stress reactions, responses and symptoms that occur consequent to multiple exposures to traumatic events that are physical, psychological, or both in nature' (2012: 2). This can include discussing or recalling traumatic events such as rape and sexual abuse.

dispersal experienced in the UK asylum system can be particularly harrowing for women and requires more thorough consideration in implementation.

#### **4.6.1 UK State Responses, Support and Recognition of Gender Sensitive Approaches**

As the previous chapter has argued, there is significantly more focus on gender issues in contemporary national and international legislation, including Human Rights law, with the most notable being the inclusion of sexual violence as a crime against humanity under UN Security Council 1820 in 2008. As such, under international legislation, militia and military leaders in areas such as Darfur, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been accused of and/or indicted under the International Criminal Courts and International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia (ICC and ICTR and ICTY) for sexual violence as a form of state crime, amongst other indictments. However, there are serious limitations in accepting legal rights discourses and policy in relation to women's experience of sexual violence in conflict in terms of prevention, protection and prosecution (Canning, 2010; 2011a).

In relation to the sexual, social and emotional harms (Dorling et al, 2005) and violence to which women are subjected stated earlier, if and when prevention is not in place, at least responses to effects should be in the way of support infrastructures and asylum policy. Whilst the latter is developing in the UK, support beyond the voluntary sector is nominal in the asylum system, if it exists at all in some areas (Asylum Aid, 2011; Canning, 2011b). Survivors of rape (as well as asylum seekers more generally) continue to experience an adversarial system that subjects them to forms of double victimisation similar to those identified by feminists regarding the UK Criminal Justice System (Temkin, 1997). Women are routinely questioned with interviews lasting up to 8 hours, instances of case workers having little or no familiarity with the subject or the applicant and questionable access to Country of Origin Information when reviewing cases individually (Asylum Aid, 2011). This can

increase levels of stress or problematise emotional and psychological improvement as women are repeatedly asked to answer personal questions and recall traumatic events in their quest for protection (Burnett and Peel, 2001).

As briefly noted earlier, NGO research in the UK consistently demonstrates instances of erroneous decision making and adversarial rigor. For example, in 2004 Ellie Smith highlighted serious discrepancies in asylum interviewing and reasons for refusal, including overlooking facts about individual cases, unreasonable expectations of knowledge and unfounded assumptions by UKBA staff (2004). Reports by Asylum Aid (2011), Rights of Women (2010) and the Refugee Council (2009) confirm Smith's findings and highlight that inadequate implementation of gendered review can have serious impacts on women. A lack of gender sensitive approach can lead to denial of necessary support, create barriers to domestic violence refuges and problematise access to the British Criminal Justice System, if needed. As such, it can result in unfair review of claims for women applying for asylum in the UK, perpetuating harm against women socially, politically and emotionally through marginalisation and exclusion. As The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture determined, this harm can go beyond the consequences of crimes of violence to impact on women's mental and even physical wellbeing, with life threatening potential if she is wrongly returned to her country of origin (2009).

This then brings the focus back to the role of the British state in protecting vulnerable women from further victimisation and abuse, in the UK and her country of origin. Challenging conventional ideologies, (including his own) Chambliss argued that 'state crime' should incorporate 'behaviour that violates international agreements and principles established in the courts and treaties of international bodies' (1995: 9). Under this definition of state crime, it could be argued that in wrongly refusing protection, governmental organisations such as the UK Border Agency are party to Chambliss's definition of state crime. Furthermore, if wrongful rejection and deportation

facilitates further persecution, there exists an indication of compliance in crimes against individuals and groups, including crimes against humanity.

Either way, the British State may not fall into the realm of state crime 'perpetration' where violence against women in conflict is concerned, since gendered persecution is not specifically recognised as grounds for refugee status in the Geneva Convention. However, the inclusion of women as a PSG in need of protection remains a necessity. This is particularly relevant in view of the prevalence of experience of sexual abuse amongst women in the asylum population within which some studies demonstrate that more women have experienced sexual violence than have not (Medical Foundation, 2009). Considering also that factors such as state sanctioned destitution through inadequate asylum review can increase women's vulnerability to forced prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, it is also essential that the state recognises its role in protecting women who remain in this country. The first step to this is in the initial stages of the applicant's claim, as identified in the UK Border Agency's own Gender Guidelines, which advises sensitivity to gender, cultural norms and discussion of violence (in Asylum Aid, 2011). As woman-centred organisations have long demonstrated, it is important that gender sensitivity is embedded in all aspects of working with vulnerable women and not side-lined or approached as an add-on.

#### **4.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted major concerns within the current UK asylum system. This includes the reliability of country of origin Information in making decisions about the political viability and safety of returning asylum seekers. As has been indicated, Asylum Aid's *Unsustainable* report (2011) highlighted the lack of gender specific information in reports, or the reliance on websites including the American gossip site 'gawker.com' for information regarding the outlawing of homosexuality in Uganda (ibid: 6; see also Collier, 2007). This, along with outdated sources as section 4.3 determined, suggests that the

quality of initial decision making can be problematic, particularly if women's rights in their country of origin are misrepresented or overlooked.

This chapter has also identified that the UKBA claims procedures are in place to ensure all applicants are reviewed fairly, individually and on their own merit. Indeed, guidelines are in place, yet numerous studies have highlighted problem areas in the undertaking and application of these approaches. As Human Rights Watch identify, the UNHCR has repeatedly voiced concerns regarding the way in which UK decision makers assess credibility and establish the facts in asylum claims' (HRW, 2010: 40). Considering that refusal rates are considerably high on the first review of an application (see figure 4.2), the actual consistency of quality of UKBA decisions is questionable. To the extent that systems which exercise such adversarial practices or are pushed by target figures, such as a cap on asylum, they arguably cannot be fully focussed on the individual's rights or circumstance.

It is strongly apparent that women fleeing conflict or unrest and seeking asylum are often survivors or witnesses of sexual violence, amongst other possible forms of torture. As has been highlighted, whilst this is a form of sexual violence, the effects relate to wider social and emotional harms including forced migration and shattering of communities (see Chapter Two). These harms are often experienced in the survivor's country of origin and can be state sanctioned with little chance of protection or prosecution, and often under state impunity. Harm can then be multiplied in the UK if women are subject to destitution, exploitation and social marginalisation. Although such impacts may not fall under the national or international legislation discussed throughout this chapter or the previous, they have significant consequences for the emotional, social and even physical wellbeing of already marginalised women. As such, women continue to face barriers to emotional support, physical protection and adequate internationally recognised rights.

It has also been evident through policy and legislation review that further research has been necessary in this area to explore the impacts of sexual

violence in conflict on women in the UK asylum system, specifically with regard to support and access to asylum. In reflection of the research gap in Merseyside, a main area for dispersal and previous screening centre for the UKBA, the following chapter will expand on these areas of concern to outline a reflective and reflexive methodology for the overall empirical research undertaken for this thesis. This will provide scope in relation to existing chasms in the recognition of women's experiences and gender sensitive review in asylum.

## **5.0 Chapter Five: Methodology and Empirical Background**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will outline the methodological and epistemological approaches that this research has developed from and incorporated, specifically feminist discussions around women's experiences (Hughes, 2002), the complexities in feminist interviewing (Oakley, 1981) and problems and benefits of activist research (Naples, 2003). It will provide an overview of recent feminist epistemologies, specifically since the 1970s, and focus on the benefits of approaching research as sensitive as sexual violence from standpoint feminism and activist research strategies. It will also undertake an in-depth analysis and justification of the strategies used (activist participation, semi-structured interviews and one oral history) and thorough discussions and reflections of the overall empirical process. Particular attention will be paid to the theoretical underpinning of the empirical research, with references also to gate-keeping, research barriers and ethical considerations in undertaking research on sensitive topics.

### **5.2 Outline of research methods**

The data gathered and finally incorporated into this overall thesis stems from three forms of investigative methodology: thirteen in-depth interviews, one three part oral history and reflections from fieldwork in activist research and participation.

Interviews were undertaken over a three month period, from June to August 2010. Participants were carefully chosen in relation to their role and included people from key organisations working with women in a support after rape capacity, women seeking asylum in Merseyside, or both.

One oral history was developed in seven meetings overall with a survivor of rape, whose pseudonym is Hawwi, fleeing the Ethiopian government and, at the time, seeking asylum in Merseyside. This was recorded in three parts,

beginning at her childhood and concluding with reflections on her life at the time in the asylum system in the UK.

Possibly the most complex and always on-going element of this research has been activist participation with groups and individuals in Merseyside. As interest in my research subject grew, so did my involvement with local organisations, namely Merseyside's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre, Merseyside Women's Movement, one unnamed women's asylum group and the Darfur Community Group in Liverpool. This included developing projects based on findings from my literature reviews, observing developmental processes in establishing one group for asylum seekers and genocide survivors and finding ways to stream information from my involvement and developing knowledge of sexual violence and conflict through academic and community based avenues. Although this chapter does not detail findings from this part of the research, working with local groups essentially facilitated the overall data collection through snowball sampling, skills to research sensitive topics and informed many projects that this thesis will develop (for examples see Appendices Six-Eight). More detailed reflections will be discussed in chapter eight.

### **5.3 Research in the Social Sciences: Qualitative Inquiry**

As has been documented, there have been fierce historical debates within social sciences regarding methodological approaches, with an arguably ingrained perception of qualitative research as 'subordinate' to quantitative in the scientific arena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 2; Silverman 2010). Stemming from human and physical sciences, social sciences historically attempted models of investigation reflective of these disciplines (ibid: 10), and positivistic methodologies often still do.

More academic credence is now given to qualitative inquiry, arguably in part as a result of feminist input. Paving the way for contemporary feminist research, decades of rigorous and respected research from qualitative inquirers and theorists in feminist fields (see for example Ballinger, 1997;

Gelsthorpe, 1990; Harding, 1986, 1987, 1993; Kelly, 1988; Naffine, 1997; Oakley, 1981; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Skinner et al, 2005; Smart, 1990; Westkott, 1990), have strengthened the use of qualitative research, along with the recognition that some issues (particularly sensitive topics) can be better approached outside of structured surveys (Kennedy Bergen, 1993). This is not to say that tensions do not exist within the approaches, but that acknowledgements have been made in engaging flexibly in approaches appropriate to the topic under investigation.

For this research, no form of inquiry was ever considered beyond qualitative methodologies. Using Becker's outline of the five differences of qualitative and quantitative research<sup>8</sup> (1996) as a starting point, I considered by what means I would investigate. Although forms of method changed during the developmental stages of this thesis, all were based in qualitative research and feminist standpoint epistemologies (Harding, 1986). The sensitive and highly problematic area of sexual violence meant that I had to consider how questions would be asked and what forms of research would be undertaken. Although various positivistic projects have been undertaken in researching sexual violence (see Ellsberg and Heise, 2005 for examples), particularly where anonymous surveys or questionnaires have been developed (for discussion on this see Kelly et al, 1994: 35), such forms of method would be unlikely to generate the data required to address my aims and objectives. This solidified my thesis as a qualitative inquiry into the impacts of sexual violence in conflict, and women's access to support after sexual violence in the asylum system in Merseyside.

Mason (2002: 28-29) suggests separating the aims and objectives of research into chart form as a way to define what information will be sought and how this will be obtained. Table 5.1 presents the thematic areas and problems, with an overview of how these were investigated for the final thesis:

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<sup>8</sup> Denzin and Lincoln outline these as 'uses of positivism and post-positivism', 'acceptance of postmodern sensibilities', 'capturing the person's point of view', 'examining the constraints of everyday life' and 'ensuring rich descriptions' (2008: 11-12).

**Table 5.1:**

Research Question	Data Sources and Methods	Justification
Impact of sexual violence on women, specifically in conflict and civil unrest	Literature review; interviews; oral history.	First-hand accounts documented by non-governmental organisations and international aid agencies. Established main themes and correlations in accounts and impacts before empirical research; Interviews with counsellors, support workers, charity heads and non-governmental organisations gave insight into impacts of sexual violence on women when questions were directed; oral history gives account of sexual violence and the impacts it has had, as well as allowing scope for analysis of other forms of inequality or oppression.
What social attitudes exist regarding sexual violence? How are they constructed, and by whom?	Literature review; activism with women's groups; interviews.	Literature review allowed consideration of reports and media analysis of sexual violence; activism gave scope in public and activist capacities of how survivors experience social attitudes and how the public responds (for example in running public information stalls on sexual violence); interviews allowed time to develop questions on opinions or experiences of media representation.
What gaps exist in sociological perspective and human rights frameworks regarding sexual violence, rape in conflict and women in the UK asylum system?	Literature review; policy and legislation reviews; interviews and oral history.	Review of sociological literature, feminist sociology and human rights literature; review of policies/legislation gave opportunity for independent analysis.  Interviews and oral history as opportunities to question the effectiveness of these policies through direct and narrative analyses.
How are women situated in the UK asylum system? How does this relate to sexual violence?	Activism in local community; Literature review; interviews; oral history.	Working with asylum groups gave insight into the often male-dominated environments in the asylum system, as well as highlighting issues of racism and ethnic segregation and access to sexual violence support; Literature review (particularly reports) outlined issues faced by women in asylum across the UK; Interviews and oral history developed individual accounts and experiences as well as organisational issues.
What forms of support are available for women seeking asylum in Merseyside who have been subjected to sexual violence during conflict, civil unrest and forced migration?	Activism in local community; Interviews; oral history.	Working with organisations allows me to reflect on my own experience with community groups, women's groups and survivors and identify key areas for gaps in support; interviews with specifically identified respondents who work and have experience in this field; oral history points to main positive elements of support and barriers in various capacities.

## 5.4 Feminist epistemology

*“Breaking our silences, telling our tales, is not enough’... In order to be politically mobilised, this truth must be shared, collectively analysed and strategically deployed in feminist political struggle’*  
(Rich, 1979 cited in Ballinger, 2011: 109)

As Evans and Jamieson outline, knowledge around social experiences has largely derived from male studies by male researchers in male-dominated disciplines (2008: xix, see also Jackson and Jones, 1998). Women’s lives, knowledge and experiences were largely invisible in sociological realms until, as documented above, the emergence of second wave feminism and feminist academia. From the 1970s onward, feminist researchers and academics began to place their stakes in developing woman-centred methods of inquiry, stemming from feminist epistemologies and expanding ontological positions (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 27; Hughes, 2002). Oakley argued in 1974 that sociology was fundamentally sexist as it was concerned with the ‘activities and interests of men’ (Oakley, 1974, cited in Stanley and Wise: *ibid*). The experiences of women, often more personally political than particularly public, were largely over-looked in systematic sociological focus. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the UK, feminist sociologists and criminologists such as Smart (1989; 1990), Oakley (1981), Kelly (1988; 1990), Stanley and Wise (1983; 1993), to name a few, persevered in challenging ‘malestream’ sociology and establishing (often qualitative) feminist research methodologies firmly in the sociological consciousness.

Harding (1987, in Maynard, 1994: 18) argued from a theoretical perspective that a ‘feminist standpoint’ would allow the research and researcher the advantage of a less distorted knowledge of women’s lives than those produced exclusively by men. Kelly et al note that feminist research often means studying women’s oppression as the underlying aim, with the intention of challenging the oppressions uncovered (Kelly et al, 1994). Moving beyond this, the feminist researcher often aims to create some form of impact through research rather than, for example, only filling knowledge gaps or expanding literature (Hughes, 2002; Naples, 2003). This is reflected in the

overall objective of this thesis, and my work more generally. The globalised and localised impacts and effects of women's oppression are entrenched in the prevalence and pervasiveness of sexual violence against women. Further to that, and as argued in the following chapters, this oppression ultimately side-lines women's rights during forced migration, whilst seeking asylum and in receiving appropriate support. Whilst differences exist in this study, for example between the experience, ethnicity and country of origin of the women in focus rather than the researcher, they are also key in forming the basis of motivation for studying women's oppression in such a socially and politically marginalised group (Asylum Aid, 2011).

Cancian identifies activist research as an approach which 'aims at empowering the powerless, exposing the inequities of the status quo, and promoting social changes that equalize the distribution of resources' (1996: 187). Therefore, an activist research strategy is intricately linked with feminism as a way to challenge the forms of oppression that are often studied when carrying out research around violence against women (Naples, 2003, see also Holman Jones, 2008). The researcher is able to adopt a two-way 'giving' relationship, as it is participatory in nature and requires the researcher to be involved (often in a voluntary capacity) in community groups relevant to the research topic. This ensures to some degree that participants gains something from the research (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). This was undertaken in many different ways during the development of this thesis (see Appendix Three).

Working with women, groups and gatekeepers of organisations, has highlighted the vulnerability of a research relationship when exploring sensitive topics. This is particularly important in terms of sexual violence as well as with asylum groups, as knowledge and trust is often built over a period of time. Activist approaches were chosen as part of a process of methodological development in this study, but also as a personal way to minimise any form of exploitative relationship with potentially vulnerable people without giving something back, even if it was small. As work and

'writing up' began to dominate more of my time, I often felt genuine feelings of regret about the limitations of my involvement in groups, as the time I had free fluctuated. I had hoped to work more in support capacities with women, such as birthing partner for pregnant women in the asylum system or in more regular or in-depth support for experiences of sexual violence. In reality, having a full time job and full time PhD did not allow these to materialise, as women needed consistency and reliability which (sadly) I could not guarantee. Therefore, more structural and community involvement allowed the opportunity to 'give back' in less individual forms of support.

As asylum seekers, women may feel they are in a particularly vulnerable position as they may be conscious of deportation or suspicious of unfamiliar people (Asylum Aid, 2008b). This realisation has been a factor in my ongoing weekly engagement with women in local asylum communities, and has encouraged me to work more consistently on an activist level with the community and activist groups involved in this research. This is important considering the significance and sensitive nature of this topic and, I would argue, allowed for production of more in-depth considerations for future policy recommendations to local and national councils, as well as relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations, and in developing practical work for post-doctorate research and support (Cancian, 1996; Skinner, 2005).

## **5.5 Double Edged Ethics – Considerations for Sensitive Topics**

Although easily broken down into sections on paper, this research has been far from straightforward with more than its fair share of set-backs, unanticipated barriers and problems that tested me as a researcher, an academic, an activist and a person (see also Cancian, 1996; Haggis, 1990; Scheper-Hughes, 1992). This has included 11 months' work with an organisation which decided to withdraw participation citing the possibility of re-traumatisation for women, withdrawal from a second local organisation based on a decision made in their London headquarters, participation

refusals from state organisations and dissolution of one participating community group, due to a lack of funding resources.

Although there exists some literature regarding research participation and power, a substantial amount considers non-cooperation from some of the most powerful state actors, such as police and larger institutions (see Coleman et al, 2009; Hope and Walters, 2008). However, there remain questions in wider forms of hierarchy of power outside of economically or politically powerful or state run institutions, such as in non-governmental organisations, specifically those working in support. As this research developed, forms of power and hierarchy became evident in areas that had not been anticipated, such as the women's organisation who withdrew participation with regard to the potential for re-traumatisation. Whilst in full agreement that re-traumatisation was and is an experience that should not be risked for the purposes of sensitive research, as a feminist activist another issue for concern was that the potential participants had not been given the opportunity to decide for themselves whether to take part or not. My experience working with women in the group in general over the 11 month period (and with women outside of this capacity) was that some women were willing, and choosing, to speak about sexual violence and other forms of abuse in conflict without prompting in the area, often just from questions about their asylum case or daily life. It is important that participation in research is informed, fully consensual and with all measures undertaken to avoid risks for the woman involved. However, I would also argue that agency, the option to choose to tell her story, should also be left for women to decide upon. The question of 'whose voice is heard?' is a crucial one with regard to a socially silenced problem such as sexual violence, yet, as this research demonstrates, 'whose voice is allowed to be heard, and by whom?' can be the first stumbling block to get through when accessing and working with vulnerable women.

This is not to underestimate the problem of unethical research strategies. Exploitative research relationships are not new or isolated instances, and

issues have been documented by various organisations, non-governmental or otherwise, in varying capacities (see Ellsberg and Heise, 2005, for examples). As another example, as part of a public discussion with a survivor of conflict rape<sup>9</sup> and member of the Association of Concentration Camp Torture Survivors Sarajevo at a conference in Paris's *La Sorbonne University* (May, 2009), I was informed of research that had been undertaken by international agencies with conflict rape survivors in Bosnia without full consent of participants. More problematically, women's personal stories and testimonies were appearing in international journals without the knowledge of the survivors. These are examples of the need and significance of ethically centred research, and provide justification of suspicion at organisational levels. Nonetheless, I would agree with Lee (1993) that this need not result in an organisational blockade on research, and participant inclusion in the decision making process should not be undermined, but sought after and thoroughly considered to allow for ethically centred activist research. Had this been the case, more opportunities may have arisen for more women to speak and, consequently, more local voices to be heard.

### **5.5.1 Organisational Gate-keeping in Governmental Capacities**

Another form of gate-keeping, and one which is well documented in criminological literature (Hammersley, 2005; Hillyard, 2003; Hillyard et al, 2003; Hope and Walters, 2008; Tombs and Whyte, 2003), came from governmental organisations. This was in varying forms, for example the denial of permission to interview Border Agency case workers, and instead being given access to a managerial representative (after a long period of attempting to make contact). A more significant form of control however was the clausuring of the original consent form by the interviewee which gave all control over the decision to publish information from the data collected to the UK Border Agency (UKBA). Whilst all other participants were given the rights determined in the consent form (Appendix Four), as well as being sent the

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<sup>9</sup> This was discussed by the presenter herself, as part of a public dialogue. However, in the interest of ethics and right to anonymity, the survivor's name will remain anonymous within this thesis.

transcripts for approval, the UKBA added a right to review 'any and all' information to be printed in this thesis from the interview itself after the interview but before signing the contract. Lee theorises that:

*'Gatekeepers often allow researchers into a setting but use formal agreements and procedures in order to control their activities. Data collection, for example, can be limited by placing restrictions on the kind of material which can be made available to the researcher... More widely, governmental organisations in particular may formally restrict the disclosure of potentially embarrassing information.'*

(Lee, 1993: 125)

Although the participant engaged fully, the clause has undeniably limited my voice as a critical researcher on the interview as a whole, so as not to prompt withdrawal of data. To ensure some autonomy over constructive criticism, I opted to send only information directly taken and interpreted from the interview (as is in line with the clausured contract) in Chapter Six, avoided critical analysis from the empirical process as much as possible and apply only contradictory discussions from other agencies rather than from myself. Therefore information related to the UKBA in Chapter Six is partial but is reflective of the general findings from the interview (see also Spender, 1981 for discussion).

### **5.5.2 Activist Research with Asylum Communities and Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence**

Moving to more community related factors, Cancian defines activist research as something that 'aims at challenging inequality by empowering the powerless, exposing the inequalities of the status quo, and promoting social changes that equalise the distribution of the sources' (1993: 92). Like feminist epistemologies generally, and linking back to Becker's debate on research on the side of the underdog (1967), this study has been based in aiming to change or, to some degree, provide an impact for the people, specifically the women, whose experience overall is the subject of this thesis. Academia and activism are, as Cancian goes on to point out, often at opposite ends of a research spectrum, with academia being aimed at colleagues within the

academy, and activism aimed at or with community groups, practitioners and governmental and non-governmental organisations (ibid).

This research has engaged groups from various parts of local communities in Merseyside. As discussed earlier, a 'give/take' approach has directed much of this study as a way to ensure the groups related to the research have benefited in some ways. Whilst I have had the opportunity to provide groups with various forms of support in differing capacities, it is also true that this work has informed some of the findings that are outlined in more depth in the following three chapters.

Regular contact with community and voluntary groups has provided further scope regarding the challenges in these specific sectors in terms of what considerations will develop within the overall findings. This form of participation has also allowed me to engage in activist work as informed by my own research, including the overall literature review. Developing on from initial studies, I applied for and was awarded funding to challenge attitudes around sexual violence in Merseyside, particularly in targeting male attitudes as there were evident gaps in focussing on potential perpetrators rather than victims (see Chapter One and Appendices Five and Six). This led to further activist campaigns on a similar note. Other forms of activism included information exchange from research in holding a symposium for the Darfur Community Group, as outlined in (Appendix Seven). This was effective in two ways: firstly, it temporarily broke down barriers between a (fairly marginalised) local group and my University, which seldom happens, and secondly by including people from asylum communities who otherwise are not granted access to higher education whilst in the asylum system. Interestingly, however, no women attended or spoke, which again indicated gender divisions and roles within the community group generally.

An important question in activist research is 'what will be done with data, and who can benefit?' Schostak and Schostak outline the limitations and opportunities in producing written material from research aimed at 'making a

difference' (2008). This applies to the written findings, which I have aimed to distribute in academic fields (for example, see Canning, 2010 and Canning, 2011a) but also to create impact in engaging my work and findings within activist realms (Canning, 2011b and Canning, 2011c). Aiming at wider grassroots audiences allows potential for wider impact and distribution outside of academic fields. This too can be said for relaying information based in academic study into activist arenas through presentations and guest speeches. In the time spent undertaking research for this thesis, I have presented findings to varying audiences (from students, to activist groups to non-governmental organisations). These total over 40 for all presentations and over 20 for national and international conference presentations specifically, including the British Sociological Association, the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control and the Feminist and Women's Studies Association (see Appendix Eight for further examples). This has been an effective way to undertake a form of consciousness raising from a feminist perspective about the social and political issues women face in conflict generally, and in the UK asylum system specifically.

## **5.6 Empirical Research: the Interview Process**

As a form of inquiry, interviews are 'one of the most commonly recognised forms of qualitative research method' (Mason, 2002: 63). Semi-structured interviews were chosen specifically for this research to allow individuals the opportunity to voice their own 'knowledge, views, understandings, experiences, and interactions' (Mason, *ibid*). As Chapter Six demonstrates, concerns beyond 'fact' are voiced by respondents that include their own worries, descriptions of accounts from women they work with or support, and political ideologies. Allowing participants to develop on their issues related to the research, as well as concerns for the people they work with, links well with the overall 'humanist', and specifically feminist, ontological position I have enveloped and developed (Plummer, 2001 in Mason, 2002). Likewise, the structural and practical undertakings of this research have embraced many forms of grounded theory as set out by Charmaz, including simultaneous data collection and analysis, pursuit of emergent fields through

early data analysis, discovery of basic social processes within the data, inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesise these processes (2003: 313). As this chapter goes on to demonstrate, this largely reflects Charmaz's definition of a constructivist perspective within this form (ibid).

### **5.6.1 Selecting and Recruiting Respondents**

Given that this subject area is so specific in its focus, purposive sampling was employed to ensure all respondents would be directly related to at least one, if not all, of my research aims and rationale (Bowling, 2002; Mason, 2002). As Chapter Four discussed, Merseyside is a key area for asylum dispersal and as such has a number of community groups and informal organisations which work with asylum seekers. Furthermore, the area has a number of specific rape investigation units, entitled 'the UNITY team', working with organisations who support survivors of sexual violence (see SAFEPlace Merseyside, n.d.), many of whom I had been in contact with through activist work. Organisations working within one or both of these remits were approached, and individual respondents were usually put forward by managers or co-ordinators as being the most related to my area of study, with the exception of a handful that I had requested specifically due to previous knowledge of their role.

Although over 20 people from varying organisations were approached for interview or group participation (not including the aforementioned groups), overall 13 interviews took place with what may be termed 'key' figures in sexual violence support, torture support, community groups, police, the UK asylum process and/or women's asylum groups. Each individual worked in some capacity with women survivors of sexual abuse and/or asylum seekers in Merseyside. This meant that my study was not limited to one specific gender, age or generational group, or ethnic group. It is notable, however, that three quarters of interview respondents were women, all of whom supported women in some capacity, and Chapter Six documents some interesting findings in relation to this. Only one respondent was from a Black

Minority Ethnic group, although activist work with community groups had a majority African presence, and one from a Slavic ethnic group.

Respondents were recruited either by directly contacting via email or phone call, or by organisation affiliation, as I had various contacts due to work in the voluntary sector. The second method was facilitated by being introduced by a colleague of the respondent, a way of approaching the participant which also helped 'break down some of the power relations between the 'researcher' and... 'researched'" (Standing, 1998:189).

### **5.6.2 Interviews: What, Why and How Was I enquiring?**

As noted earlier, the most viable way of ensuring open questions within a loosely based structure was to develop semi-structured interviews based on a schedule rather than specific questions. As Mason argues, although the respondent will likely feel they are having a 'conversation with a purpose' (2002: 67) the semi-structured interviews still required rigorous planning and preparation. The schedules were carefully drawn up, reviewed, re-reviewed, edited and re-drafted before the first interviews were under way. As a form of piloting my technique and the general structure and content, I interviewed three colleagues within the space of one week, all of whom were experienced with working with marginalised groups and/or sensitive topics. These drew my attention to issues such as flow, approaching difficult questions and establishing a rapport, allowing me the opportunity to ask myself questions on the 'substance and style, scope and sequence' of my interview guide and edit them accordingly (Mason: *ibid*).

Again, the variety of roles that respondents played within their own relevant fields meant that not all questions would relate to each interviewee, for example an asylum group manager may not have first-hand experience of counselling sexual violence survivors. Therefore, a basic structure was developed that could be easily moulded to suit the respondent's field of experience or knowledge (see Appendix Nine for interview schedule).

As sexual violence is a particularly sensitive and, in many ways, silenced subject, questions related to rape were not directly broached in the first instance. As Robson (2002) suggests, a rapport was loosely built. Although I had usually spoken to participants previously and had sent information sheets (see Appendix Ten), I opened interviews by outlining the background of the research itself and asked individuals to outline the organisation they worked with and their role within that. This provided an 'ice-breaking' question as well as allowing me to consider what direction to take the focus in, dependent on the area of support they worked within.

Once rapport was established, conversation generally flowed well. I found the most useful way to keep focus on the respondent, without getting too caught up in reading from the schedule, was to write down key points and refer back to them once the respondent had finished talking. For this I kept an anonymised notebook which has since doubled up as a kind of reflective diary whilst transcribing, coding and analysing. Having written points of interviews that seemed particularly important at the time, I was then able to reflect more clearly on what I was considering to be significant information when analysing, as well as developing on the initial thoughts when transcribing. As will be elaborated on in section 5.11, most interviews were conducted in places chosen by the respondent, typically in their place of work. These were generally informal areas, with the exception of the Police and UK Border Agency (the latter of which I had to go through a security check before entering for interview). The respondents (listed in Table 5.2 below) varied in organisation affiliation, interview time and gender. This often meant extreme variations in answers and perspective, which will be developed on in the following three chapters.

**Table 5.2:**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Length of Interview</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
<b>Respondent 1 (R1): Darfur Community Group Leader and former Médecins Sans Frontières doctor in Darfur</b>	1 Hour 39 Minutes	05/06/10
<b>Respondent 2 (R2): Sexual Violence Advocate 1 (Youth)</b>	40 Minutes	08/06/10
<b>Respondent 3 (R3): Sexual Violence Advocate 2 (General)</b>	37 Minutes	11/06/10
<b>Respondent 4 (R4): Sexual Violence Support Worker (includes asylum)</b>	55 Minutes	21/06/10
<b>Respondent 5 (R5): Women's Torture and HIV support worker</b>	1 Hour 23 Minutes	01/07/10
<b>Respondent 6 (R6): Refugee Organisation Manager</b>	34 minutes	02/07/10
<b>Respondent 7 (R7): Asylum Women's Group Leader</b>	33 Minutes	16/07/10
<b>Respondent 8 (R8): Women's Health Outreach Worker</b>	53 Minutes	16/07/10
<b>Respondent 9 (R9): Survivors of Human Rights Abuses Agency Manager</b>	58 Minutes	19/07/10
<b>Respondent 10 (R10): UK Border Agency Manager</b>	1 Hour 11 minutes	4/08/10
<b>Respondent 11 (R11): Asylum Support Agency Manager</b>	1 Hour 27 Minutes	10/08/10
<b>Respondent 12 (R12): Detective Inspector</b>	51 Minutes	10/08/10
<b>Respondent 13 (R13): Asylum Support Caseworker</b>	38 Minutes	16/08/10

## 5.7 Oral History and Life Story: Access, Reflections and Methodological Inquiry

Oral history is loosely a form of biography, derivative from personal narrative and stemming from life history approaches to an individual's experiences and personal history. To define the difference between life story and oral history, Atkinson explains:

*'An oral history most often focuses on a specific aspect of a person's life... an oral history most often focuses on the community or what someone remembers about a specific event, issue, time, or place. When an oral interview focuses on a person's entire life, it is usually referred to as a life story or a life history.'*

(1998: 8)

Elements of both are evident to some degree in Hawwi's oral history. The use of oral history in the contexts of asylum and the intersectional continuum of violence provides an original avenue to explore the impacts of sexual violence, as well as patriarchy more generally. With this intention, oral history was decided to form an in-depth understanding of one woman's life in the aftermath of rape, and in living the UK asylum system.

In the overall account, Hawwi details more of her life than specifically related to the research but, echoing Mason's claim that research participants often discuss what they presume (from the kind of research being undertaken) what the researcher wants to know (2002), Hawwi focussed large parts of the discussion on life after rape, political involvement with oppositional groups in Ethiopia, and life in the asylum system and was therefore more relatable to oral history. Nonetheless, other factors of her earlier life still formed in me an interest in wider gender inequalities since, as Kelly notes, violence against women is not created in a vacuum, but exists in a continuum of inequality (1988, see chapters Seven and Eight for further discussion).

As Chase details, interest in life histories and personal narratives as forms of methodological inquiry were reinvigorated by liberation movements in the

1960s and 1970s (2008: 61). Feminist researchers were particularly influential in developing life history approaches since 'by listening to previously silenced voices, feminist researchers challenged social science knowledge about society, culture, and history' (ibid: 62; see also Pantazis, 2004). Oakley, discussed above as key in developing feminist methodological inquiry, highlights some significant factors for consideration in the telling of another's story:

*'Unsurprisingly, the biographical method is tied to theoretical approaches emphasising the importance of subjectivity, and a resurgent interest in biographical methods within social science in recent years reflects a growing interest in the role of agency in social life... Biographers, in particular, are agents who turn encyclopaedias of material into readable accounts, so their subjectivity must contribute to the product.'*

(2010: 426)

Although oral history may not directly relate to Oakley's description or definition of biographical method, elements of the above are intricately linked with the experience I have had in engaging in Hawwi's oral history and life story. I have not had to trawl through the amount of historical information that Oakley goes on to describe in summarising her biography of Barbara Wootton. What does echo true in exploring Hawwi's oral history includes subjectivity, agency and turning material into readable accounts which then become the 'product'.

This has again developed concerns for me in terms of whose voice is being 'heard' (see Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). As a feminist in the Rape Crisis movement (and a white researcher wary of imperialistic approaches to ethnic and language difference), I have issues in altering the words of women to fit my own language, and so opted to relay Hawwi's oral history by summarising her account and life story in the third person rather than as if by Hawwi herself. Then, as in the findings from interviews, I drew out themes that relate to her overall experiences but which also link with the wider issue relatable to sexual violence, women's lives, oppression, forced migration and asylum. I have also tackled the issue of what language to include and opted to keep it

as close to the original as possible in the hope that it does not lose its authenticity (Standing, 1998).

## **5.8 Hawwi**

The first time I met Hawwi was the day of recording the first section of her oral history. A colleague from an asylum group I work with had been in contact with Hawwi with regards to support, informed her of the research I was undertaking and asked if she would be willing to be interviewed. Hawwi agreed, passed on her email address and I opened a dialogue. On the first day we met, in a quite private office in my University, and on speaking to Hawwi, oral history was definitively decided as the method most appropriate. Even though my own perspective and experience of supporting women has been that many want to talk, for some reason there had remained an expectation of vulnerability which was quickly challenged when Hawwi began to talk about her life, sexual violence and forced migration.

As discussed and widely acknowledged, access to survivors of sexual violence for research is limited and bound in ethical implications (Rape Crisis England and Wales, ND; Campbell and Dienemann, 2001). Researching from 'the outside' can have implications for researcher/participant relationships, particularly in regards to trust, researcher interpretation, and limitations of research in impact to changing the problem area being investigated (Reay, 1996; Skinner, 2005; Weedon, 1999). Although successful research has been undertaken with survivors directly, these investigations are often led by highly experienced researchers with access to appropriate support if emotional or psychological effects, such as re-traumatisation, should arise (see Kelly et al, 1994; Jones and Cook, 2008; Medical Foundation, 2009)

As mentioned, and which will be further discussed in sections 5.5.1 and 5.11, much of my experience of working within the field of sexual violence inquiry and activism (specifically with Merseyside's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre) has been that women can often wish to discuss experiences of violence if a

level of trust exists and the environment is safe, as Hawwi had. It has also been important to 'ponder on the presumed willingness to reveal experience' (Kelly et al, 1994: 35) and therefore never to push the boundaries of conversation with women who were initially approached in the community groups discussed in section 5.5.

Although I will not include reference to women's discussions of sexual violence with me outside of a consensual research capacity, it is important to acknowledge that experiences of being told about instances of violence by survivors are fairly frequent for me in personal and research capacities. This is perhaps (importantly) because of my work within support for survivors of sexual violence and advocacy roles. Whilst this has directly informed my approach to working with women seeking asylum, it was also significant in developing my capacity to engage in and discuss sensitive issues around sexual violence with interview respondents and Hawwi. This will become more significant in developing discussion around barriers to support in the aftermath of sexual violence within the Criminal Justice System in the following chapter, as well as first responses to women seeking asylum. Although not all survivors will wish to discuss instances of sexual violence (Kelly et al, *ibid*), the way in which questioning is approached has vital effects on whether someone will willingly inform you of their experiences. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this is an area for serious consideration within Criminal Justice and the UK Border Agency.

As discussed earlier, the possibility of further psychological effects or re-traumatisation affect the accessibility and ethical inclusion of direct discussion with rape survivors in sociological inquiry, gaining access on an official research basis with women in the UK asylum system who have been subjected to sexual violence during conflict was a difficult process (section 5.5.1). Literally until almost the end of the process of data collection for this thesis, I had (for almost one year) decided to include secondary accounts of sexual violence from individuals within organisations and from literature and report reviews. Although I have upheld the inclusion of these, one final

attempt at including the story of a survivor was, after almost two years of attempting access, successful.

After completing an interview with a respondent who led an asylum women's group, discussion turned to whether women were being included in interviews. Having outlined the issues experienced in gaining access, the respondent took steps to ask women in her group if anyone would consent to being interviewed. In what was essentially a form of snowball sampling, one woman proclaimed an interest and I was put into direct contact, first by email, then text and telephone. In short, to echo the sentiments of Raymond M. Lee, 'that which is most likely to secure access can only be gained once the researcher is actually inside the setting and has carried out the study!' (1993: 121).

To undertake the oral history, I contacted Hawwi first by email, as was suggested by the person who put us in touch, and then phoned to establish contact and properly outline what I was researching. Language was not an issue at this point, as I had been made aware that Hawwi is fluent in English, and we met for the first time days later. Steps, outlined by Atkinson (1998) in considering how to approach oral history, were taken to prepare for the meeting. This included explaining my purpose in the first instance, preparing practically and mentally for what we would discuss as well as how it would be recorded, creating the right setting (which Hawwi chose – see Section 5.11) and being reflexive and open ended.

As an outline of the oral history shows (see Appendix Eleven), I had to do very little prompting and instead left Hawwi space to develop her own story and memories. Only on very few occasions, for clarification rather than prompting, did I ask further questions during the process. Whilst this may not work well with everyone, I felt Hawwi was more than happy to lead the telling of her own story without interruption, giving her space to reflect and, as she said herself, remember (see Chapter Seven). This again echoed the sentiment that it is important to work with the woman in front of you rather

than to adhere specifically to guidelines (Cook and Fonow, 1990; Ellsberg and Heise, 2005). Another point worth noting is that, although asking further questions may have harvested more specific answers, the account that Hawwi has given is almost completely of her own recollection, with very little from me as a researcher, reinforcing one form of feminist standpoint in validating women's stories and affording women the opportunity to use her own voice.

## **5.9 Transcription, Coding and Analysis**

Once data from participants and Hawwi had been collected, the initial step in this research process toward coding was transcription. Transcriptions were undertaken as soon as possible for the first four interviews on a week to week basis with transcription time requiring an average of six to eight hours of transcription for every one hour of recorded data. The frequency at which I was able to transcribe escalated with a three week period of leave from work in August 2010, which enabled me to complete the final nine interviews and some sections of the oral history.

Although this was a great opportunity, it came with unexpected problems of its own. Firstly, I had underestimated the effect that monotonous and fairly unchallenging work would have in such a concentrated capacity. Having gone from full time and varied work, as well as voluntary and field work, to a somewhat isolated transcription process was quite daunting. Although the aim of completing all transcription in this time was accomplished, my transcription speed fell to around eight hours typing per one hour of data and at times even more. I had also assumed that, because the interview transcriptions required changing format for the time and speaker (as it was a process of dialogue), the transcription of the oral histories would be significantly quicker. Being on the whole a monologue of her own account, I had expected Hawwi's story to be easier to type as she spoke.

This was not the case for two reasons. Firstly, although set at the slowest speed and although Hawwi was fluent in English, it was extremely difficult at

points to determine her exact words through her Oromo accent from my own Northern Irish, meaning constant manual rewinding as I did not have a transcription pedal. This brought my speed to around ten hours per one hour recorded which, in all, required around eight days of consistent transcription. Some terms of use are not particularly common in the UK (see also Fontana and Frey, 2008), but these were not edited for the final transcription and, in my opinion, add depth to the cultural construction of her own experiences and maintain her own personal perspective (Reissman, 1993: 13) whilst highlighting possible complications in interviewer/participant rapport and understanding.

The second issue that emerged from continuous transcription, from listening uninterrupted to Hawwi's life story over eight to ten hour periods, was being submerged in her experience. Although Hawwi goes into little depth about her subjection to rape, the majority of the three parts of oral history reflect serious and, at times, greatly upsetting inequalities and personal challenges. Many are directly resultant of her experience of rape and many are linked to socio-economic or gendered inequalities and disadvantage, but at various parts I felt saturated in her experience and on a few occasions became both upset and angry that individuals can be subjected to so many forms of violence, social harms and inequalities. At these points, I chose to take breaks from transcription. Although this lengthened the process (hence the eight days of transcription), it maintained my ability to keep focus when I did resume my work and therefore maintain accuracy.

Although full accuracy cannot always be guaranteed (Reissmann: 1993: 12), recordings were listened through multiple times to ensure the finished script was as close to the original as possible. This includes inaccurate grammar which was noted using the term [sic] and accent was represented in including terms attributable to the accent and dialect of the participant. Examples include the use of 'erm' by Respondent Two, from Liverpool, and 'Ja' with Respondent One from Darfur. This retains individuality from the participant which can be lost in changing the spoken word to written (Reissman, *ibid*)

and allowed for analysis of pauses or gaps if I had chosen to undertake narrative analysis.

Richards (2009) outlines three forms of coding: descriptive coding, topic coding and analytic coding. The first refers to the storing of information about the interview or respondent, as has been done in Table 5.2. The second describes the separation of topics and discussions in a particular paragraph or set of paragraphs. The third focuses on probing further to engage in what is being said by the participant. These stages are separate but related to narrative analysis, which was a focus in the previous section.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) discuss, qualitative inquiry is seldom clear cut and not always linear. Coding is another practice in this research which fits that description. Beyond descriptive work, coding commenced to some degree during the transcription process and to a greater degree, once all interviews were complete and had been transcribed. This was done manually at first, as personally I find reading from screens uncomfortable and, in terms of when it can be done, inflexible. Copies of all interviews and three parts of oral history were printed on single pages (to allow for notes) and read through numerous times to begin deciphering definite themes. Paragraphs were sectioned off and lettered codes written at the sides, as outlined by Richards (2009). I was uncertain as to whether to follow coding guidelines suggested by colleagues in using different coloured highlighters for different themes but, when reflecting on the number of themes emerging from initial coding, decided that there were too many interconnected topics and issues, and so proceeded with one colour but many acronyms.

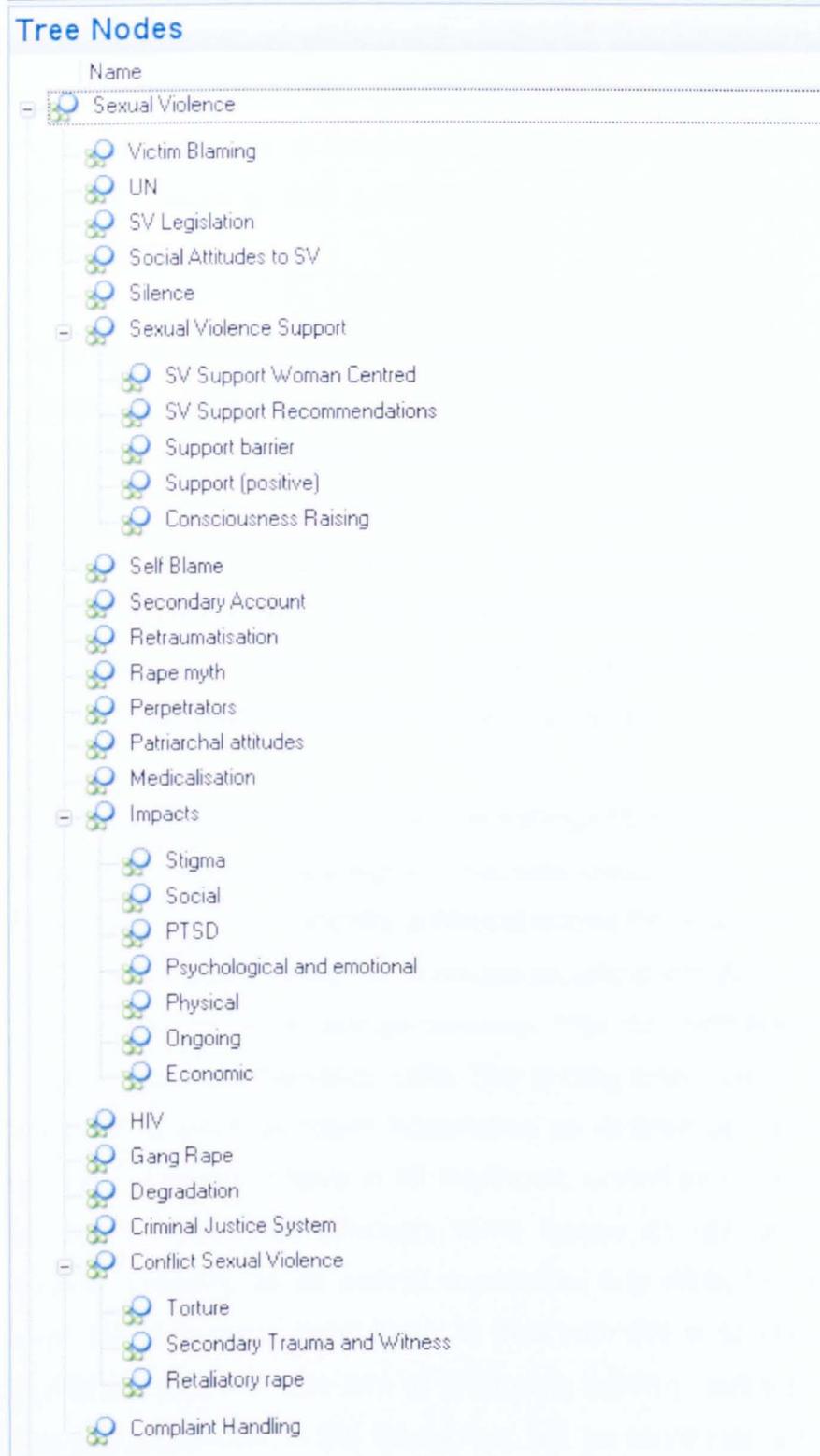
Indexing has gradually developed within qualitative researching. Traditional methods included manual indexing and separation (Richards, 2009; Silverman, 2010), or (using software) cutting and pasting documents. Most analysis software initially catered for quantitative methodologies; however, developments over the past two decades have been vast in response to

surges in qualitative researching in the social sciences, as well as technological advancements (ibid).

After thorough consideration, I undertook final stages of coding and the all stages of indexing and analysing using NVivo 8, an analysis package which allows for layered coding. This required attending one training session but, as technology is not a personal strong point, many more hours of adaption to the software. Although time consuming in the short run, the overall process allowed for effective organisation, identification of relationships within different interviews and the oral history and ordered coding and analysis.

Firstly, all interviews were uploaded in the 'Sources' section of the software. Once this was complete, and still reflecting on the manual coding, I identified and developed nodes to categorise the data collected. These were separated into 'Free Nodes' and 'Tree Nodes'. The former allows for one strand of information that is not related to any other theme to be identified. For example, in initiating discussion in the interviews, I asked each participant to outline the role of the organisation and what they do within it. Although important information in determining what forms of support was available for women, it was not linked to any other issue and so was 'stand alone'. After this I used the codes from the interviews, some of which were established as themes following the literature review, and some emerging directly from the data, to form 'Tree Nodes'. This allows one parent node with various branches linked to the same theme or subject. For example, unsurprisingly one of the most important themes in the information collected related to sexual violence. Using tree nodes, I was able to link on issues related with sexual violence, one example being 'Impacts'. As not all impacts are similar, and as individuals respond in different ways to sexual abuse, using tree nodes allowed me to separate different impacts of sexual violence into physical, psychological and emotional, social, and so on (see Figure 5.3 below). This effectively means that data are not lost or left in an all encompassing category, but are easily accessible and identifiable as similar but separate.

Figure 5.3:



### 5.9.1 Analysis

One of the most complex parts of analysing can be determining what will and will not be included in the final findings (Mason, 2002; Richards, 2009). The data collected through interview and oral history came to over 120,000 words, much of which was directly relevant to the initial questions asked and the overall objective of the project inquiry. From fearing I had too little data, snowball sampling and participant input resulted in streams of relevant information.

Many researchers detail their problems in deciding what will and will not be included in findings and analysis (Chase, 2008). This can be especially significant in interpreting information on particularly sensitive topics or politically important debates, such as sexual violence, especially when individual accounts are included (as discussed above). This has been somewhat problematic in this research in terms of trying to include as much information and detail about activist research reflections, balancing with findings from interviews and Hawwi's oral history.

There are various ways to focus the findings from this research, and the most important remains focussing on what was asked in the initial set of aims and objectives. So many socially profound issues have arisen, from poor mental health in the asylum system to issues around destitution and no recourse to public funds for failed asylum seekers. This has perhaps, to some degree, led me into what Richards calls 'the coding trap' (2009: 109). Having the software to store as much information as desired as well as a bottomless number of nodes, I have in all likelihood, undertaken more analysis than is necessary. However, although some issues do not directly relate to the overall research, as an activist researcher it is difficult to ignore them. The most effective way I have found to deal with this is to keep all relevant and significant data with the aim of producing reports, conference presentations and journal articles in the future that will be more relevant to these topics, providing an outlet for this information rather than discarding it.

For the study in focus, Mason suggests drawing a distinction between literal, interpretive and reflexive readings of interviews and qualitative data (2002: 78). Overall, all three forms of analysis have been used in different forms. As this chapter demonstrates, social interaction and research with organisations has allowed me to look reflexively at my position as a researcher and the ways in which the research developed, including barriers and ethical complications. To some degree, interpretive readings are included (evidenced in the next two chapters) which stem in some ways from narrative analysis and (more commonly) from annotations made during transcriptions and the coding process.

Most commonly, readings from the interviews and oral history overall have been interpreted literally. Having asked questions with a clear view of gaining specific answers related to the overall aims and rationale (Mason: *ibid*), I filtered out dialogue that was not directly related and interpreted answers literally. This was more problematic on a few occasions where questions were deflected or contradicted original answers given. This then draws the question of how and why I have included narrative as forms of representation in my overall findings (Reissman, 1993: 16), which is important in both interview and oral history, which have been analysed and interpreted separately. The range of interview respondents left me with widely scattered data, as participants were often coming from different fields or areas. I was then able to filter out themes of topics for my findings, and slowly include (what I deemed to be) the most useful and appropriate responses relevant to that theme.

The overall process of analysis for interviews is different again to interpreting and representing the life story of Hawwi. Although I had indexed many of her statements in the same nodes as other interviews, and similar (as well as identical) themes developed from her story, there was even more complexity in condensing a short synopsis of her life. The Personal Narratives Group (1989) state:

*'When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't just reveal the past 'as it actually was,' aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences... Unlike the truth of scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters 'outside' the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them'*

(261, cited in Reissman, 1993: 22)

This statement encapsulates many of the conundrums and research dilemmas that have been embedded in the process of collecting Hawwi's oral history, and more significantly, in how I have gone about attempting to reflect or represent her experiences in my own interpretation. As a researcher, I have not engaged in the question of 'truth' around Hawwi's claims or life story to any real degree. Having been in the asylum system in Merseyside for around two years, therefore telling her story to various caseworkers, judges and support workers as well as a counsellor, Hawwi will be familiar with the concept of telling many parts of her life to people (although she did indicate that a lot came to mind from her childhood whilst we spoke – see Chapter Seven). Therefore the question of forgetting, exaggerating or becoming confused, as indicated in the paragraph above, can only lead to speculation of her own process of remembrance.

What is evident throughout the 5.5 hours of oral history in three parts is that, although there were weeks between one meeting to the next, consistency remained in parts of the story that had been repeated, as timing meant some meetings between us were cut short, with the story picking up just before where Hawwi had left it. Nonetheless, as Kennedy Bergen argues, 'feminist research is, above all else, woman centered' (1993: 200). Although the question of truth is problematic in researching stories or lives, as evidence may rely on memory, this research aims to challenge the (often) adversarial systems in place when people make one of two claims: that they have been

raped, or that they should be entitled to asylum and protection. As chapters One and Four discussed, and as chapters Six, Seven and Eight will go on to discuss, these are often areas clouded in disbelief and assumptions of deceit where both sexual violence and asylum are concerned. As a researcher, I must also acknowledge the limitations of interpreting someone else's story, as well as emphasising that my own views of Hawwi's story will no doubt be subjective. As with the interpretation of interviews, I have had to decipher what is significant to *this particular study* without undermining other significant events or experiences in her own life. Therefore, although I have tried to ensure as much of Hawwi's own words are included, I have (as discussed earlier) tried to keep focus on my original aims and objectives, echoing the sentiments of The Personal Narrative Group in shaping the meaning from what I have derived from Hawwi's story.

### **5.10 Whose Side Am I On? Researcher Objectivity and Balance**

The sociological dilemma of 'bias', or maintaining objectivity, is not a new one. Linking with the positivistic and quantitative foundations of much of many forms of social science, 'keeping a distance' from the social groups or individuals under observation or study has been a key issue for many social scientists (Becker, 1967; Liebling, 2001; Oakley, 1981). Unsurprisingly, this has been an issue that I grappled with at most stages of the research process. A focus on avoiding bias has been integrated into practically all of my sociological study as an undergraduate, and even in monitoring my own thoughts or opinions in voluntary capacities, where it is arguably more important to provide an opportunity for a survivor's voice to be heard.

It was possibly only at the end of interviewing respondents and during the development of Hawwi's oral history that I allowed myself to properly question why, as an activist researcher, I was focussing so much on attempting to separate myself from the full extent of political problems that were stemming from the research. As Oakley (1981), Becker (1967) and Schostak and Schostak (2008) have argued, researchers in the social

science often steer toward an issue that is of political interest of significance to the investigator and, as such, are seldom undertaken from a neutral stance. Neither was my own choice of subject without political motivation and personal interest. Although conflict and war have long been interests, my own sociological interest in gender inequalities related to, and embedded in, sexual violence began to fully develop after working with children who had contracted HIV from rape and forced prostitution in the Kwa-Zulu Natal region of South Africa. On attending various court cases with the families of survivors, inequalities faced by complainants became horrifyingly evident in that region. On returning to the UK in 2007, I began to take further interest in similar issues and identified parallels in women's experience of the UK's Criminal Justice System. It has therefore been paramount throughout the process to recognise my own agency in the direction of the work (see sections 5.9 and 5.9.1) without fencing off my own political motivations to avoid truly embracing the side of 'the underdog' (Becker, 1967).

In the case of working with women in the asylum system on a weekly basis, it became difficult toward the end, particularly of Hawwi's oral history, not to apply some form of judgement on state institutions who, arguably, appeared to be having direct impacts on women's mental health, access to support and general human rights (see chapters Six, Seven and Eight). During the many stages of activism, focus remained on whose side I was on: that of the woman who had survived sexual violence, in whatever capacity. For some reason I had, perhaps naively, not anticipated such substantial challenges to the UK Border Agency. However, regular discussion with women and Hawwi specifically, more engagement with literature on the asylum system and an interview with a manager at the UK Border Agency all shaped, in some way, the final direction of this debate to question the authority, legitimacy and respectability of the Border Agency itself. This was perhaps most strongly reflected through frustration in my own research diary when, after transcribing, I started to reconsider the UKBA's definition of having a 'well-founded fear of persecution':

*'WHAT? What is 'well-founded'? Rape is not included in terms of gender – is that not 'well-founded'? Fear of rape after watching families/communities/individuals raped – is that not 'well-founded'? What, exactly, is a 'fear of persecution'? How is it measured? And who determines what is 'well-founded'? WHAT EXACTLY FITS THIS CATEGORY??'*

(Diary Entry, 26/07/10, emphasis in original)

Although I would genuinely argue that the interview with the UKBA manager was as neutral as possible in terms of engagement (as many interviewers have noted, those leading the process often have so much to focus on that the context of the answers may not be fully visible until afterward, see Bryman and Burgess, 1994), I have since had to review and re-review what I first drew out in my analysis afterward. As Reissman argues:

*'Investigators do not have direct access to another's experience. We deal with ambiguous representations of it – talk, text, interaction, and interpretation. It is not possible to be neutral and objective, to merely represent (as opposed to interpret) the world.'*  
(1993: 8)

Working on one side of the asylum experience at the same time as the other proved a complex process, particularly in drawing an analysis and providing any real form of balance in the overall argument. As Becker had argued, this was not always possible and probably the most constructive way of working through this division has been in publishing concerns that developed from this experience (Canning, 2011b; 2011c).

## **5.11 Ethical Considerations**

As Sieber and Stanley outline, socially sensitive research includes 'studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research' (1988: 49). Lee and Renzetti elaborate on this, stating:

*'A sensitive topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for*

*the researcher and/or researched the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data.'*

(1993: 4)

These issues have embodied large proportions of this research, from theoretical investigation and literature review, to access of participants, to broaching the sensitive topic of sexual violence during interviews and oral history. Sexual violence can be difficult to speak about in personal or political capacities. This can be multiplied for women (and men) who have experienced sexual violence, where socially embedded forms of stigmatisation or self-blame may create further barriers to discussion.

Sieber defines ethics as being, 'to do with application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wrongdoing others, to promote the good, to be respectful, and to be fair' (1993: 15). Whilst this may be interpreted as a fairly ideological approach to researching sensitive topics, as discussed earlier, activist or radical research can stem from a political will to challenge or change the topic you study in some way or other (Schostak and Schostak, 2008). To aim for something 'good', as Sieber implies, can come at a cost if adequate ethical considerations are not taken account of.

Ethical considerations have been an integral process of this thesis's whole research process, from design to empirical investigation. Campbell and Dienemann, (in Renzetti et al, 2001) effectively outline issues involved in ensuring consent when researching violence against women, and how these are adapted throughout the research process. This develops first from recognising gender, culture and community as being intricately linked to wider ethical issues and 'difference', therefore highlighting the need for research sensitivity as well as recognition of the researcher as potentially holding some forms of social power that they, or I, may not be aware of, but that the participant may (Reay, 1996). Campbell and Dienemann state that access to this knowledge comes from personal cultural self-knowledge (ibid: 60), something that I have attempted to acknowledge and incorporate into this research.

Cultural congruence is significant in establishing a non-hierarchical relationship with respondents and participants generally (ibid: 61). At most points of this process, including activist development, my contact with participants and community groups was almost always in community centres, organisation headquarters and church halls. This included undertaking interviews, almost all of which were conducted in these areas. Interestingly, however, Hawwi chose not to discuss her life history in any of these settings. Although I had offered to come to her home, at that point she was living in shared asylum accommodation and understandably did not feel comfortable in that particular environment. When asked where she would be more comfortable, she requested that we meet at my office, out of all sight of community groups and the Women's Group we had first met in (a point that will be developed on in chapters Six and Seven). Although not particularly 'culturally congruent', as Campbell and Dienemann advise, it is also important to ensure that the wishes of the respondent are met when researching sensitive topics.

A consent sheet was drawn up to indicate each participant's rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage (Campbell and Dienemann, ibid: 66) as well as reassuring anonymity (Mason, 2002: 80-81). As discussed in section 5.6, all participants agreed and signed in the first instance, with the exception of the respondent from the UK Border Agency, who placed a clause on my agreement to ensure that the Agency would be able to approve any work for publication before it is publicly released.

Before choosing to participate, all respondents were assured that this research is confidential; pseudonyms have been applied to all participants to ensure anonymity. All interview respondents have been identified as 'Respondent 1, 2, 3', or 'R1, 2,3' and so on, all of which correlate to the kind of organisation they work with as laid out in Table 5.2. I chose at the beginning of the interview process to ensure anonymity for the organisations involved as well as the individuals to avoid any come back on participants once this thesis and any subsequent materials are published. The only

organisation names included are those of public bodies and even then the role and participants involved have been anonymised. Likewise, Hawwi's name has been changed from her own name. During our final meeting together I asked if there was any particular name she would like to be known as, and 'Hawwi' was her own choice. I felt that this gave her further autonomy over her story, which was also sent to her for final approval.

Although not necessarily a result of interview, the risks of re-traumatisation for the participant is an important concern, but the regular presence of a support worker may allow for further emotional support (Rape Crisis, 1984; Kelly and Radford, 1998; Jones and Cook, 2008). As discussed previously, the oral history undertaken with Hawwi was done so in the knowledge that she was receiving regular support for trauma and counselling and with discussion with colleagues at Merseyside's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre, who agreed further support if necessary if Hawwi requested it.

This research was initially approved by the LJMU Ethics Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009, with subsequent amendments approved (due to changes in research methodology and participant group) on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010 (see appendices Four and Ten for agreed consent forms and information sheets).

## **5.12 Issues in the Field: Language, Ethnicity and Power**

As discussed, this study has been far from straightforward, with issues in gate-keeping, access and overall design. There have also been anticipated and unanticipated practical issues in undertaking research of this nature, particularly in cultural identity, language and power/lessness. Some of the below detail these issues in further depth, paying particular attention to issues in interpretation and gender, ethnicity and power which have shaped and directed this research.

### **5.12.1 Interpretation**

Language, accent and dialect can be serious barriers to research within asylum communities (see Action for Social Integration, N.D.; Murphy-Lawless

and Kennedy, 2002), as can the perception and assumption that research barriers will undoubtedly exist. As a pre-emptive strategy for effective interpretation with women, I undertook one day's training with the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, accessed through my voluntary work with Sahir House, for *Working with Interpreters*. Although eventually not necessary for oral history with Hawwi, the training was valuable in activist research with the Darfur Community Group and the aforementioned women's asylum group, as well as providing some support when it came to transcription with regard to Hawwi's use of the English language. This made me consciously aware of the importance of engaging specifically with the participant or interviewee rather than the interpreter and proved useful in various instances. For example, in regular meetings with the Darfur Community Group during its initial development, my interaction was usually through interpretation from Arabic to English and vice versa.

A more relevant and sensitive example was in working with a woman claiming asylum who only had access to a male relative interpreter. As Ellsberg and Heise (2005) outline, this can be hugely problematic for the woman being interviewed if she has experienced sexual violence, due to the stigma attached to rape. Although two questions needed for her claim and support included whether she had experienced rape or female genital mutilation, training, literature and experience with sexual violence support imprinted on my consciousness that these should be excluded in case of issues in interpreter confidentiality or judgement. Furthermore, had she felt unsafe enough to not discuss sexual or other violence, this may have affected the information given in her claim. These are again issues that should be strongly considered by agencies engaging in discussion around sexual violence with women but that are not always upheld, as Chapter Six will discuss.

One issue that did develop from work within communities, and during interviews, was not always so much language, but accent. Again, I have a fairly apparent Northern Irish accent which, despite years of adapting to life in

England and slowing down for lecturing, can be a problem in conversing with people who do not speak English as a first language. This was particularly apparent in working with the Darfur Community Group and in interaction with women's groups, where an older woman once exclaimed (whilst telling me of human rights abuses she had been subjected to) 'I don't know what you are saying, but your face makes me happy!'. Although I had anticipated that I would have problems in understanding asylum seekers, it was in fact directly the opposite on many occasions.

For what was not the first time, I found the best ways of improving a mutual understanding were open gestures and relaxed body language, to literally adopt a slightly middle English accent, and simply slow myself down.

### **5.12.2 Ethnicity, Gender and Power**

Ethnicity and power is a much discussed and often problematic area in data collection and inquiry in investigations where the researcher embodies particular forms of power within a given society or context (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Phoenix, 1994, Spelman, 1988). As has been identified by various feminists, positions of 'whiteness' can relate to issues in obtaining acceptance or inclusion in research processes within Black Minority Ethnic groups (Phoenix, 1994; Rice, 1990) particularly if some form of power is assumed or perceived by the group. In academic terms, I am relatively powerless in the overall hierarchy, yet academia still appears from the outside (and at times even inside) to be a prestigious and powerful institution, and one often viewed as separate from grassroots concerns of experience (Schostak and Schostak, 2008).

This was an element that worked two ways during this research process. Although I was acutely aware of my position as a white researcher, academic and (essentially) outsider amongst women in asylum groups, I was also conscious of my position as a woman amongst men in the asylum community. On occasions when interviewing at a local asylum group, I was fully aware of the extent to which the space was male dominated, if not

exclusively male, and that I was one of (at times the only) woman there. Although the UK asylum system is predominately male, the experiences made me question how accessible support in these arenas is for women, particularly vulnerable women who may be intimidated by such a male dominated environment.

A more telling occurrence was within the Darfur Community Group. Although instances of being the only woman present were not irregular (almost all meetings included no women except me), one particularly memorable event was a meeting on a Sunday in February 2010 to discuss women's participation in the group as it was developing. The meeting consisted of me, a white male from a local organisation and 27 African (largely Darfuri) men from various local community groups and organisations. My diary reflections note my feelings at the time as having 'a privilege of position but reflective of subordinate status of Darfuri women – [there have been] jokes about hiding them from the community' (diary entry, 2/02/10). Obviously this ignores the fact that women in Darfuri communities are expected to uphold the role of carer for children, a status that has the potential to provide a barrier to political involvement within groups or to embed a woman-centred approach in the development of community support groups. The fact that I am white benefited me at the time, but I still question if my position as a woman would have been more problematic if I were not Western.

### **5.13 Chapter Conclusion**

The process of generating empirical research data for this thesis has engaged in activism, developed an oral history and sought in-depth information from key participants from local community groups and networks. The overall study has seen marked changes and developments throughout the three years of study which have created an informed set of findings that have been touched on throughout this chapter and detailed further in the next three. This chapter documents in detail how decisions were made with regard to choosing the methodologies encapsulated in this research, why these have been most effective in obtaining information to fill gaps in knowledge

laid out in the overall aims and objectives, and in outlining epistemological developments of knowledge in this area with particular focus on feminist research in the social sciences.

As highlighted, sexual violence is a sensitive topic that has required in-depth considerations for ethical approaches. This has gone beyond theoretical realms to reach more practical training in engaging in sensitive topics, including Rape Crisis support training, 'Emotional Intelligence' training and 'Working with Interpreter' training. Reflections from these throughout this chapter have, in many ways, contributed to the overall epistemological approach taken as well as to how I have engaged in interviews, interactions in community settings and with Hawwi. In doing so, parts of the overall methodological process highlight reflective issues in research which have gone on to impact and (in many ways) improve the practical and political considerations that follow.

An important area detailed in this chapter has been the issue of access and gatekeeping. Although not always a key focus in research literature, the time spent gaining and attempting to gain access to groups and individuals can be (and in this case has been) phenomenal. This chapter has highlighted the ways in which access can shape empirical findings, as well as giving some indications of problematic areas which still exist in governmental and non-governmental organisations with regard to power holding. This is a significant point in undertaking research into sensitive topics generally, but from a standpoint feminist perspective this issue remains political with regard to sexual violence, a problem still shrouded in silence, in determining whose voice is or is not heard.

Having established issues in sexual violence generally, in conflict specifically, in women's experiences in the asylum system in the UK and methodological approaches to sexual violence research, this thesis will now go on to establish specific findings and themes from interviews, before engaging thoroughly in an outline and interpretation of Hawwi's experience of conflict,

sexual violence and life in the asylum system in Merseyside. In doing so, gaps in sociological, political and local knowledge of women's experiences and the impacts of sexual violence will be filled and information will form the basis of future recommendations, reports and articles on the overall issues included.

## 6.0 Chapter Six: Data, Research Reflections and Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

Social attitudes toward sexual violence have been outlined through a standpoint feminist discourse in Chapter One; contemporary and historical instances of sexual violence in conflict have been detailed in Chapter Two; international responses to sexual violence, including from sociology, have been examined in Chapter Three, and women's rights in the UK asylum system, as well as localised accounts of asylum issues and organisation in Merseyside, are investigated in Chapter Four.

This chapter combines all of these aspects, moving forward to incorporate findings from interviews with 13 key people<sup>10</sup> working in asylum issues, women's support or sexual violence responses, or all of these, within Merseyside. It discusses a number of themes drawn from interviews, particularly in identifying those that correlate or directly contradict existing discourses and perspectives within these (often very different) spheres.

Only fairly recently has there been any serious acknowledgement of the gendered differentiation of asylum experiences (Asylum Aid, 2003; 2007; Collier, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2010). As with many forms of sociological analysis, the gendering of experience has not always been a prominent consideration (Delamont, 2003). Feminist research has highlighted the need to apply different focuses in gender when undertaking research (Gelsthorpe, 1990; Harding, 1987; Kelly, 1988; Smart, 1990), but a general lack in systematic research (often due to under-funding or lack of knowledge or political motivation in the area) has impacted on wider focus of asylum experiences generally and women's experiences in the asylum system specifically. This, coupled with the marginalisation of asylum seekers, as well as social silencing of sexual violence, has created a void in research around these areas. This is particularly notable in the Merseyside region. For any

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<sup>10</sup> References for each respondent are available in Table 5.2

research that does exist into support for women survivors of sexual violence in the asylum system, a significant proportion of research in the UK has focussed on areas such as London, Leeds and (less so) Manchester. When this research began, Liverpool held one of the UK's two asylum screening units, along with Croydon. This made Liverpool a major entrance point for asylum seekers until 2010 (Home Office, 2011a), when the UK Border Agency collapsed the unit and all screening to Croydon. Despite this, and although it is a key area for dispersal, Liverpool has been largely overlooked in studies regarding asylum (MIND, 2009), as well as women's rights.

This chapter will highlight specific themes that have developed from 13 in-depth interviews with key people working in support or governmental and non-governmental organisations regarding sexual violence, asylum or both. As discussed in Chapter Five, the individuals asked to take part were specifically chosen in purposive sampling (Bowling, 2002) based on their knowledge and experience of working within either the asylum system, the criminal justice system regarding sexual violence, and/or sexual violence support.

It outlines impacts of sexual violence as defined and experienced by support workers. It discusses, often through secondary accounts from women seeking support, the forms of sexual violence that women living in Merseyside have been subjected to during conflict, and the suggested motivations for these forms of sexual violence. As is reflected in chapters One and Two, this chapter examines portrayals of social attitudes toward sexual violence, and questions how these interlink with wider societal implications in directing or receiving sexual violence support. From this, the chapter moves to look specifically at access to sexual violence support for women in the asylum system in Merseyside, key social and institutional actors in this access, and ultimately confirms gaps in this access to sexual violence support for women who are potentially vulnerable, marginalised and possibly even severely traumatised from their experiences.

## 6.2 Impacts of Sexual Violence Generally

Although all interviewees had some level of recognition of the varying impacts of sexual violence, those who engaged directly with survivors of sexual violence were the most detailed in outlining the specific effects that different forms of sexual violence could have on individual women. This could be that, being semi-structured interviews, the questions asked were often geared toward the form of work that the participant was engaged in. Therefore, if the participant was more engaged in work within the asylum system and not specifically with women, the interview may have focussed more on their particular knowledge or experience. However, there were various points in numerous interviews where very little recognition of effects were evident, particularly with Respondent 10, who continuously interpreted questions about sexual violence to mean sex trafficking, which is a very specific form of sexual violence that does not necessarily include, for example, conflict rape.

Effects of sexual violence documented ranged from general to specific, and secondary accounts were often relayed by support workers to illustrate the effects they were defining. Generally, participants who worked directly with women survivors highlighted the longevity of the effects, as well as the range and depth that the effects could have:

*R 2: 'I think the impact on women is something that's definitely overlooked. And it's massive, it can, I would say all of my cases have had their lives changed forever, 100%. They've now got no confidence to go out, they stop drinking, or start drinking, get involved with drugs, a lot of self blame, self harm.'*

*R 3: 'In the long-term, somebody's self esteem, somebody's self worth, in the short term and again possible long-term, it affects somebody's outlook with regard to their own safety.... I think that obviously, emmm, it impacts on them in that they are constantly in a state of anxiety which goes hand in hand with depression... they look for ways to cope, like alcohol and drugs.'*

These highlight that sexual violence can have lasting effects on the individual, but also outline that effects differ from one person to the other, which may have implications for generalised approaches to support. For example, to lose confidence and 'stop drinking' can have different consequences than to find ways to cope by drinking more or getting 'involved with drugs', and yet both can and do have wide impacts on the individual, their family or in some instances (such as drug addiction), communities and society. This then correlates with more specific effects that participants suggested sexual violence could have. Although some link to one or more category, themes of effects are documented below as separated into physical, psychological and emotional, and social.

### **6.2.1 Physical**

In almost all interviews, respondents referred to the physical impact of sexual violence. This is not surprising, being as it is, to some degree, a physical and interpersonal form of violence, despite being bound in wider forms of torture and societal inequalities, particularly gender (Holmes and Holmes, 2009; Kelly, 2000). Physical consequences mentioned ranged from vaginal tearing to sexually transmitted infection (STIs). Significantly, various respondents, including Merseyside Police as well as a Community leader (who is a Medical Doctor and ex- Médecins Sans Frontières volunteer) argued that the emphasis given to physical effects of sexual violence can undermine the wider effects. Physical effects may not always be permanent or on-going (not including HIV/AIDS, or for example fistulae, which no respondent mentioned) in the way that psychological or emotional effects can be (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005; Peel, 2009), yet it was argued that both the Criminal Justice System and the UK Border Agency place significant emphasis on 'physical' proof in terms of evidence in rape or sexual violence cases or in individual asylum claims, with little weight on psychological evidence:

*R1: 'They take medical evidence in the case for asylums. But that point of view is very difficult to prove... unfortunately the Home Secretary does not take psychological effects as evidence of rape. They often only focus on the physical consequences of rape in*

*terms of scars, tears... any physical evidence to prove the rape took place... the victim will recover in weeks so there is no consequences of them after six weeks or almost two months, but the psychological trauma will persist.'*

*R12: '...you can only self refer probably up to a week after the event [rape] otherwise you lose the forensic evidence. Less if you're a male, or it's an oral rape or an anal rape.... You've got a very short window of opportunity, and we can't change that, it's a matter of fact. Time is of the essence in terms of forensics.'*

This concern was highlighted again in the return of a positive application for asylum, where Respondent 5 found:

*'One of my clients managed to get leave to remain because she had the scarring from the abuse that she'd gone through and the torture that she's gone through.'*

Various respondents did argue, however, that this kind of occurrence was rare, as coercive elements of sexual violence may not involve on-going physical injury and that too much focus is placed on such physical effects, particularly in terms of forensics (such as is demonstrated above).

The physical impacts of sexual violence may be increased or multiplied dependent on the number of perpetrators and the level of physical violence exerted during rape<sup>11</sup> (for further in-depth discussion of effects see Jewkes et al, 2009). This concern was aired by Respondent 2, who had been supporting a young survivor of multiple perpetrator rape:

*'The physical effect that shocked me the most in the sheer amount of STIs that were involved in one [multiple perpetrator rape] case'.*

This will be elaborated on in section 6.3 but is worth noting in terms of STIs. In this particular case, the 15 year old victim in Liverpool took numerous doses of antibiotics over a period of months with slow and gradual improvement, but possible permanent physical effects.

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<sup>11</sup>In a study of 101 multiple perpetrator rapes, Horvath and Kelly found that half of cases resulted in injury, but that most (70%) resulted in minor injuries beyond the rape itself (see Horvath and Kelly, 2009: 89).

## 6.2.2 Psychological and Emotional

Psychological and emotional effects of rape and sexual violence were the most documented forms of effects discussed by respondents. This ranged from short term effects, such as sleeplessness or nightmares, to longer terms effects such as disassociation and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, although, as had been highlighted in Chapter One, concerns were raised on the definition of this. The interlinking of effects was summarised by R1, who argued:

*'You can't just separate the social, physical or psychological effects of rape. You can't'.*

As interviews developed, it became more evident that this was the case in many instances. Although some impacts or responses were specifically psychological, the effects of these often appeared to relate further to physical effects, for example Respondent 4 documented many survivors she supports to experience:

*'Flashbacks, sleeplessness, anxiety, depression, PTSD if it's prolonged'.*

Whilst Respondent 9 went on to note:

*'They don't sleep, if they do sleep they have violent nightmares from their experiences, they have flashbacks, em, memories, intrusive thoughts, high levels of anxiety, they struggle to trust people, especially men. Ahm, a real sense of separation from the rest of the world.'*

These also echo the statements made by Respondents 2 and 3 in section 6.2 which highlighted loss of confidence in survivors, depression and use of coping mechanisms such as increases in drug and alcohol consumption. These echo wider literature regarding the effects of sexual violence on individuals. Another mechanism noted by all participants who work in survivor

support was an increase in self harm as a way to cope with trauma. As Respondent 2 summarised:

*'They'll start to self harm. They're the most common coping mechanisms I've seen with young girls.'*

This again highlights the interlinking of effects: although an emotional and psychological response to sexual violence, self harm can manifest in various forms (from anorexia, to over eating, to cutting) and inevitably has physical effects on the survivor, possibly generating further detrimental psychological and emotional effects as well as social reactions.

### **6.2.3 Social**

Just as physical effects can manifest in psychological forms and vice versa, impacts of sexual violence on survivors can have wider reaching effects beyond the individual. In the *International Journal of Human Rights*, I argued that 'when a woman is raped, the effects are seldom experienced by *either* a society *or* an individual' (Canning, 2010: 852), and that both can be interlocked in an escalation of on-going effects. Working with Merseyside's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre has demonstrated that, although psychological effects can be individual for the survivor and therefore individual support is often fundamental, evidence shows that everything from business (non-attendance to work) to childcare, to relationships can be vastly affected in the aftermath of sexual violence. According to Winters: 'Each adult rape is estimated to cost over £76,000 in its emotional and physical impact on the victim, lost economic output due to convalescence, early treatment costs to the health service and costs incurred in the criminal justice system' (2011: 18). This has also been identified as a catalyst for conflict rape (Jones, 2010; Leatherman, 2011) which will be elaborated on in 6.3.

Social issues stemming from the aftermath of sexual violence were pinpointed by a number of participants, particularly in terms of relationship problems. Volunteering with women who had been raped in conflict had brought the issue of child detachment as a focus in terms of social effects,

specifically affecting the relationship between women and children who had been conceived as a result of rape (Mookherajee, 2007). Although this was evident with women in the organisation I worked with for 11 months, none of the participants mentioned it. However, the concerns raised from the experiences of respondents were more based on relationships:

*R3: 'Relationship issues, intimacy issues. Emmmm. They'll struggle with trust'.*

*R4: 'When the woman was prostituted day and night, she has no trust in men. She's a young woman, she wants to go on to have an education, maybe have a family one day. But her words are, 'how can I look at another man, How can I trust another man?'*

Having experienced sexual violence from men (particularly men they have trusted previously) it was difficult for women to re-establish trust in relationships. Whilst this may have profound effects for the individual woman, it may inadvertently affect partners or potential partners currently or in the future. However, male partners can be directly affected in the relationship, a problem Respondent 13 identified:

*'There was a woman here about 3 weeks ago, and her husband was sittin' there and she's tellin' us about the rape that occurred, you know, and she fell pregnant and she didn't know whether it was the husband's or the perpetrator.'*

The potential effects of rape in this case may resonate to the woman, the woman's husband, the woman's child (if she chooses to continue to birth), familial or community ostracism if the child is known to be the result of rape, or financial and medical implications if the woman chooses to terminate her pregnancy. In short, the consequences of rape can be far reaching, long lasting and profound for the survivor and wider society.

### **6.3 Sexual Violence in Conflict: Effects, Impacts and Urgency**

As outlined in Chapter Two, sexual violence is a common tactic against women and communities in warfare, but also during conflict, civil unrest,

political uprising and during migration (Arieff, 2009; Bastick et al, 2007; Kelly, 2000; Leatherman, 2011). Women are vulnerable to many forms of sexual violence, and many areas are seeing epidemics of sexual violence and violence against women as conflicts and unrest continue to rage.

To refer again to Chapter Two, there are many reasons offered for explaining the prevalence of sexual violence in these settings. The question of 'why' was put to respondents who worked directly with women survivors of conflict sexual violence in Merseyside, with various reasons suggested. These included retaliation for a husband or partner's political beliefs:

*R4: 'A couple of the women have been punished; it's been used as a punishment for the husband's political beliefs, or the family's political beliefs'.*

*R13: '...if their husband's been active then they're seen to be active, and if they've lost their partner in their own country, then they'll go after the woman'.*

Therefore, although women may not have been directly involved in political movements or uprisings, they have been directly targeted by opposition in forms of retaliation. Another direct kind of targeting mentioned was in terms of ethnic division and warfare. The following dialogue with Respondent 1, again an ex- Médecins Sans Frontières volunteer who is referring to cases in Darfur, highlights this:

*R1: 'The women they rape, ja. They will not rape every woman because the convoy [mumbles] is taking women' [1.09.40 untranscribable].*

*VC: [1.09.43] 'So do they rape the woman who is the enemy?'*

*R1: [1.09.45] 'Ja. That's what's going on now. In the past, the woman was when they went to collect wood for the camps... that was common [VC acknowledges]. But now when the woman wants to go to wood they go with convoy again'.*

This links to wider acknowledgments that sexual violence can be used as a way to punish tribal groups and societies during ethnic or political conflict,

particularly as the shame and stigma attached to sexual violence can force migration and 'shatter communities' (Human Rights Watch, 1996; McKay, 2009; Mookherajee, 2010). The level to which this can resonate into host communities was highlighted by Respondent 12, a Police Detective Inspector, who noted:

*'We've had a case where someone has been raped when they've belonged to one tribal group in the UK, where the suspect has belonged to a different tribal group'.*

Although these are contributing factors for the prevalence of the perpetration of rape, and specifically motivations or vehicles for war and conflict, the main correlation between rape and sexual violence in war and conflict is arguably the gendering of perpetration and victimisation, that the majority of victims are women. This is outlined by two respondents when asked why they believed sexual violence to be so prominent in conflict, and in how women experience conflict specifically:

*R4: 'Because they can. The woman is there. Basically it's because they can. The men, the armies, their forces have the power. And what power does the woman have? And who is she gonna tell? There's nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide'.*

*R9: 'If women are tortured in detention it's mostly sexual because that's the way to violate a woman. And the way women are tortured physically may be very different from men, they're burned... perhaps burned around their genitalia. They are humiliated in certain ways because they are women'.*

This then links to the ways in which women experience sexual violence, and who violence is perpetrated by. Participants had supported women in Merseyside after varying experiences of violence, and violence such as multiple perpetrator rape and additional forms of torture, beyond sexual violence, were relayed, including for example:

*R4: 'The woman... with the electric cables, she was whipped with them... that was repeatedly. She was kept for a couple of days. But it wasn't just one incident, it's many.... when it's gang rape it's more the humiliation and torture, the powerlessness. Women*

*experience powerlessness when it's one on one, but it does bring so much more, it just undermines everything.'*

*R9: 'They may have been raped in conflict, raped as a method of torture. Many of the women who visit here have come from rape camps in Central Africa. They've been raped more times than I can even imagine.'*

The establishment of rape camps, well documented during the Bosnian War (Gutman, 1993; Stiglmeier, 1994), clearly demonstrates a level of organised violence against women, which Respondent 9 then goes on to discuss:

*R9: 'Those who are perpetrating abuses within detention, for women it's systematic, it's multiple, there's men watching, there's lots of men doing it and it's night after night or day after day'.*

The term 'systematic' is noteworthy in this instance. Systematic is often perceived as something that is far reaching societally, for example the use of systematic rape during conflict by many perpetrators against many victims in one particular setting. However, in considering sexual violence in conflict more generally, the systematic nature of sexual violence can also be individualistic. An individual woman may experience systematic abuse through various forms in differing settings, such as in conflict, when fleeing, during displacement, if trafficked and during asylum:

*R4: 'You hear of the men who come in in trucks, but what you don't realise is that a lot of the women have been abused while they've been on the trucks... To get their place they've had to sleep with the boss of the group, they've had to put themselves with the most alpha male. That's sexual violence and that's not recognised, she's called a slut, a slag, is spat on... You know, the reality is something horrible'.*

This relates to the 'continuum of violence' (Kelly, 1988) that women can be subjected to as a result of gender inequalities and again highlights the interconnectedness of the individual and wider society/ies. Another consequence and on-going form of violence against raped women, one respondent argued, was a rise in prostitution in areas where mass rape had left women stigmatised and ostracised:

*R1: 'Sex workers is a lot. That's a bad thing... a very terrible consequence of sexual... mass sexual violence. Spread of sexual workers'.*

This echoes wider literature and accounts of the consequences of rape in conflict. Respondent 1 proceeded to name the presence of United Nations forces in specific areas as a particular contributor to escalations in prostitution. This is supported by further contemporary and historic evidence, including Kofi Annan's *Elimination* (2005) and highlights gendered power relations and the abuse of women by men on most, if not all, sides of conflict, reaffirming that the main correlation in sexual violence, rape and exploitation is that women are victimised because they are women.

The use of force and degradation, documented by many sources and discussed in detail in Chapter Two, is another key factor in the forms of sexual abuse being perpetrated. One respondent's support experience echoed the accounts given by many women in the DRC presently in describing degradation, humiliation and torture:

*R5: 'One of the clients that I'm working with, she was sitting down in the living room peeling cassava when the ahm rebel soldiers came in, ahm, forced themselves into the living room, went over to her, slapped her, kicked her, pinned her to the floor, stripped her clothes and got the cassava and, you know, they inserted it into her vagina. And the others got their private parts out and you know, getting her to do all sorts basically. Ahm, and those, the sort of ahm stories that I come across a lot'.*

The woman subjected to this violence and degradation is (at the time of writing) still living in Liverpool and receiving support for this traumatic experience. This then opens the question of the effects of conflict sexual violence, for the individual and wider society/ies. Being that such violent forms of abuse have been perpetrated against, and experienced by, women living in Merseyside, and in reflection of the generalised findings for the effects of sexual violence in section 6.2, the on-going impact of such forms are important considerations. When asked what effects rape in conflict had

on the women or groups they work with, most respondents echoed the physical, emotional and social effects of sexual violence that are documented above.

Other issues included forced migration due to shame or stigma that has resulted from public sexual violence and rape:

*R9: 'women I've worked with from Eastern Congo have said very clearly to me that 'within my community I am shamed now. I've lost my honour. I can't marry and have children, I'm no longer a valid person'.*

Attempts to avoid the trauma of rape, as well as internalised or socially induced stigma, include fleeing conflict where rape is endemic:

*R9: 'Rape in war is a tactic, it's a tactic to make whole communities flee. And I really believe that if women can escape that before it happens then of course they should'.*

The issue of 'witnessing' and secondary trauma is one that has been prominent in wider discussions with community groups, and when presenting findings from this research. Rape is not considered a reason for asylum in accordance with the Geneva Convention (1951). Avenues of discussion exist to argue that one of the main reasons for engaging in systematic sexual violence (particularly against 'enemy' groups) can be to force migration (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Shaw, 2003; Wood, 2006). Nonetheless, effects on individuals and wider society can be substantial:

*R13: 'Some kids have seen it, they've been by their mothers when that's happened. So, you know then they've got the kids who are traumatised by it'.*

Linking back to earlier discussions on the psychological effects of rape, conflict rape is often associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for both the victims and perpetrators. PTSD is, by definition, a mental health disorder that can occur as a result of experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event/s (Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974). Sexual violence is one such

experience, but practitioners and academics have added layers of criticism to accepting the existence of PTSD, with Joanna Bourke voicing scepticism as to the application of the term to American GIs who had raped and murdered Vietnamese women, particularly during the attack on My Lai (Bilton and Sim, 1992; Bourke, 2009). One respondent also emphasised the argument that PTSD is based on a Western model of psychology, and was concerned about what she deemed to be an over-emphasis on PTSD which (like physical evidence and forensics in rape cases) problematises women's, and men's, claims that they have experienced trauma or torture but do not demonstrate the symptoms:

*R9: 'I struggle with anything that's named as a disorder... I think it's a very normal and understandable response to a huge violation... and you see them across all cultures, it's not just refined to the West but it's, it's something that suggests it is experiences by Western cultures... What we may call a nightmare may be understood as a message in a different culture. So it's a Western diagnosis that's applied to everybody... if it's applied to refugee women, you see that it ignores all the other levels of difficult going on'.*

It was evidently important to those who worked with survivors on a one-to-one basis to acknowledge that the effects of rape could differ from individual to individual in terms of assessing the kind of support that may or could be effective or beneficial, although this was not acknowledged by all respondents.

## **6.4 Attitudes to sexual violence**

Respondents who worked with survivors of sexual violence, including women seeking asylum, were vocal about the role social attitudes to sexual violence can play in women's victimisation, stigmatisation and ostracism. This included silencing of instances of sexual violence, or the constant playing down of the systematic nature of sexual violence generally. Emphasis was often placed on attitudes within governmental organisations, particularly Criminal Justice Systems in the UK and further afield, and the role of the mass media in forming inaccurate perceptions of sexual violence, namely

that women lie or that rape is usually committed by strangers (outlined by Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 12 and 13).

#### **6.4.1 Victim Blaming and Stigmatisation**

Stigmatisation and victim blaming were highlighted as serious issues for women's access to criminal justice, support or community acceptance. This was evident in the majority of interviews (only one did not refer to victimisation in some way) and referred both to victimisation in the UK and, in some interviews, globally, including parts of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. There was also an assumption that attitudes somehow differed between cultures, and that attitudes toward women who have experienced sexual violence would differ in the UK:

*R1: 'The difference in Darfur is that the social link together... woman is just like a Holy book in Darfur. Any association with the woman with a foreign man, it is a red light for the community which she will not be forgiven. Ahhhh and there is no sympathy or support or any excuse for the women subjected to the rape.'*

It was acknowledged that women can be blamed for their subjection to sexual violence, particularly where impunity exists for perpetrators:

*R1: 'they don't blame the men for atrocities and they can move freely. The blame is always on the woman. She risked herself to him. And so they attack her so the offenders will move freely.'*

In actuality, similar problems were highlighted by women who support rape survivors in Merseyside, as well as by Respondent 12. The emphasis on victim blaming in the Criminal Justice System was considered a serious barrier to conviction and as something that perpetuates and is perpetuated by wider social attitudes:

*R2: 'With sexual violence, with rape cases, abuse cases, the onus is always on the victim to prove that she said no. And that's where it falls down.'*

This is an issue widely identified by feminists as a barrier to conviction, and has been a focus in the UK Criminal Justice System since the 1970s (Gregory and Lees, 1999; Kelly et al, 2007; Lees, 1996). During the 1980s, similar attitudes (particularly within the police and judicial system) were exposed and legislative action was taken to improve women's experiences of reporting and conviction, including the 1991 Sexual Violence Act And the 2003 Sexual Offences Act. Merseyside has the advantage of being one of few areas with a dedicated sexual violence team, named 'Sexual Offences Liaison Officer' (SOLO), UNITY team, as well as a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC, see SAFEPlace Merseyside, n.d.). Two respondents who work closely with, but independent of, Merseyside Police (Respondents 2 and 3) outlined problems in police attitudes and response. However, both were adamant that some improvements had been made, and that many problems arise from officers who are not specially trained in dealing with rape complaints, that is, beyond the SOLO and UNITY teams which they considered to be a positive step (R3).

Nonetheless, interviews and activist research indicated that issues including disbelief and victim blaming were still visible and highly problematic in the Merseyside area and wider. This was particularly evident in the responses of two participants, one in the police force and one who works closely with women who take cases through the Criminal Justice System:

*R12: 'If there can be any shred of doubt in the victim's account, you get a not guilty verdict returned.'*

*R2: 'nobody believes that they've been raped, not even the police. So if the police don't even believe you, then you must be a liar.'*

The particular problem of victim blaming was elaborated on in depth by a Detective Inspector. On discussing victimisation and blame within juries, I asked if siding with the complainant is a part of being on a jury, to which he responded:

*R12: 'No, no, it's about reviewing the evidence but it's like anything, they're subjective decisions on the jury. If they like the suspect and believe what the suspect says, and they don't believe what the complainant says, they are more inclined to return a not guilty verdict. Whereas if you put somebody that they immediately take a dislike to in the dock, and the complainant is a credible witness of previous character and no question marks of their character, then people will believe the complainant. But it's hard to say, it's all subjective.'*

This highlights various issues that could impede prosecution or conviction, both on structural and individual levels. It could be argued that subjective decision making within the CJS leaves gaps for influence by wider societal attitudes as well as personal beliefs. The issue of a complainant being a 'credible witness of previous character' corroborates the claim made by Respondent 2 that the onus is on the victim. These are issues challenged historically, yet persist in Merseyside and further afield (Amnesty International, 2005a; Brown et al, 2010).

Although Respondent 12 acknowledged the dilemmas in this area and demonstrated awareness that these were serious problems within the Criminal Justice System, there remained a distinct gap between this acknowledgement and identifying why women may not choose to make a complaint, or to follow a complaint through the CJS:

*R12: 'One of the reasons when you look at the cases like I have done over the last few years, is that if a case fails, it's often down to disengagement with the Criminal Justice system by complainants. They either can't see it through to court, they don't want to give evidence or whatever.'*

Again, responsibility is placed on the survivor for opting not to support the prosecution without conceding why this may be the case or proposing how it could be improved on the side of the Criminal Justice System. This is not to undermine the complexity of rape cases. As discussed, both the UK Border Agency and the Criminal Justice System place significant emphasis on physical evidence of rape and sexual violence, which can be difficult to provide due to the nature of rape. However, in approaching complainants as

'credible witnesses', the balance of complainant/accused is swayed to focus on the victim rather than perpetrator, reinforcing victim blaming attitudes.

Although not resorting to 'cause and effect' theories, it is also important to note that all respondents but one voiced concern about the influence of media on public attitudes toward both rape and asylum seekers. Negative connotations around asylum are evident in many forms of media, particularly *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, both of which were referred to by four respondents. More sources were named in conjunction with false portrayals of sexual violence, particularly stranger rape:

*R3: 'I think that is massive, what society believes, how the media portray women and men, or what they portray rape to be or how rape happens. It's... everybody thinks it's the stranger rape down an alley way and that's the rarest rape.'*

This concern is historically embedded in feminist literature (Cole and Henderson, 2005; Kitlinger, 2009; Lees, 1995; Macdonald, 1995; Meyers, 1997; Naylor, 2001; Soothill and Walby, 1991). Media portrayals of asylum were criticised as having an impact on public opinion:

*R4: 'With the propaganda in the newspapers about asylum seekers and refugees, you know, before the women come into the country we've already got enforced beliefs on us.'*

*R5: 'A lot of people kind of choose to, I guess, or just can't be bothered or whatever, they just sit there and read the Sun or read the Mirror or whatever, and read headlines such as 'we're being swamped... Bogus asylum seekers' and you know headlines like that and articles like that don't help. They don't help.'*

*R7: 'It's all negativity. All negativity. You know, particularly for those Daily Mail and Sun readers.'*

Furthermore, Respondents 4 and 8 argued that women asylum seekers faced double media persecution and that this had the potential to create barriers in women's access to support.

## 6.5 Support

Globally, the forms of support that are available or offered to survivors of sexual violence vary. Silencing around rape and sexual violence, lack of infrastructure and lack of funds can all affect the availability and quality of sexual violence support, as well as cultural differences in understandings support and counselling more generally

What is evident from interviews is that different organisations offered different forms of support, ranging from practical support for asylum seekers, such as clothes, food and English conversation classes, to support for women survivors which ranged from counselling to attending court with the survivor if a formal complaint had been made.

Key suggestions for supporting women survivors included long term support:

*R3: 'I think the best thing is to offer that long term support, that's down to our success.'*

This was mentioned at various points with women who supported other women, and by Respondent 1. It was acknowledged that the impacts of sexual violence could be on-going and far reaching, and that short term support may not be particularly beneficial for most women. R9 also emphasised that responses in counselling strategies varied dependent on if and how the woman wanted to engage in discussion around sexual violence:

*R9: 'For some of the women, talking really, really helps immediately, and others want to wait until they've got a bit more security and safety in their lives. Ahm, I mean my experience is that women want to talk, and once they've found somebody they trust, they will.'*

This mirrors my experience of working with survivors, and highlights a set of quite different responses that organisations take to working with women in sexual violence response capacities.

As outlined earlier, practical support was offered in conjunction with emotional support by groups which took a woman centred approach. This included accompanying women to Genito-Urinary Medicine clinics, abortion clinics and court. For women seeking asylum however, more emphasis was given to practical support, with some support including:

*R7: 'Being very informal, having a nice space where we meet, being able to provide tea and coffee, and we reimburse bus fares as well, which I think that is very important.'*

This highlights differences in the needs of women in the asylum system (many of whom have been subjected to sexual violence) and support after rape more generally. Whilst emotional support may be necessary, even if it is not always formally available, women's practical and financial needs (linked to poverty and destitution) are fundamental.

### **6.5.1 Supporting Women in the Asylum System in Merseyside**

Throughout all aspects of this research, activist participation as well as interviews and oral history, the need for specific forms of support for women seeking asylum in comparison with women already resident in Merseyside was evident. There is wider acknowledgment that women from Black and Minority Ethnic groups can face barriers to support after rape (Amnesty International and Southall Black Sisters, 2008; Larasi, 2011; Rice, 1990). Sexual Violence support is already in high demand despite little funding (Coy et al, 2007; 2009) but activist work and interviews demonstrated that women in the asylum system in Merseyside faced even deeper challenges to accessing support, and that the range of support required (such as clothing and sometimes food) made this even more complex:

*R4: 'You often see the woman looking at you as if to say, 'why are you here? What you doin'? What's goin' on?'. 'Cause 9 times out of 10 they've got tooth ache, they've got stomach ache, they've got gynae problems, they've got sandals and beautiful, beautiful African clothes in the depths of winter. You know, they don't know where they're being moved to, they don't know where their house*

*is. And that's the issue that I'm being bombarded with at [Asylum and Refugee Agency].'*

This was mirrored in a discussion around cultural incongruence regarding the meaning or overall point of counselling. This was highlighted by two support workers in particular (Respondents 4 and 9) who voiced concern about cultural perceptions of talking about sexual violence generally and specifically with a counsellor, advocating support work instead:

*R9: 'Women from so many cultures women won't necessarily see talking as a way of resolving difficulty... talking to a stranger in a counselling setup is a bit of a bizarre notion.'*

As Respondent 9 went on to identify, this does not always mean that women will have no concept of counselling, but may engage in similar forms of support in different capacities. Further barriers mentioned included language, interpretation, and access and availability of services locally. In one interview, a community group leader who supported people seeking asylum responded:

*R1: 'There is no organisations in Liverpool to discuss with the women [seeking asylum] about their experience other than [names organisation].'*

The organisation named as being available does provide some outreach work within some asylum groups, but it was also noted by respondents who work there as being grossly underfunded with little access to interpreters:

*R4: 'It comes down to us with funding for interpreters. And we don't have money for interpreters, and I don't speak any other languages, which is quite sad.'*

This gap in access to support in asylum communities also stretched to Criminal Justice services and first response support, despite there being evidence that women in asylum systems can be vulnerable to sexual abuse, especially if they are destitute or have been trafficked to the UK (Collier, 2007; Crawley et al, 2011a; Asylum Aid, 2011; Women's Aid, 2003). On

questioning the levels of reporting, three respondents highlighted gaps in engagement between asylum women and support/criminal justice:

*R2: 'I've never worked personally with anybody seeking asylum.'*

*VC: 'Do you think there is a reason why there are fewer women seeking asylum receiving support in a [criminal justice] capacity?'*

*R2: 'I think it'll probably come down to language barriers, and not understanding our criminal justice system... and probably not being aware that they can come and report to the police and be cared for.'*

This was reiterated by Respondent 3:

*VC: 'Do you ever get referrals from asylum seeking women in Merseyside?'*

*R3: 'Well I've had a few emmmm, I've not essentially worked with them. I know they've come through and they've sort of been referred to [Asylum Women's Group] or another worker that's been here. But I have to be honest Vicky, there hasn't been many, it's been a small percentage.'*

This gap in reporting was also confirmed by Respondent 12:

*R12: 'We probably get about, on the whole of Merseyside, I would say something between 3-400 [rape] cases a year, I could probably count on one hand each year the number of cases we get like that that are actively reported. Not to say that they haven't happened, we only know what's reported to us.'*

This suggested that instances of sexual violence may go unreported, as well as possible problems in accessing support for historical abuse or conflict sexual violence. These gaps were potentially exacerbated if women were refused asylum and as a consequence had no recourse to public funds:

*R13: 'We've had two women last week who had suffered at the hands of men when they were in that situation. One was beaten with a hammer, one was locked up in the house and wouldn't let her out. But she finally got out. But where do they go? There's nowhere for them. They can't go through domestic violence unit*

*unless they've got any money, resource to public funds, but they haven't got that so they can't go, so they're worse off than women who do suffer here, English women and all, because of their status. They're ten times worse.'*

Access to public funds proved a clear problem for individual women (see Amnesty International and Southall Black Sisters, 2008), but structural access to funding was a further barrier to providing support to survivors generally and survivors seeking asylum specifically. Having worked in the voluntary and public sector, I was already acutely aware of the shortfall in funding for voluntary organisations, particularly sexual and domestic violence organisations (Coy et al, 2007; 2009). For example, during the final stages of this research, Merseyside's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre had their funding from the City Council reduced from £60,000 per year to £0. Likewise, out of the 13 respondents interviewed, only the two state funded bodies did not attribute barriers to support on organisation funding. As a direct consequence, support organisations were often stretched beyond capacity (as discussed by Respondents 4, 5, 9 and 12) and unable to cover all the aspects of support that they would otherwise hope to:

*R1: 'Because of our financial difficulties at the moment we cannot set up any project so we need partners so we can involve more fully in women's activities ah um in the near future.'*

*R 11: 'Almost everything that's done feels under resourced. And you just struggle... Sometimes we have to turn destitute people away because we've got no food, no accommodation, no money, and I cringe when we have to do that.'*

*R9: 'When you're under resourced to just try and squeeze in more, get more volunteers to fill resources, then you're not able to supervise and train them properly to see more people. I don't want to dip the quality of what we do, which I believe in, so we struggle with resources.'*

Inadequate funding for interpreters was consistently brought up by all respondents, and Respondent 4 was particularly critical of rota systems for interpreters, as this did not always guarantee a woman interpreter, and

highlighted problems in only offering four counselling sessions for women through a local personal provider, as well as the standard of interpretation available:

*R4: '[name of organisation] offer four counselling sessions with an interpreter. But four sessions isn't enough... But some of the interpreters are appalling.'*

Organisations working with asylum seekers identified barriers to women's access to support in terms of the consequences that shortfalls in funding had, particularly in relation to the North West being a key area for dispersal:

*R9: 'We're way too small here in the North West. It's the biggest dispersal area, we've got really high numbers in both Merseyside and Greater Manchester and Manchester is really hard to get help from people.'*

This was discussed in terms of numbers of the groups available for women, but that support groups may not have adequate resources:

*R1: 'Many organisations in Liverpool could help women [in the asylum system], but are also short of funding.'*

Likewise, barriers to funding can have a knock-on effect on wider issues, such as space, personnel and interpretation, which, in turn, can influence whether or not women choose to speak about experiences of sexual violence:

*R11: 'Confidentiality is not high in this place because we couldn't get through the volume of people if we said it was one person to one room.'*

This is a problem generally, but can be particularly detrimental to people experiencing trauma for sexual violence, torture or indeed any mental health problems that perhaps should be factored into asylum claims but have not recognised. For organisations that worked with asylum seekers generally, there often seemed a lack of recognition of the gender specific impacts of

conflict. Although sexual violence was acknowledged as a violation that many women in the asylum system have been subjected to, only woman-centred agencies were forthcoming in identifying the need for offering upfront access to women support workers, caseworkers or interpreters. Although Asylum Aid (2008a) has defined Gender Guidelines, the extent to which they have been formally applied can be unclear, for example, for the UKBA, in informing women that they are obliged to access same sex interpreters or interviewers during their asylum claim:

*R6: 'If a woman requested a female case worker, we would always endeavour to meet that request. Ahm, it's very rare that that happens, but occasionally it does.'*

This is in direct contradiction with claims by a manager at the UK Border Agency:

*R10: 'When they [women] claim asylum at the screening interview and at the substantive interview they will be asked whether they would like to be interviewed by a woman or a man, and we will endeavour to provide accordingly.'*

Furthermore, 'endeavouring to provide' and 'providing' could be construed as two separate points. Although the intention may be in line with Gender Guidelines, a substantive number of women I have worked with in asylum communities have not been made aware of their right to same sex interviewers, possibly a reflection of uncertainty of their rights more generally. This is acknowledged in wider literature (Asylum Aid, 2003; 2011; Canning, 2011b; Smith, 2004), and may be a case for consideration in terms of discussion and confidentiality.

## **6.6 Women in the Asylum System in Merseyside**

As discussed in Chapter Four, there are clear divisions in gender in the UK asylum process, with men being the most prominent group applying at almost a rate of three to one (Asylum Aid, 2011).

In interviews with people working with asylum seekers, I asked what Countries of Origin women they commonly work with were coming from. Countries identified included China, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, South Africa, Iraq, Iran, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malawi, Nigeria, Sudan, Nigeria, Guinea, Ukraine, Georgia, Ivory Coast, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia.

One commonality for most of these countries is that they are currently, or have recently been, engaged in internal or international conflict (Bastick et al, 2007). For those that have not, such as China and Iran, repressive regimes can endanger individuals or groups who participate in activist opposition to the government. Furthermore, Respondent 10 identified China as being particularly affected by rises in international sex trafficking, and many of the countries listed have appalling records in regard to the human rights of women. Even South Africa, 15 years after the end of its official system of Apartheid, suffers from epidemic levels of sexual violence and rape, with women and children as the main victims (Jewkes et al, 2009; Palmary, 2008). Women arriving in the UK from these countries are often the victims of some form of sexual violence in their country of origin, or during the migration process (Asylum Aid, 2011; Leatherman, 2011; Medical Foundation, 2009).

### **6.6.1 Community and Confidentiality: Culture and Silence**

As discussed in Chapter One and section 6.4, social and self-silencing of sexual violence can be a major barrier to realising the extent of sexual violence in most/all societies, and therefore a barrier to support. In working with women in asylum communities, there can be added layers of consideration to ensure a safe space for discussion of sexual violence, either in terms of providing support or in asylum applications:

*R4: 'I don't think half of the women are giving anything to the officials. Unless it's fact, if there's no evidence, then they can't prove it. So if there's no proof, there's no case. So they're dealt with as if it's not happened.'*

As outlined earlier, a major possible barrier can be obtaining an interpreter generally, and a woman interpreter in particular. However, further issues can be met concerning cultural differences, or even being in the same community. Many contemporary conflicts are based within states or in close proximity to state borders (Kelly, 2000; see also Chapter Two). Many such conflicts can be based on ethnic, tribal, religious and/or political divisions. Working with women's asylum groups demonstrated to me the significance of cultural sensitivity when considering an interpreter, but interpreters were often used on a rota, so cultural and gender congruence could not always be guaranteed which may again affect speaking out about experiences of violence (Respondent 4 was particularly concerned about this). However, as Respondent 9 highlighted, it is important to work with the person in front of you in terms of identifying needs and safety. With this in mind, it is also important to consider that women may specifically wish to speak with someone totally separate from their own community or culture to avoid the kinds of stigmatisation that often comes with being a victim of sexual abuse:

*R12: 'You might think that an Asian complainant might want an Asian doctor, but that's not the case, because they think they'll be the talk of the wash house. Let's say somebody say from Pakistan gets a doctor that originated from Pakistan, they're worried that it might get round the Pakistani community that they're a victim. They're not confident in confidentiality in their own community.'*

This was reiterated by Respondent 8 who referred specifically to sectors of Liverpool's Somali community, which is well established but also includes asylum seekers:

*R8: 'You get some women who say, ah, they would never go to anybody in their community because they don't trust the confidentiality. They think it will be known by everybody in their community, whereas you get other women who say, 'No. We deal with that in the community. We would not access help outside of the community''.'*

Although this is not always the case, this issue highlights a need for practitioners, caseworkers and support workers to widely consider the kinds

of implications that there can be in women speaking about sexual violence. As Respondent 13 indicated, stigmatisation and shame can have serious consequences on women's asylum claims:

*R13: 'Some women don't speak about it, 'cos they're ashamed, they're ashamed. I say 'why didn't you tell them?' and they say 'I feel ashamed. I feel dirty'. And you know, sometimes there's men there, or very, very bolshie women. Like army generals. It's not sort of relaxed enough for them to trust them to tell them what's happened.'*

These forms of stigmatisation and victim blaming can, as discussed earlier, tie in with cultures of disbelief, in the UK and more globally. Actual disbelief and the fear of being disbelieved are separate but similar entities. As cultures of disbelief exist in terms of both sexual violence and asylum, survivors of sexual violence who are applying for asylum may be unwilling to fully speak of their experiences:

*R1: 'The women more likely to focus her case for asylum in political issue, tribal issue, more than the sexual violence because they will not ahh believe her.'*

These issues feed into wider concerns for the UK Border Agency, as well as concerns voiced by other agencies in terms of women's access to adequate applications and support.

## **6.7 The United Kingdom Border Agency: Suspicion or Disbelief?**

Chapter Four outlined the role and position of the UK Border Agency. Undoubtedly, the UKBA has a difficult task in terms of assessing asylum claims, keeping up to date on international legislation and country information, and managing thousands of employees as well as asylum seekers. As outlined, support and proper consideration of women's experiences can be complex where sexual violence is concerned, particularly as it can be difficult to prove forensically (particularly historical cases, as

highlighted earlier), is often shrouded in silence and shame, and cultural considerations in broaching the subject of sexual violence can be extremely complex.

Since 2004, Gender Guidelines have been in place as part of the asylum application review (see Chapter Four). The effectiveness of this has been questioned by organisations such as Asylum Aid (2003; 2008c, 2011), but nonetheless the overall aims and motivations for gender policies have been welcomed as a step toward recognition of gender implications in migration and asylum.

Investigating this, I asked Respondent 10, from the UK Border Agency, if women's experiences of violence are considered, and how they would be assessed:

*R10: 'Depending on the circumstances of the case, we do consider the trauma that may be associated. If somebody claims they've been raped or exploited some way, we would look and see if there has been contact with any support organisations, voluntary or statutory in the UK, we would seek for information from them, ahm, if applicable.'*

Clearly, the implication that actions are in place to respond to women's claims of sexual violence is evident. However, ways in which this works on the ground, in terms of casework and initial interview, is questionable:

*R4: 'She was trafficked from Uganda. She was told by the immigration team that they can't take what she said as read because lots of women lie to get status in this country.'*

*R5: 'To prove that you were raped is extremely difficult as well. And sometimes a lot of the stories are, you know, off words really. And I guess it's, it's the case owner or the case worker who chooses to believe whether the story is convincing enough and whether it has consistency.'*

These issues reflect instances in my activist research where women have been in the asylum system for up to six years where it has been assumed

that they were lying to obtain status, despite knowledge that more women who claim asylum are likely to have been raped than not (Medical Foundation, 2009). This highlights two problems: one is a case of subjective belief which may be embedded in attitudes to sexual violence that are outlined in section 6.4, and secondly that it is assumed that 'proof' will be available for making a case. As discussed, this is not always possible.

### **6.7.1 Adversarial System or Rigorous Investigation?**

The UK Border Agency's approach to asylum application has come under scrutiny for reasons ranging from racism (Siva, 2008; Shah, 2000; Taylor and Lewis, 2011; UKBA, 2010), detention and child detention (Burnett, 2010) and deaths in custody (Institute of Race Relations, 2010).

Although many of the processes for applying for asylum are made clear on the UK Border Agency's website, I had found it difficult to obtain information on how applications are assessed outside of working with women and asylum groups. Therefore, during the interview with Respondent 10 I asked how this was undertaken:

*R10: 'Merits, considering the merits, it's a question of the completeness of the information, the genuineness of the information, is it consistent with itself, for example as I mentioned there are two interviews, the screening interview and the substantive interview, has the account that the person has given been consistent?'*

*Consistency was discussed as an issue of subjectivity by Respondents 5, 9 and 13.*

*R5: '...they always say, you know, 'there's no consistency in the story, there was not enough detail, the story wasn't convincing.' And that's really difficult, really difficult because even though you provide medical reports and you have medical evidence, so if you have depression, lack of sleep, not eating properly, you know, those elements that are key indications of the experiences that the women have gone through, even though you try to provide all that information, it's still not good enough and still hasn't got enough weight.'*

This linked to the use of Country of Origin Information (COI). To ensure that up to date information is available for all countries for reference on reviewing applications for asylum, the UK Border Agency maintains and upkeep COI databases. However, it was unclear how thorough or effective these are from different parts of the interview with Respondent 10:

*'Country information obviously is general';  
'We will compare that with the knowledge base for their home country';  
'We have very wide and detailed knowledge of many countries. We would expect them to know a certain background to the country.'*

It was suggested by all respondents working with asylum seekers that guidelines and policies in place, including COI, could be used as a way to prevent people obtaining asylum:

*R11: '...it's an adversarial centre and it's designed to catch people out rather than work with people.'*

*Similar sentiments were echoed in statements from Respondent 10 regarding the assessment of asylum applications:*

*R10: 'If they claim that they're threatened by authorities in their home country but they arrived on a plane having used their own passport to leave their country of origin, then you can throw doubts that the authorities in their home country had any interest in them since they were able to leave unopposed from their home country. Ahm, those are the sort of things we're looking at.'*

This linked further into attitudes and assumptions of who could or would be seeking asylum in the UK and why:

*R10: 'It could be that the family group is not necessarily, and has presented... as you asked the question previously, undocumented arrivals, a man, a woman and three kids, how do we know that*

*they're a family group? [long pause]. What's to say that the adults are not facilitating trafficking in to the United Kingdom?'*

*R10: 'I mentioned that we provide benefits for asylum applicants while their claim is being considered. Those benefits are both financial and accommodation, ahm, the presence of a number of children would require a larger house and increased benefits. Ahm, it could be that the children... they may present more children than are actually part of the family group. Benefit fraud.'*

This is not to say that some applications for asylum are false, or contain false information or alternative motives for entry to the UK. However, attitudes such as these were highlighted as problematic for asylum cases in numerous responses:

*R11: 'There is an automatic assumption that if you are an asylum seeker you're up to somethin' [yeah]. And you know, you might be, some people are. It's a system and some people play the system just like any other system... tax, welfare benefit, whatever it is. Some people use it and abuse it, but I think it's far fewer people than the general public or the UKBA would have us believe.'*

*This was specifically the case for women:*

*R7: 'It's the culture of disbelief and for a lot of women, having to claim asylum and go through the process of what happened to them, and to tell someone who's their case owner about what happened and then disbelieving. I mean, the Home Office disbelieve everything.'*

Furthermore, in probing for what information would aid in obtaining a positive response for application; a further set of requirements emerged:

*R10: 'We're not expecting everyone to know where they were every minute of every day, but we are expecting them to give us some information on their routing from their home country, the time scale, how they travelled, who they travelled with, how they entered UK, what mode of transport they were on, what routing they took, timescales... If they flew into UK, what countries did they change planes on, what was the colour of the interior of the planes... any and all information.'*

As a researcher, I was not completely able to decipher exactly what information was required to receive a positive response to application, as the beginning sentence seemed to contradict the later sentiments in terms of what knowledge could be interpreted as 'any and all information', or what evidence is needed to determine credibility.

There is also an issue in terms of what was identified as consistent. In most social (or even physical) sciences, correlations between accounts of individuals from the same region usually suggest patterns in behaviour, allowing for the possible generalisability of issues or experiences (See also Asylum Aid, 2011; Smith, 2004). This has been discussed in the correlations in accounts historically and across conflicts in Chapter Two, and has been used as a method to highlight similarities in women's experiences of sexual violence in conflict. However, Respondent 10 appeared to interpret correlations in accounts as evidence of untruth:

*R10: 'It is not uncommon for a series of applicants from a certain country to give similar accounts, so we're always looking out for people who are trying to abuse the system.'*

Nonetheless, the overall interview did include acknowledgment of the possible problems in terms of obtaining or supplying documentation:

*R10: 'Most asylum applicants tend not to have documentation... If they have left their country in fear of their life and are claiming asylum, it is not unreasonable to say that 'I was more worried about escaping from being shot than I was about getting my identity documents.'*

Beyond management, issues seemed to arise with the attitude and action of some caseworkers in the experiences of asylum support workers. Although I had tried to obtain access to interviewing caseworkers, I was not successful. Concerns were raised by some respondents about the effectiveness of some caseworkers:

*R5: 'I have had experiences with case owners who have known the system and have made mistakes and haven't dealt with it... I had someone who tried to commit suicide a couple of months ago who was pregnant, because of the NASS discontinuation letter... She was being pulled back and forth, back and forth. And it was actually the case owner's mistake for not sending the discontinuation letter to her in the first place.'*

Similar issues were reported by Respondent 9, who works directly with caseworkers. Attention was paid particularly to training and attitudes:

*R9: 'The training of case workers is grossly inadequate. They're not skilled interviewers, they're not supervised in a way to help them manage their responses to the person in the interview, and I don't think their practice in terms of their attitudes is reviewed. Ahm, it's over very quickly, in order to cope I would imagine as well as more suspicious reasons as to who these case-owners are and why they choose to be doing that sort of work.'*

This highlights potential problems in terms of casework, but also includes undertones of mistrust between organisations and the UK Border Agency:

*R10: 'If they will have worked with them for some time then they may give us their opinion on the circumstances of the case and that will be taken in the round with all the other information that we have. We don't always accept what all organisations say. It can be that we have conflicting information.'*

Problems such as these have the potential to strain relations between state and voluntary sectors. The UK Border Agency was not the only organisation to identify and be identified as having complex relations which at times led to differences in approaches to case handling and even support.

## **6.8 Issues Within and Between Organisations**

Approaches to counselling evidently differed amongst support organisations. Lack of funding and training impacted on how well informed some agencies were in working with cultural differences and approaches to support. Likewise, asylum agencies were less knowledgeable on how to work with women's experiences of sexual violence. This was evident in identifying

cultural barriers in explaining and informing women of what support for survivors of rape was and why it was offered:

*R9: 'You gotta know why you're talkin' with refugee women... Lots of our clients come in and they say, 'oh I saw this really nice lady at the GP practice. She just smiled at me a lot and she was really sweet, but I didn't know what I was supposed to do and I felt really anxious'. And there's that sort of expectant, 'now tell me your story' and why would you do that unless you knew why you were telling your story?... I think counsellors aren't always as thoughtful as they could be in that first assessment session, they need to help people realise what counselling is and why they want to help.'*

Corroborating this, counsellors interviewed in the research highlighted being in exactly that position and finding it difficult to communicate the purpose of their support session, especially as other needs had to be met for the woman on top of emotional support:

*R4: 'Out there it's a very different culture. So they think I'm helping with shoes and, and housing and medical problems. And I can go back and I have gone back and said, 'look, we've got three or four questions, can you help them? This is what they're askin' for'. But if the communication was better they'd be able to understand more that actually I'm there for them. It's so frustrating, it's hard to know that the woman's walked away [pause] thinking, 'what was that all about?''*

This demonstrates a difficulty in effectively supporting women, particularly where other support is required and diversity training may not have been available. However, further issues can be seen in different approaches to supporting women in the asylum process who may be dispersed or are not guaranteed to be in the UK for any substantial period of time:

*R6: 'One of the difficulties with us is that people are only here for two weeks and we know that the dispersal timetable is very difficult to change. It's very unfair to refer people to some service that they're just starting with and then they're told 'no, you've got to move'. It's much better in most cases if they can wait to go and see a local GP and be referred on to local services where they can continue to use those services.'*

Another interviewee had a different perspective:

*R9: 'I just think you have to be incredibly careful and I think there are some real myths around it, like you can't do trauma work until somebody is safe. Well, I'm sorry, women can be in the process for four or five years, you can't put off support.'*

These tensions echo earlier discussions on the complexities of supporting women in the asylum system that are not necessarily issues in the static population. Extra layers of consideration are evident in how support workers and counsellors approach working with women in asylum, indicating the need for a more unified and holistic approach to include woman-centred models.

### **6.8.1 State Agencies and Non Governmental Organisations: Divisions and Difference**

Throughout the interviews with respondents involved in asylum support or advocacy, there were clear issues in terms of method and approach between state agencies and voluntary and Non-Governmental Organisations which could potentially carry serious implications for what support is available for women seeking asylum, and how knowledge, information and experience is shared amongst agencies and organisations.

One example of this was in the police, where the question of counselling came under scrutiny by the respondent, despite wider attempts by the Crown Prosecution Services to build relations with support groups:

*R12: 'People might feel they need counselling but that can then prejudice some criminal justice outcomes because when they come to court they could be suggested that they've had ideas put in their head by counselling rather than recalling their actual evidence, to put it in very simple terms. So it can contaminate the evidence they might give.'*

There was little acknowledgement that this may be a contributor to why women often choose not to pursue rape complaints through the Criminal Justice System, as they may feel they need counselling at the point they are at. This has been a focus in feminist literature and sexual violence research

(Jones and Cook, 2008; Kelly, 1988; Rape Crisis, 1984), and there have been developments for advocacy and intervention in establishments of ISVAs, there still appears to be gaps in police consciousness to some degree.

This was one example of difference of experience and understanding between interviewees. Similar divisions existed between the experiences of two asylum groups in comparison with how the UK Border Agency perceived destitution amongst failed asylum seekers:

*R10: 'We would not knowingly make somebody homeless, without support, however if somebody has reached a point with their claim where they have no right to remain in UK, then we would terminate single person's support to encourage them to return to their home country.'*

However, an asylum and refugee agency manager stated:

*R11: 'Destitution is the other big thing that we do. We have about 230 destitute people registered with us.'*

This was also discussed by Respondent 5, and was also echoed by the manager of an organisation working throughout the whole of the North West:

*R9: 'One of the things we're seeing now is that women who become destitute when the system fails end up being sexually exploited in return for somewhere to stay, or, you know, in a house full of men doing a lot of the cooking and cleaning and letting people who are destitute sleep on the sofa.'*

This last point highlights the gendered nature of vulnerability in asylum, and why it is important to consider the possibility of violence against women, as is outlined in the Gender Guidelines (2004). As has been argued by Asylum Aid and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, women can often be made vulnerable to forms of domestic servitude, violence and slavery when protective supports are reduced in the asylum system (Asylum Aid, 2003; 2008c; Crawley et al, 2011a).

This then links again with disclosure of wider experiences, and how they may feel their own safety is in jeopardy if persecution in the country of origin is discussed in the UK:

*R4: 'Why should they tell? If they tell, about the opposition on legal documents, can those legal documents follow them? Can people have access to those legal documents when they go back to their own countries? And what is that going to do for them? What is speaking out gonna do for them if they're goin' home anyway?'*

Again, this highlights the need for thorough communication with women, and men, at every point of an asylum claim. This may be particularly important in terms of assuring confidentiality, which interviews with all but one of the respondents from voluntary organisations discussed. Furthermore, these questions draw attention to the possibility of strategic self-silencing as a way for the applicant to prepare for wider eventualities by avoiding further repercussions if they were to be returned to their country of origin.

## **6.8.2 UKBA and Rights Based Approaches**

Chapters Three and Four have outlined the definitions and international legislative engagement with the Geneva Convention of 1948 (1951), as well as other human rights conventions. All the respondents discussed rights in some form, specifically the issues of international human rights, asylum rights and/or women's rights. Again, the kinds of rights discussed were reflective of the kind of organisation in which the respondent worked.

Emphasising the rights of asylum seekers under the Geneva Convention, Respondent 10 defined the framework within which the UK Border Agency aims to work, and the reasons people may seek asylum in the UK:

*R10: 'Human rights are always considered as an integral part of an asylum claim... typical reasons to have left their own country would be the likes of conflict, political opinion, religious opinion, membership of a particular social group, perhaps their sexual orientation, ahm, religious obviously could be a religious*

*organisation, political is self-evident, ahm, could be forced to undertake working in the army or whatever, soldiering against their will, it could be exploitation in their home country if the criminal agencies in their own country are not able to provide them with appropriate protection... there's a whole range of reasons.'*

This is an extensive outline, and although inclusive of most reasons for application, it also highlights a lack of recognition of the gendered nature of conflict, forced migration and asylum, specifically in reiterating the lack of focus on sexual violence that exists, not only in this statement or the UK Border Agency, but in the international humanitarian law that guides these responses (see Canning, 2010). This is also evident in the following statement:

*R6: 'it doesn't mean that people are coming from nice places to come and try and better their lives, they're coming because things are pretty terrible where they're living, but they don't necessarily meet the condition of having a well-founded fear of persecution for them individually.'*

To focus on this statement with a gendered lens, women do experience horrendous levels of violence, indeed things can be 'pretty terrible', to the extent that Major General Patrick Cammeart declared that 'it is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflict' (in Canning, 2010: 849). However, it does not justify protection under the Geneva Convention since 'gender' cannot meet the conditions of a well-founded fear of persecution under the specific groups outlined. This may be challenged in some ways, for example many women are targeted for being part of a specific ethnic or religious group. The problems here lie in the fact that this is not always the case and, as discussed in Chapter Four and section 6.6.1, many women will not directly speak about instances of sexual violence in an interview or formal situation.

This can be further problematised by applicants' lack of knowledge in presenting instances of violence linked to reasons identified by the Geneva Convention, as identified by Respondent 6 when describing how lack of access to specialised advice can affect women's claims:

*R6: 'the Geneva Convention... to gain asylum you have to fit under certain categories. And if you describe yourself in a certain way that you don't, then, then that's just it.'*

The implementation of rights based approaches and policies also received criticism:

*R5: 'They've got all these policies and procedures in place that they say you've got to have to qualify for the refugee status, and people provide that evidence, and yet again it doesn't protect them... it's really concerning, it's really worrying because it's that risk and that worry that we're not protecting individuals, that we signed as a country, and we agreed to protect them. You know, we're failing those people.'*

And specifically if women speak about being subjected to sexual violence and are not believed:

*R4: 'it perpetuates the pain that women are second class citizens, and a lot of the countries women are coming from, they're second class citizens anyway. They have no value, no opinions, no rights. And what that does is embeds them even further. So wherever they go in the world, that stays with them. So they come into this country and the officials that are dealing with them reinforce those beliefs and treat them the same way.'*

These issues have the potential to have significant effects on some women's access to adequate protection, with the possibility of overlooking the human rights of women.

## **6.9 Male Domination in the Asylum System**

The Women's Resource Centre (2010) have argued the necessity to have female only spaces in many social spheres, particularly where women are vulnerable or have experienced violence. To further this, issues of male dominated space were highlighted in my own experience within asylum communities, for example being one of only four women in a space of over thirty men in one support centre. This was also discussed by respondents and, through narrative analysis, was evident in interviews with three male

respondents.

By all accounts, asylum is male dominated. More men reach the UK than women (Asylum Aid, 2011) as more men may have the capacity or economic and political freedom to flee conflict or unrest while women may have family and children to care for, as well as the possibility of fewer independent rights in some areas. The fact that men may also be more politically active in their country of origin may also impact on the active desire to flee, particularly as a political target. This is evident from the women I have worked with and supported. For example, although I have accessed five asylum groups, I have only ever met one group of women from Iraq, none from Afghanistan and one from Iran whilst researching in these centres. This is despite these being the countries from which most asylum seekers currently flee due to the British and US invasion and internal conflict:

*R7: 'We have no ladies from Afghanistan, Iran or Iraq. Because I think it's men who flee those countries, and the women are left behind.'*

This may be one explanation, but work with Darfuri Women and men also suggested that cultural roles of women may be another, as women were expected to be more engaged in domestic spheres. However, women do still make up one third of asylum applicants, yet space is often dominated by men even when women do access support, which may impede access to some or all of the opportunities offered to asylum seekers in general asylum support agencies:

*R13: 'There is more men claiming asylum than there is women. Mostly here we have, we don't have many women come in. We used to but now it's become more male dominated, and women feel vulnerable here.'*

*R7: 'You know, if they're going to use the computer space they have their children, and who looks after their children? They get there and it's, you know there's just a lot of men that use that space.'*

This was directly acknowledged by one manager, although challenging sexist behaviour seemed inconclusive:

*R11: 'We've had people who won't come back to the English classes because young men have said things to them. And I suppose once every couple of months we stand up in the kitchen and say 'listen, this is going on and it has to stop'.'*

Issues regarding sexism in asylum support spaces have been directly challenged by some of the volunteers involved. For example, as a direct response to women's experiences, two organisations have been set up to work exclusively with women. Whilst women-only spaces are often positive, the opportunity to engage in wider social and support spaces should also be available so women may gain access to a full range of necessary resources.

### **6.9.1 Patriarchal Attitudes in the Interview Process**

As outlined, male-dominated approaches have been evident in the asylum system during this research process. Likewise, there were clear differences in gendered discourses in the interview process and analysis. Although no direct forms of sexist attitudes were ever displayed, all four male respondents were not fully aware and, in some ways, uninformed about the importance of gendered space for vulnerable women, as well as women centred problems and experiences. For example, the term 'women's activities' was commonly used by Respondent 1, as though not connected to wider social or political issues; 'rape' was often misinterpreted as 'sex trafficking' by Respondent 10 and Respondent 12 discussed the physical differences between women and men that meant women may not be able to physically fend off perpetrators (therefore perpetuating the notion of stranger rape, rather than the coercion women may be subjected to).

Discourses of blame often (directly or indirectly) reflected the Madonna/Whore dichotomy (for discussion see Tolman, 1994) in that women were held in some way responsible for their own subjection to rape or sexual violence:

*R11: 'What I find that is problematic, ahm, is some of these gentlemen think that this is the promised land that they have entered into, that every woman that they talk to is going to take them home and ahm you know, they're they've fallen into the 'Oh my God, look what happens on Saturday night' kind of thing. You know, they go out in town just the same as everybody else, but they see lots and lots of scantily clad women behaving dreadfully and they literally think that they can do whatever they want. And that leads to some very, very inappropriate behaviour that the police have picked up on.'*

This story begins by outlining a form of attitude differences amongst some men in the asylum system and women in the static population in Liverpool. Although acknowledging that there may be something problematic in men's attitudes, there is an inherent focus on women's 'freedom' to engage in public life, particularly in focussing on the clothes women wear and (assumingly) alcohol consumption. Already this is a problematic discourse: women are not adhering to the 'Madonna' side of the Madonna/Whore dichotomy and therefore may somehow be complicit in whatever may befall them, a notion long challenged within feminist thought (Bohner et al, 2009; Carll, 2003; Fawcett Society, 2007; Rape Crisis, 1984; Temkin, 1997). However, more ironically, when asked what kind of inappropriate behaviour he meant, the same respondent replied:

*Oh, ahm, you know, standing outside schools, chatting up kids as they come out.*

Indeed, not only has this statement reiterated existing discourses in women's behaviour in terms of what is 'dreadful' or not, the end of the story is completely disconnected with the beginning: men's 'inappropriate behaviour' is disconnected with women's even though the discourse entwines them. It is arguable that such attitudes and discourses may directly or indirectly affect the experiences of women seeking asylum. Although the attitudes outlined above may not be particularly problematic in isolation, in addition to the problems in support I have noted in field reflections and highlighted by the respondents discussed in section 6.9, they highlight a serious lack in women centred approaches and attitudes and provides indications as to why a

vacuum in support evidently exists for women in the asylum system in Merseyside that goes beyond a lack in funding.

## **6.10 Chapter Conclusion**

Liverpool has a range of differing institutions and agencies working on similar areas of social exclusion. This chapter has investigated experiences, attitudes and areas of concern working with a number of these groups; asylum, sexual violence and/or women. It establishes the impacts of sexual violence generally, through physical, emotional and psychological and social means, and in conflict specifically. It has identified forms of violence that women living in Merseyside have been subjected to and, in specifically investigating sexual violence in conflict, demonstrates a severe gap in access to support as well as women's human rights, as well as intertwined needs that should be addressed through holistic approaches.

Firstly, the experiences of sexual violence relayed by support workers, and the physical, emotional and psychological effects of these, highlight the urgent need for more support for women seeking asylum who had been subjected to sexual violence. It is clear from respondents working with women that the impacts of conflict and conflict related sexual violence do not easily come to an end when women flee immediate violence or threat, but that effects transcend the situation which she was in when abused. As Respondent 4 highlighted, this can be eclipsed by the range of immediate necessities when seeking asylum, such as accommodation, clothing and food, and is further overshadowed by the legal process of applying for asylum in the UK.

Therefore, a key finding of this chapter is the exposure of significant gaps in support for women, as well as a set of needs that cannot separate practical, social and emotional support, particularly those seeking asylum. However, the seriousness of this is perhaps most resonant in consideration of the long term emotional and social effects of sexual violence that practitioners identified women to have experienced. The recognition that availability of

long-term support is a crucial area for women, as discussed by Respondent 2, is met with a lack of acknowledgment in some organisations, due largely to funding but also as part of a wider lack in recognition of the benefits and importance this can have for some survivors. As is evidenced here and in other chapters, this can have particularly serious implications for women involved in criminal justice proceedings or the asylum system, as well as organisations which do not adhere to a gendered lens with regard to support (see section 6.9). To echo the sentiments of Respondent 9, how well organisations respond to sensitive information or vulnerable groups and individuals appears to depend on the role and perspective, including the ethos and institutional attitudes, of that organisation. This can leave a number of gaps; those who work with or support one marginalised group may not apply adequate focus with another. Whilst funding is a key director of this and adds internal and external pressure to the running of organisations, particularly frontline voluntary organisations which have been even further affected by the Coalition Governments cut's, attitudes, knowledge and priorities within some organisations also need to be targeted to ensure full recognition is given to the rights and experiences of asylum seekers as well as women survivors.

As demonstrated here, and in previous chapters, women are less likely to discuss instances of sexual violence in formal or official settings if they do not feel safe or protected, or even as a response to social and cultural silencing of rape and sexual violence. This can include sexual violence perpetrated as a deliberate tactic in conflict under motivations such as ethnicity, politics or religion, even though these correlate with legitimate reasons for protection of the human under the Geneva Convention. Although most respondents recognised that sexual violence can have serious effects on women including, for example, disassociation, and that not discussing sexual violence can be a prominent issue for women seeking asylum, there remained a lack of motivation for some to attempt to solve this problem, matched with a lack of resources to do so. In turn, as Asylum Aid (2011) and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (2009) have also

argued the quality of decision making from the UK Border Agency can be compromised.

Having investigated the issues outlined above, the following chapter will move toward a synopsis of the oral history of one woman who survived rape in conflict, the impacts that this has had on her and her life direction, her life in the asylum system in Merseyside and the forms of support that have been beneficial to her. I will then move to the final discussion where findings from this chapter will be applied to findings from the next, drawing out overall analyses of the impacts of sexual violence in conflict and the relationship this has with women's rights, human rights and support for survivors.

## 7.0 Chapter Seven: Experience of Rape in Conflict: Local Lives, Global Contexts

### 7.1 Introduction

*'I believe that for the vast majority of people, the sharing of their life stories is something they really want to do. All that most people usually need is someone to listen to them or someone to show an interest in their stories and they will welcome the opportunity.'*

(Atkinson, 1998: 25)

The sentiments Atkinson describes are, as noted in Chapter Five, reflective of my experience of working with women and supporting survivors of sexual violence. This chapter goes beyond 'life story' in the sociological sense, to develop an oral history in three parts with Hawwi, who survived sexual violence whilst fleeing conflict and state repression in Ethiopia who, at the time of sharing her oral history, was seeking asylum in Merseyside. This chapter begins by outlining the political context of Ethiopia in terms of conflict, ethnic segregation and women's rights before moving to a detailed account of Hawwi's oral history.

As discussed in Chapter Five, this oral history was undertaken with Hawwi over a one month period, meeting on three occasions with meetings lasting between one and three hours. Throughout the oral history, I did not ask many questions, but invited Hawwi to tell me as much as she wished about her life, starting from childhood. On doing so, Hawwi recalled many things that she had otherwise forgotten, evoked many different emotions, from anger, to sadness to regret, and relayed whole sections of her life that she had not discussed with other people before or at least for a long time.

In all, this brief account of one woman's history accumulated over 45,000 words, with over five hours of recorded conversation. This chapter aims to condense further the life history of Hawwi by identifying main points of her life story as I have interpreted it. Whilst many more events are noted in the transcripts, the first section of this chapter aims only to include those that

directly relate to this overall thesis, without diluting the context or significance of events for Hawwi herself. Nonetheless, it largely excludes the 'everyday life' and as such unavoidably leaves gaps in her story, such as how specific events progressed or situations developed. Each *selected* event links to a future or past experience for Hawwi, and many link directly or indirectly to her subjection to rape whilst fleeing political persecution during conflict. As Becker (1967) argued, information may never be fully objective; therefore it is important to recognise that the overall interests of the researcher inevitably lay in the final document, in this case this chapter.

The second part of this chapter directly incorporates feminist sociological interpretation and analysis. It engages with wider structural discourses of marginalisation and oppression, as well as in identifying themes in conflict and impacts of sexual violence. It discusses political problems related to conflict, such as state violence and militarisation, but focuses mostly on continuums of violence (Kelly, 1988) and the impacts that these have on one individual woman as well as her wider society and community.

## **7.2 Part One**

### **7.2.1 Ethiopian Context: An Overview**

Ethiopia is a large landlocked country which makes up one quarter of the Horn of Africa. It has a population of over 88 million, and is amongst the world's lowest Gross National Product, or income (AFROL, 2000; Country Reports, 2006). In terms of women's rights, Ethiopia has a high rate of domestic and sexual violence (Devessa et al., 1998; Kedir and Admasachew, 2010). Alemu and Mengitsu note:

*'In Ethiopia, women traditionally enjoy little independent decision making on most individual and family issues, including the option to choose whether to give birth in a health facility or seek the assistance of a trained provider. Harmful traditional practices, including female genital cutting, early marriage and childbearing, gender-based violence, forced marriage, wife inheritance, and a*

*high value for large families, all impose huge negative impacts on women's Reproductive Health.'*

(2007: 2).

In terms of ethnic structure, Ethiopia's demographic makeup consists of over 80 registered ethnic groups and 10 groups of more than one million people (UNFPA, 2007). The largest of these groups is Oromo, which makes up over 25 million of the 88 million population.

As with other countries in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia experienced various stages of conflict and civil unrest during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, largely resultant of political upheaval and acute social and economic change (Matteo Terrazas, 2007). This culminated in the Ethio/Eritrea War from 1998-2000, with political shifts stirring within Ethiopia as a result. This political instability influenced numerous escalations in internal conflict and civil unrest, notably the 2005 election crisis that led to the deaths of approximately 193 (largely ethnic Oromo) student demonstrators and the arrest of around 100 pro-democracy students, political opponents and journalists (Abbink, 2006; BBC, 2006).

### **7.2.2 Hawwi**

Hawwi is a 36 year old Ethiopian woman of Oromo ethnicity who fled Ethiopia due to political victimisation by the state, and was raped at the border whilst trying to flee. The following section outlines significant points of her life as relayed by her in her oral history. The sequence of this oral history will be relayed in the order that Hawwi recalled it.

### **7.2.3 Hawwi's childhood and life as a young adult in Ethiopia**

For the most part of her childhood Hawwi lived with her parents in a village in rural Ethiopia. One of 11 children, three of her siblings died whilst she was young and the family overall experienced drought and periods of hunger: 'My childhood, there is no place to sleep in the night, there is no clothes to wear. And because there are a lot of childrens we are fighting and starving for food'.

In the domestic sphere, Hawwi identifies her mother as holding all responsibility for the household and experiencing domestic violence at the hands of her father. Hawwi remembers this as there being 'no peace at home' and that 'he is just bringing huge stick and he's just beating her. He is making her bleed'. This culminates in her mother leaving for varied periods of time and her sister adopting the role of 'mother'.

Although most girls in Ethiopia are removed from school in Grade Eight (13 years old), Hawwi's father allowed her the opportunity to continue schooling for one year in return for living as a domestic servant for her brother, and then further afield to her Aunt where she would continue education beyond 13. At that point, Hawwi began to be subjected to physical abuse – beatings and starvation – at the hands of her aunt and uncle whilst replacing 'the job of a servant'. Hawwi told this to her father and family, who ignored the claims. This led her to cut ties with her family and move to live as a servant with an unrelated woman where again she was denied breakfast, lunch and dinner. Whilst completing high school, moving in with friends and starting her first job in a factory, the government changed and guerilla fighters occupied the country for three years, when 'military power is everywhere'. Hawwi recalls this period stating 'wherever you are going you are in fear of rape of the soldiers, not rape of the society... if they see a woman there is no question, they are just taking her from the street for rape'.

#### **7.2.4 The Beginning of Hawwi's Career and Role in Political Opposition**

By 21, Hawwi had completed a diploma and moved 300 kilometres to work. Here, she contracted Tuberculosis and, due to the lack of a hospital, moved nearer Addis Ababa for hospital treatment. Eventually she was working near the capital. Here she volunteered for a public service and spoke out against advertisements encouraging men to join the Ethiopian military because 'if you are going to the military, you are dying'. This is the first point at which she was accused of having 'hidden objectives' against the government and military, this time by the people she worked with and local state actors.

On losing her voluntary role, Hawwi moved to Addis Ababa and applied for a job in journalism. Due to her Diploma and ability to speak Oromo and English, this application was successful and she began work as a journalist. Hawwi highlights the first stages of this conflict, stating: 'there is tribe conflict starting now in Ethiopia... after this transitional government... this tribe issue arises from every corner of the city'. She goes on to argue that 'Ethiopia is a country with a very huge military power. At the ground, people are starving and dying of hunger'. At this point of her career, Hawwi covers the student demonstrations of 2002 in Addis Ababa which led to the death of around 38 students at the hands of the government during a protest. Hawwi states that she, along with other journalists who reported on the shooting, was accused of 'provoking society' by showing the force military used against students. An investigation ensued by parliament to examine the role of the media and specifically, Hawwi argues, the role of Oromo journalists. She continued to report on the government response of arresting Oromo students and reporters and as a result was sacked from her job.

As a response to government actions, including the imprisonment of Oromo journalists and students from the protest, Hawwi decided to flee to a neighbouring country. As there were no flights due to conflict, this was an overland trip hiding in the back of a car.

It is here between borders that Hawwi was raped. After two 'safe nights' staying with one woman and three men, Hawwi was woken by one of the smuggling agents. She recalled: 'he come and sat by me. I pushed him, he resisted, he start pushing me and start doing like that. 'Please leave me'. He can't hear me. 'Leave me'. He can't hear me. He said, 'are you a virgin' or something, some word which was broken Amharic. 'Why, you are not a virgin, why you are not doing this? Shut your mouth' or something. As much as I am trying, pushing him, he is just pretending and just pushing me and pushing me. In the middle of the night, he beat me. And he start doing sex. Just, he put some dirty cloths in my mouth and he just done everything he

likes and I will not tell you the situation, it is a very big shame'. She goes on to state that: 'He told me that 'we will play on you, three of us will play on you'. Before this point, Hawwi had been a virgin. She remembers: 'I cried a lot, I cried a lot, I cried a lot, oh', feeling as though, 'I have to go to my house and I have to die there', and 'there is pain all the day. He struggled, he beat me as much as he can. Every pain is on my body'. Once he left, she travelled to an organisation in the same area where she was taken back to Addis Ababa. At this point, she remembers, 'I took my shame in my mind. I didn't speak to anyone'.

Once back at Addis Ababa, Hawwi experienced constant vaginal discharge and itching, and was diagnosed with having contracted a Venereal Disease, which subsequently was not effectively treated until she later arrived in Merseyside. On realising she had missed a period, Hawwi undertook a pregnancy test which confirmed she had become pregnant from rape. She states, 'now there is no way I have a child. I don't have home, I don't have job, by any means, whether I die of it, I have to discard it, I have to remove it I decided'. Hawwi was then able to obtain an abortion at one of the few abortion clinics in Ethiopia, but suffered 12 days of continuous bleeding as a result. On receiving treatment she was advised to undertake an HIV test, which she did. Hawwi recalls the test proving positive, 'Finally the doctor is white Russian and interpreter said, 'it's for you', and they told me, 'sorry, we are very sorry. You got HIV' they said. I don't know what to do, really. All the heaven comes to me and I don't know what to do'.

For the following weeks, Hawwi blamed the transmission on the religious belief that 'God didn't observe me in society and didn't forgive my sins' and that God could cure her if she repented, including reunifying her with her family.

After some months Hawwi applied for, and was appointed to, a new job as a journalist. She recalls this particular appointment as 'the first happiest year of my life. One phase of my life is switched off and the other is open'. Being

paid in dollars and being able to afford a house, she undertook her role in an international company and remembers, 'I became extremely popular, to tell you the truth... my name becomes exaggerated in that country, really. Every farmers, my tribes, especially my tribe. They just loved me a lot'.

After this point, the political position in Ethiopia again began another transition. The 2005 Ethiopian election ensued, which the government was accused of rigging. Again, demonstrations took place in Addis Ababa which Hawwi was required to report on. She states: 'I am a reporter. I am independent. I have to interview the victim's families... I will get information from non-government organisations and the civil society'. As a response to this, the government again accused her of provoking society and, because of her contact with Oromo guerilla fighters as a reporter, forms of collusion. As part of reporting, Hawwi followed the story of the detainment of 60 members of the government opposition, three of whom Hawwi states were tortured and killed in prison. She reported this through monthly visits to court. Finally, on one occasion, the police opened a pack to find radio equipment she carried to record the trials. Although she openly declared herself as a journalist before entering the court through security and to the police, Hawwi was accused of asking police to be allowed to bring a pistol to court by one security guard. Hawwi argues this was a way to deflect from staff permitting her radio through security. At this point she was detained, kicked and beaten before being released. They took her equipment, but she recalls: 'I am OK, I can walk'.

After this, and despite attempted protection by her international employers, the Ethiopian government revoked Hawwi's license to report. This once again left her unemployed.

At the same time, Hawwi had begun a relationship with a man, who was also HIV positive. This partially developed from a friendship with the man, who was able to obtain anti-retroviral drugs to support Hawwi's immune system. As a result of being well known to the public, Hawwi felt unable to attend

clinics to acquire HIV related medications, as 'I have fear of the society and I need to get an informal way without exposing my HIV... people need to see it, I don't know why, They say 'at the back of the clinic is a corner, the HIV positive peoples are there. The other patients are hearing that... as if they must gossip they want to see who... are sitting there'.

Hawwi's relationship changed gradually developed. However, after some time, Hawwi's partner informed her he had one daughter from another girlfriend, but that they now lived in another country. Hawwi acknowledges that 'he is treating me well because I have got a lot of money' and that, although she was a devout Christian, after six months they started 'doing sex together' and she soon became pregnant. She refers to buying him food and clothes and paying rent, and that 'I am loving him too much'. It was at eight months in her pregnancy that Hawwi's journalism license was revoked. To challenge this, Hawwi contacted an International Non-Governmental Organisation who invited her to speak about her treatment by the government at a conference held by a human rights organization in a nearby country. Despite being far along in pregnancy, Hawwi attended but could not convince her husband to accompany her. She also acknowledges this point as a reason for the refusal from the Home Office to let her claim asylum in the UK as they questioned 'how is it possible for you to travel by airport if you are eight months pregnant?' and that this was even though 'I gave the days and pregnancy months and even the pictures with the pregnancy. Everything. Even the pictures with the human rights organisation in [says country].'

Later that year, Hawwi gave birth to a baby whom she did not breastfeed, but bought packed milk and powders to avoid HIV transmission. After this point, Hawwi's partner 'is evaluating me... Now there is no dollar, there is nothing'. After one and a half years in a relationship, her partner disclosed having a wife and children in another corner of the city. Instead of looking for jobs during the day, as he had said, he had been spending time with his 'other family'. Hawwi states at this point that her partner had become aggressive toward her and would not interact with their child.

Having had little support from Ethiopian organisations, Hawwi contacted an international independent NGO for political support as a result of her incarceration and abuse by the government. They granted Hawwi money to travel back to the same country to meet with an African human rights organisation. Hawwi planned to seek political asylum there, which encouraged her partner to return to her to support their child and travel as a family unit but only if they got married. Hawwi agreed to this, and reflects 'he started loving me.' However, after two hours of marriage, 'he discussed with things how he will claim my property and that he has house with me, he has money in account with me... I gave the chance to share my house, to share the money in the account [bangs table] by that marriage certificate [bangs table]. I killed myself without knowing.' After 15 days, Hawwi filed for divorce. By this stage, her husband had a claim on the house, and still does at the time of writing.

In response, Hawwi's husband exposed her involvement with a party where she was a member as part of the opposition to the Ethiopian government, in a report to local police. She was subsequently arrested, recalling: 'everything that we shared as husband and wife he completely told the police. The police come and caught me without any court decision... when police come to you, they start by beating or insulting you.' Hawwi was detained for a short while, questioned about why she was planning to leave the country and eventually beaten. Hawwi states, 'he will beat me on my face, he is kicking me on the wall. Now I am just standing like this [gets up to show she is standing still]... sometimes he is beating me, sometimes he is trying to put something in my eyes, I am crying. Sometimes he is kicking me, he is saying, 'give her slump', he is ordering him'. Eventually the police released her, and Hawwi recognised her husband's involvement in her arrest: 'I just completely understand that... he gave them money to frighten me and to leave anything for him. Because if the court says give them order to arrest me they will not say 'don't tell anybody'. Once released, Hawwi stayed on the street in a bus station where she began to experience the first effects of a breakdown. She

recalls: 'I am trying to speak but I can't activate it, I tried to speak to someone... nothing. If something, if anger or something happened to me I don't know. I just can't speak at all really. Crying all the night, I just completely lost my mind'. Once found by her brother, who had contacted the police, Hawwi was admitted to hospital where she was medicated, injected and remembers: 'when they gave me injection I don't know, something completely happens to me. I start shouting, extremely shouting... I remember some of it... I tried to beat every person who approaches me'. When her brother took her to the toilet, Hawwi threw herself into a river: 'the purpose is to kill myself'. She was rescued by a number of people, and admitted to a psychiatric hospital. She remained here as an inpatient for some months. On release, she remembers 'I will see visions and I will hear some voices in my mind... I can't control myself'. At this point, Hawwi began to publicly speak about her HIV status in shops and on the street, and to her family, with whom she was now living. In response, her brothers would not allow Hawwi to use shared cutlery, plates or cups because of her HIV status. She states: 'if they touch me they will wash their hands with many things... [they] are just putting some paint on their cups, not to mix by any means'.

Shortly after her return from hospital, Hawwi's father was killed in an accident. Linking her return with the timing, her family blamed her for the misfortune. At the same time, Hawwi's husband went on to steal all of her money from her house whilst she attended her father's funeral. Consequently, her brother fell out with her, accusing her of not preventing the theft by leaving the money in house. After quarrelling, she was told to: 'take your child and leave our mother's house, otherwise we are going to kill you'. Shortly after, Hawwi began state funded anti-retroviral medication (ARVs), as well as medication for newly diagnosed bipolar disorder, suffering at this point from being 'extremely depressed'. HIV combination therapy impacted on her overall health, reducing appetite resulting in weight loss. Hawwi decided that 'I can't take this child anymore, I can't hold my mind, my attention is completely diverse in everything'. As a result of this, Hawwi left her child in the care of her mother.

### **7.2.5 Migration and asylum**

During discussion in the opposition party offices with the party leader, Hawwi was informed of a course for Oromo political members funded by a British organisation. Although uncertain if her HIV status would prevent membership, Hawwi applied and was accepted to the course. Her status did not affect her application, and three months later she was granted an opportunity to travel to the United Kingdom as part of a collaborative country scheme in Ethiopia. She went on to inform her family, collected paper documents and left her mobile phone to allow her to contact her son.

Hawwi arrived in the UK, recalling, 'the weather is cold, it is completely different, it is icy and I am shivering'. As part of a number of focus groups within the scheme, Hawwi was asked about her political experiences and affiliations in Ethiopia, which led to disagreements with members of oppositional government groups during the event.

To ensure she would receive ARVs, Hawwi was sent to an NHS clinic, where blood samples were taken which showed problems with her liver and that she had a highly detectable HIV viral load. Tests also found that her heart had become enlarged as a result of inadequate and incorrect ARVs in Ethiopia. At this point, Hawwi began to consider claiming asylum, again writing to a human rights organisation for a support letter. Hawwi did not yet know how to apply for asylum in the UK, but was informed by another woman that this could be done in Liverpool (since changed) or Croydon. Again, on investigating, Hawwi found out how to get to offices, left the accommodation and took a bus to Liverpool.

On applying for asylum at Liverpool's UK Border Agency screening unit, Hawwi was finger printed and had her picture taken, but was not given any documentation before being sent to a local asylum Hostel. Hawwi remembers arriving here: 'my mind is not active like other people's is active, people are studying me, staring... I don't know what they are really staring.'

Hawwi was then asked for details of her solicitor and for her asylum card, neither of which she had. The Home Office took another picture and gave her an asylum identity card, but she was not allocated an asylum case owner. Eventually she was given the address of a solicitor where she was informed of the process and chose to proceed.

Hawwi waited for six months initially in the UK asylum system to be allocated a case owner whilst living in Home Office National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation and receiving the standard £5 per day for food, clothes and travel. Eventually, after six months, UK Border Agency officials interviewed Hawwi. This was undertaken on a Friday, four days after surgery in Liverpool to improve her enlarged heart, resultant from inadequate ARVs. Half was done on the same day and, due to recognition of her illness, half one week later. After one month, another interviewer was sent to Hawwi, again not her case owner, to clarify the previous interview. Hawwi's solicitor informed the Home Office that 'this lady is a victim of torture, victim of rape, and she was a journalist. Many things she told them'. Hawwi's solicitor included letters of support in her application from numerous local, national and international charities and NGOs that she had been in touch with, including support agencies in Merseyside which Hawwi had accessed at the request of her solicitor through one national organisation.

Hawwi's solicitor requested that the Home Office did not grant a decision in the case whilst waiting for a final medical report. However, the Home Office sent a refusal letter during this time, over a year after her first application, stating discrepancies in her documentation. This included questioning her relationship with the organisation that had supported her, and arguing that there are sufficient antiretrovirals in Ethiopia for HIV. The refusal stated that most of the government activity that had taken place against Hawwi had happened before 2007, whilst she applied for asylum in 2009. Furthermore, as she had come by air using her own passport, it was deemed unlikely that the government would have any interest in her. They stated that they

believed what job she claimed to have and which 'tribe' she was a part of, but questioned why she had not claimed asylum at the airport. To this, Hawwi states, 'I don't know the asylum process and even after I claimed, I stayed for a long time without card, without solicitor. And who believes you? It's very hard.'

Hawwi moved toward appealing against the refusal based on a set of interviews she had given whilst with an organisation in Birmingham. These had been recorded and displayed on television in the Horn of Africa, where she had highlighted human rights abuses by the Ethiopian government. Tapes and newspaper articles were disclosed in court and, although translated into English, were again rejected until they were supplied in their original Oromo format to the courts. At the time of exploring Hawwi's oral history, Hawwi was still waiting for a final decision on her second appeal. During this time, the court date was also moved back by over two weeks.

### **7.2.6 Life in Asylum**

As the final part of the overall oral history, I asked Hawwi to describe life in the asylum system in Merseyside. She stated: 'for me, asylum is a new process... I entered into it and learned all the process by myself through the system', one which she struggled with (see section 7.5). Her anxieties included having a 'restless mind' whereby, 'I don't know whether I can join that little child, I don't know whether we are just disappearing forever, I don't know if I can have an ability to raise him. I don't know what will happen'. She went on to say that 'when I just tried to gain a little relief in my health situation, the result of my asylum become negative and all my thinking and hope become darkened at a time and I don't know what I am going to do'. She questions why no one believed her asylum claim, and argued, 'the suffrage that I came through, no-one will understand that. I am not a thief; I am not like a criminal'.

On her fear of returning to Ethiopia, Hawwi stated: 'There is no way I am going to escape the eyes of the government, and there is no means of

surviving there.... Deciding to return me to Ethiopia is killing me'. She identified problems in Ethiopia at the time including, 'the human rights abuses, look at the life of women, look at the rape of women... if you are a female you can't have your own property alone, you have to have a bodyguard, or a good relationship with the government' and goes on to argue, 'you can't tell any media that we are suffering, people cannot speak to medias, medias are controlled by the government. You cannot expose anything. International organisations cannot function in that country'. This also led to the questioning of Country of Origin Information (COI) at the UK Border Agency, about which Hawwi argues: 'the reality in Ethiopia and the country report, or what the government can speak to the world, is very, very different... the government denies the reality in this country and tried to negotiate with other governments and he is doing well.'

Hawwi acknowledged positive elements about her asylum claim at various points, most significantly: 'I am thanking and I will give them thanks always because they treated me well... I have good accommodation and I get good health treatment, shower, good type of food', referring specifically to her heart operation. However, there were other parts of life as an asylum seeker that she found difficult, for example, 'I can't control my time, I am losing my way all the day', and has at times had problems recognising her environment, for example, 'I lost myself twice and reported to the police... and I can't cross the traffic light properly. Every time the drivers are shouting at me and just I am, it was very, very devastating'. She also continues to have problems with her mental health, including, 'I have great depression... sometimes I need to kill myself and sometimes I need to kills someone'. She refers to 'remembering the past. Always the past is in my mind'. She continues to struggle with side effects from ARVs, including nausea and sickness.

In terms of support, Hawwi speaks positively of one particular local organisation who have provided counseling and where she was able to network with people living with HIV in the asylum system. She received one to one peer discussion and has been allocated a clinical psychologist. These

have, she says, led her to reduce the number of tablets she takes on a daily basis, and that most times ‘the idea of killing myself, all the idea of drinking poison, or doing something to others is completely released in my mind, and I am controlling every emotions of my life’.

Although her mental health has improved since receiving counselling and support, Hawwi referred constantly to feeling restless, losing sleep and not eating whilst waiting for a response from the UK Border Agency. She questions why asylum seekers cannot work in the UK, as this has left her with empty time which she spends ‘dreaming about that people, about the court and the response of the court’ while she waits for her appeal to go through the Home Office. She argues, ‘there is plenty of things that we can work. Not by depending on the government and not always by being benefit claimants or just by not doing anything. There is many things we can do’.

In the concluding part of her story, Hawwi questioned the Geneva Convention, and whether it is sufficient to protect ‘vulnerable ladies, childrens and peoples who exposed to many different diseases’. She questioned her own protection under the convention in the UK, adding: ‘I don’t have very sufficient years to live in this world, and I don’t need to finish the rest of my life my struggling and by conflicts and by disturbing my mind. I need rest, I need peace of mind, so I need this protection to protect my life from danger’.

## **7.3 Part Two**

### **7.3.1 Structural Inequalities, Marginalisation and Exclusion**

Hawwi’s oral history relays whole discourses of power that impact on her individually, as well as on wider individuals and social actors related to the historical moments that she discusses. Notable social inequalities include poverty and starvation, such as in her reflection of there being little food as a child and at varying stages of her adulthood. These can, for example, relate to global distributions of wealth, state crime and corruption. These are clearly important points for concern; however this section will focus more specifically

on conflict, state power, migration, impacts of sexual violence, gender inequality and the UK asylum system.

### **7.3.2 Government, State Crime and Freedom of Press**

From early on in her history, Hawwi identifies the role of government in Ethiopia, particularly through the historical moment of government transition and the presence of state power, such as soldiers and militia. What Hawwi initially describes is the May 2005 election protests in Addis Ababa, staged as a response to suspected vote rigging for the leader of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which re-elected Meles Zenawi, who is still (at the time of writing) Prime Minister. At this protest, scores of demonstrators were shot dead and (mostly Oromo) pro-democracy oppositional leaders and journalists were detained. Under this government, Ethiopia has seen increases in state militarisation, also resultant of the Ethio/Eritrea conflict of 2000-2005. Hawwi discusses the effects of ethnic conflict on her own environment, stating, 'there is no peace of mind' whilst living in Ethiopia.

Ethnic divisions are integral to the overall context. Hawwi indicates expressions of oppression and exclusion, for example:

*'The first, the first victim is the Oromo people, because they are the one who got the largest place and who hold a very large area, who are very prosperous, has lands has rivers and they are very uneducated and they don't have many education, most of the Oromo peoples.'*

Evident here is the problem that, like many other regions, and as was evident in Rwanda before the 1994 genocide (Magnarella, 2005), divisions of ethnicities create lived social hierarchies which then impact on equality within and between social groups (Jones, 2006; Shaw, 2003). Whether or not people engage in challenging hierarchies and inequalities can link more directly with autonomy or personal political circumstance, as well as societal coercion. As the outline of her oral history indicates, Hawwi did actively engage in challenging state power and, as she identifies it, social inequalities

in her identity as 'Oromo' and in her role as a journalist. Methodologically, it is also important to note that this perception of hierarchy is developed through personal experience, but remains a subjective perception of the Ethio/Eritrean conflict, which can be interpreted differently by 'other' ethnic groups (Shaw, 2003).

Wider governmental problems manifested in conflict often include corruption and state violence. As Hawwi indicates, Ethiopia is indeed one of Africa's poorest countries (Country Reports, 2011). There are regular shortages in food and as UNICEF indicates, almost two thirds of the country is illiterate, with women having less than half the literacy rate of men (2009). Hawwi identifies these as reasons for her involvement in political opposition:

*'Ethiopia is the most poor country in the world, Ethiopia will get grant from everyone. That grant will go specifically to the government region.'*

*'They [EPRDF] completely failed that election. But what they can do?'*

The government, who on paper advocate democracy, also denied freedom of press throughout the protests, and continue to do so at the time of writing. These issues have direct implications for Hawwi as an individual because she is both Oromo and a journalist. In 2005 she lost her job for allegedly provoking the public, and in 2007 had her licence revoked by the government for covering the stories of oppositional leaders and journalists.

*'Students start demonstration, then they shoot them. As a reporter, what is my responsibility?'*

*'I got many children's dead childrens on the street. The cameraman took picture for me, I wrote the script but they told me it will not be displayed.'*

*'The government parliament members decide it is the media who are the problem, and we have to clarify the problem in the media.'*

*'You can't tell any media that we are suffering with that, people cannot speak to medias, medias are controlled by the government. You cannot expose anything. International organisations cannot function in that country.'*

This level of regulation and control can impact on the knowledge available about Ethiopia within and outside of the country, something which will be discussed later in relation to Country of Origin Information (COI). Furthermore, it is important to note that state corruption, and Hawwi's links with opposition groups, are the primary vehicles in her husband's ability to have her arrested and beaten. This highlights the use of state power against individuals and groups in areas of political repression (Coleman et al., 2009) as well as gendered power hierarchies, and creates voids in justice which exist when the most powerful in society exploit or victimise less powerful individuals (Alvarez, 2006; Coleman et al., *ibid*). The way in which individuals experience forms of state control are identified by Hawwi:

*'They [police] are coming to you not in a polite way, without knowing anything just in a harsh... Everything is warning, there is no way of saying like in this country, with regard, with kind, with sincerity. You can't hear like this from any Ethiopian organisation. Everything is warning, everything is harsh. When the police come to you, they start by beating you or insulting you.'*

Hawwi also highlights the fear of 'rape of [by] the soldiers' when outlining militarisation of areas around rural and urban Ethiopia. Whilst Hawwi did not experience sexual violence at the hands of government militia, sexual violence by the Ethiopian military has been widespread during various points of civil unrest (Arieff, 2009). As previous chapters indicate, fear of rape is a very real concern for women during conflict and civil unrest, and soldiers are often one of the most prominent perpetrators of sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2005b; Brownmiller, 1975; Canning, 2010; Leatherman, 2011). This gendered fear of crime is arguably echoed globally, encouraging self-regulation in women and, if subjected to sexual violence, can increase internalisation of shame for perceptively not 'protecting' herself from rape (see Chapter One for fuller discussion).

### 7.3.3 Gender Inequalities

Kedir and Admasachew argue, 'there is widespread tolerance of violence perpetrated against women at individual, family, community, peer-groups, school, religion and state levels' in Ethiopia (2010: 438). Certainly, forms of violence as perpetrated by most of these groups are evident in Hawwi's accounts, whether she has experienced them herself or is relaying details from other women, or broader systems and structures. Alemu and Mengitsu summarise the context for women in Ethiopia:

*'From her birth, an Ethiopian female in most families is of lower status and commands little respect relative to her brothers and male counterparts. As soon as she is able, she starts caring for younger siblings, helps in food preparation, and spends long hours hauling water and fetching firewood. As she grows older, she is valued for the role she will play in establishing kinship bonds through marriage to another family, thereby strengthening the community status of her family. She is taught to be subservient, as a disobedient daughter is an embarrassment to her family.'*

(2007: 5)

Indeed, many of these are evident in Hawwi's story and experience. As standpoint feminists have argued, the domestic sphere can be a place of violence and intimidation for women (Berhane, 2004; Copelon, 1994; Devessa et al, 1998; Jewkes et al, 2009; Nesabai, 2005). There are various points in Hawwi's oral history where this is evident, experienced by her mother, her sister and herself:

*'I don't know any days that my mother is sitting and speaking good things with my father. I just know that all the time she is terrified of my father.'*

*'My sister becomes like a mother. My elder sister became my mother and she became like a wife for my father... She suffered a lot a lot a lot and finally my sister become mentally ill.'*

*'My brothers, one of them will beat me, my younger brothers they are beating me.'*

Whilst the contexts of these change in relation to who is perpetrating and who is experiencing violence, the element of gendered inequality remains in that it is in the most part male violence against women. This applies to all but one instance that Hawwi discusses, namely that she was physically abused by her aunt whilst at school. Although this highlights that women can perpetrate or be complicit in violence generally and against other women specifically (Kay Cohen, 2009), the overall history identifies that the majority of violence perpetrated against women is by men.

Linking back to Kedir and Admasachew (2010), various inequalities relating to patriarchy weave into other elements of Hawwi's life history. These include, for example, education and legal entitlement. Although Hawwi was able to obtain an education and whilst her own father encouraged it beyond the minimum state regulation, her study was transactional, in that she had to supply domestic labour in return for it:

*'My father send all of us to the school. He sent all of us whether the girls or the mens but when we reached grade 8 he told us to stop education, it is enough for you. Now more than this you will get a husband, it is not good for you, what are you bringing more than sons?'*

The oral history demonstrated other elements of cultural social control based on gendered spatiality, for example whilst Hawwi was struggling to get food whilst living with her brother:

*'I can't eat outside, which is culturally very bad, and you can't eat on the street as a married girl... even if you are married it is cultural very, very shameful for a lady to eat outside. But still, because of the shame of the society I will not go somewhere and I will not eat anything.'*

Furthermore, cultural gender hierarchies include women's access to legal rights, education and property (Alemu and Mengitsu, 2009; United Nations, 2004). Hawwi states:

*'As a female, if I don't need anything from that government, and if I need to live by my own thing, if I got my own money, I can't build something and then leave. Death can happen to me, anything can happen to me.'*

This discrimination questions the level of autonomy women may have in regard to their own lives, finances and futures and sets up a pathway for further violations of civil liberties and human rights. Hence violence against women does not remain only in the physical and emotional sphere, but can relate to institutional sexism and patriarchal culture which can lead to further harms (Edley and Weatherell, 1995). This includes, for example, Hawwi's experience of being denied food as a result of gendered cultural restrictions rather than physical, economic or ecological factors.

#### **7.3.4 Intersectional Continuum of Violence**

As Kelly (1988) reflects, women can be subjected to many forms of sexual violence and respond to violence in many different ways. This 'continuum of violence' does not exist independently, but is as part of a greater structure of inequality reflected in patriarchal societies and cultures, as was also argued by Brownmiller (1975). In areas where women are accepted as subordinate, violence against women can reach epidemic proportions (Brownmiller, *ibid*). Pointing to Ho (2007) and Galtung (1969, 1990), even when no physical perpetrator is present, cultural and socio-structural violence against individuals and groups (in this case, women) continue to be perpetrated through the denial of necessities for survival or basic rights. These structural forms of violence are reflected in the reluctance of states and governments to implement social change, but also in overlooking the prevention of systematic or culturally ingrained violence. As argued in Chapter Three, oppression can manifest in ways beyond the structural level, impacting on interpersonal relations. For Hawwi, this includes witnessing domestic violence, being subjected to rape and being systematically manipulated by her partner:

*'There is no peace at home.'*

*'Her husband is beating me, 'are you still here?' I become extremely upset, extremely. My life become, become, become really madness. I can't recall that time really [begins to cry].'*

*'Take your child and leave our mother's house, otherwise we are going to kill you', they said. My brothers, my own brothers.'*

Whole social realms are interlocked to reflect and perpetuate such forms of subordination (Brownmiller, 1975; Kelly, 1988). Although there are policy moves toward combating violence against women in Ethiopia, such as the Ethiopia National Action Plan for Gender Equality, which aims to challenge inequality through mainstreaming and abolishing harmful practices (UN, 2004) how effective they are at grassroot levels is questionable. As has been determined earlier, researchers such as Kedir and Admasachew (2010) and Alemu and Mengitsu (2007) continue to find that women are subjected to discrimination, high levels of domestic and sexual violence and are the victim of further practices such as Female Genital Mutilation and forced marriage.

Parts of Hawwi's life history do, in this sense, indicate that gender inequality continues to lie at the root of physical and sexual violence. As Shaw (2003) points out, violence in any form is not created in a vacuum and is often the manifestation of hierarchies and power relations. Hawwi's life experiences more generally highlight patterns of inequality that permit this physical manifestation of gendered control. This is most prevalent in being subjected to a sustained sexual assault, highlighting gender inequality and women's subordination (Brownmiller, 1975).

## **7.4 Impacts of Sexual Violence**

As outlined earlier, there are many effects and consequences of sexual violence. To briefly reiterate, chapters One and Six highlighted physical, emotional and psychological and social effects outlined in interviews, ranging from STI transmission, to disassociation to migration.

Similar impacts are evident in analysing Hawwi's oral history. Some are immediately recognisable, for example in identifying physical effects, as Hawwi spoke about varying diagnoses and personal injuries during the first and second parts of the oral history process. Others, particularly emotional effects and feelings, were more open to subjective identification and discourse analysis (Denzin, 2008; Naples, 2003). For example, repetitive reading and coding of the raw history link shifts in suicidal feeling dependent on Hawwi's situation at that historical point, and particularly regarding access to effective support.

The following section outlines the most prevalent or recurring examples of effects that Hawwi has experienced as a result of sexual violence. This is in two ways: one form of effect is direct, such as HIV transmission, a result of rape at the Kenyan Border. The second is indirect, for example the domino effect that the consequences of rape had on Hawwi's mental health, and the social factors that elements of depression and attempts at suicide had on her, including on her family and in her final decision to flee Ethiopia. In hearing, transcribing, reading and re-reading, and analysing Hawwi's oral history, the harms of sexual violence becomes ever clearer. Although this is not always directly identified by Hawwi herself, it is in methodical literal analysis and discourse analysis that many of these issues transpire (Atkinson, 1998; Chase, 2008; Lapadat, 2009).

### **7.4.1 Physical**

As the outline of Hawwi's history illustrates above, there were various physical implications that developed from being raped. Sexual violence can have varying consequences physically, some short term and others

significantly longer term or permanent. This can include different levels of fistulae (some irreparable), Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Infections (STD/STIs) and damage to internal organs. These may be particularly common in conflict situations due to high levels of rapes and multiple rapes experienced by individual women, as well as multiple perpetrator rapes which can increase the likelihood of STD/STI transmission or internal damage (Elbe, 2002; Mills and Nachega, 2006).

The physical consequences of rape were, for Hawwi, vast. Hawwi gradually discussed numerous effects, all in the initial part of the oral history but with implications of each effect transcending to wider problems and decisions in other parts of the history. Alongside the physical pain she experienced due to rape and being beaten, the first instance of recognition of any further implication began with a Venereal Disease, from which she suffered until she arrived in Liverpool:

*'On the fourth day I got itching. itching, itching. I am like my, my legs itch me like, how can I tell you [scratches thighs]. I have a lot of itching... There is liquid, discharges. Oh my God, there is some venereal disease I have got and what can I do.'*

After this, Hawwi realised firstly that she was pregnant and then that she would have an abortion, which consequently led to blood loss:

*'I waited for my period, there is no period. I convinced that this pregnancy, again I went to check my pregnancy test. It is positive.'*

*'After that abortion my blood count stop. I have bleeding, I have bleeding, I have bleeding. 12 days continuous bleeding.'*

The most permanent and physically devastating consequence of Hawwi's rape was the transmission of HIV, which had significant impacts for her health more generally, many of which she continued to experience during the collection of her oral history:

*'Finally the doctor is white Russian and interpreter said it's for you, and they told me that 'sorry, we are very sorry. You got HIV' they said.'*

*'Physically I am completely devastated.'*

*'I am struggling with side effects of my antiretrovirals. I am nauseous; always I am taking anti-sickness tablets with my medication. That is always a big challenge at that moment for me.'*

*'My previous medication systems I started in Ethiopia... my liver and kidneys and my heart, most of my organs were damaged, but I got treatment now and I become very, very well after that. And because of this I am always give thanking.'*

The impacts of HIV contraction were far reaching, including stigma, further physical problems and, Hawwi's oral history suggests, contributing to the development of mental health problems.

#### **7.4.2 Psychological and Emotional Effects**

Hawwi first identified experiencing feelings of shame directly after being raped, and decided not to tell anyone about her ordeal. This response can be common amongst women who survive rape, due to the social stigmatisation of sexual victimisation, and in victim blaming attitudes:

*'I took my shame in my mind, I didn't speak to anyone.'*

*'But my life is completely damaged, I lose weight, I am not eating, keeping my hair, I am not brushing my teeth. Completely I become rubbish thing. I become rubbish.'*

It was in the diagnosis of HIV after being raped that she first recognised emotional and psychological changes in her mental health:

*'Now I have some sort of depression. I need to stay without reason on the bed, or I will not be very eager to do as I used to do in the past, but there is no very complicated health issue in my mind, and I can't control my mind, I can't think what I have to do.'*

Depression is a common emotional and psychological response to HIV diagnosis, and is associated with 'increased disability, lower quality of life, shorter survival and greater probability of dying' (Sambamoorthi et al, 2001: 33). A fear of these impacts may also contribute to depression on initial diagnosis, which Hawwi refers to at the point of diagnosis and later in discussing her asylum claim.

### **7.4.3 Suicidal Feelings and Mental Health**

Throughout the oral history transcripts, Hawwi repeatedly speaks about suicidal feelings after being raped and consequently contracting HIV, and attempts suicide on a number of occasions, as has been indicated in the outline of her oral history above. She recalls her first response to waking up after being raped:

*'I have to go back to my house and I have to die there. I planned that.'*

This later included an attempt at suicide soon after she began to experience a breakdown after an arrest:

*'My brother took me to the toilet. I left the toilet and run and put myself in the river. It is very, very bad and it was full of you know every toilet in that. I tried to sink myself; the purpose is to kill myself. It broke bits of my legs and I am bleeding and I sink and some of it entered my body.'*

*'They washed me and again they took me to the mental hospital. Then they said I have to stay there. I stayed in the mental hospital and they gave me injection and they gave me injection. They gave me injection; they will tied my hands, my family members, my brothers. And for medication they do by forcing me and forcing me and putting water in my mouth. For one week I struggled like that. I struggled with them a lot. They left me there; I stayed until 3 months in that as inpatient.'*

As well as evidencing the psychological impacts, this section also points to further problems in terms of mental health care. Whilst Hawwi was suffering psychological trauma, the forms of treatment she received are highly

problematic in terms of human rights and autonomy, particularly in relation to forcible medicalisation. Furthermore, Hawwi identified the emotional support that she has since received in Liverpool as more effective in terms of overcoming depression. As respondents in Chapter Six also indicated, forms of support or 'medicine' vary from country to country, and through cultures, however Hawwi's use of the words 'forcing', 'struggled' and 'left me there' indicate inadequate care and perhaps unnecessary medicalisation, certainly against her will. She was later to consider suicide again, further questioning the effectiveness of her treatment.

#### **7.4.4 Rape, HIV Contraction and Stigma: Going Beyond the Individual**

As with sexual violence, survivors of HIV can be subjected to stigmatisation and ostracism for a number of reasons, including fear of HIV and the social stigma of sexual transmission routes (Taylor, 2001). Rankin et al. note a number of ways this can be experienced, for example, 'Individuals may be isolated within their family, hidden away from visitors, or made to eat alone. These repercussions may or may not be simple acts of heartlessness. They may be a well-intentioned but ignorant attempt to preserve the family' (2005: 702). These experiences are uncannily similar to those of Hawwi in terms of her treatment by her family and wider society after disclosing her HIV status:

*'Because they heard about my HIV. If I drink something in house, they will check, 'did she drink in this cup? Did she sit here?' My own brothers. They discriminate me.'*

*'My family is ashamed of me. If anyone comes to the home they want to hide me. It was very, very horrible.'*

*'They have a very big fear of HIV, even the doctors of the hospital or the place where you are rented. If I am giving the other peoples who rented me house, the peoples will start to abandon me from house.'*

The physical effects, then, of sexual violence may not be limited to the individual, but can transcend to wider groups. This is also seen in the

emotional effects of sexual violence and HIV contraction, as Hawwi's family also struggled with her breakdown and admittance to a psychiatric hospital, issues which continued after her release:

*'You know the sadness comes to all family members. Some of them... she is the one who brought this whole disaster. I become like they tell things to each other and all the credit is by me.'*

*'One day even my brother cried a lot because he suffered from me.'*

Again, these issues indicate that the effects of rape have serious consequences for the victim or survivor, but also for their family and community. As argued elsewhere, 'when a woman is raped, the effects are seldom experienced by either a society or an individual. Society and the individual are interlocked in a complex web of consequences' (Canning, 2010: 852). These consequences range in severity, but can include familial breakdown or social isolation and for Hawwi, like many others, may eventually end in influencing her decision to flee her community and country of origin.

## **7.5 'Now I am floating': Hawwi and Asylum in Merseyside**

Chapter Five discussed practices and policies in the UK asylum system, and highlighted problems within this. Although gender guidelines have, in theory, been implemented (UKBA, 2004; 2007), many contest that this has been effective in recognising women as being potentially vulnerable to wider gender specific forms of abuse (Asylum Aid, 2011; Canning, 2011d; Smith, 2004). Whilst Chapter Six reflects this from interview findings, Hawwi's experience does not directly correlate, but does highlight serious inadequacies in sensitivity toward her HIV status and related health implications, as well as more general levels of inefficiency and insensitivity.

Firstly, although asylum seekers are, in theory, to be allocated a solicitor at the time of application, when they are finger printed, photographed and given

an asylum card, Hawwi did not receive either a card or solicitor before being relocated to a hostel in Liverpool. Furthermore, she claims that:

*'I don't know how to study or why solicitor is needed. I don't have any solicitor.'*

Overall, Hawwi spent almost two years in the UK asylum system which includes receiving free accommodation and £5 per day. Her application was initially rejected, as many are (see Chapter Four) and she appealed twice, finally receiving protection under the Geneva Convention after the collection of this oral history. This echoes findings by Smith, who highlighted serious errors in the granting of asylum in 2004. This was later corroborated by Asylum Aid in 2011 in their report *Unsustainable*, which included accounts and case studies where women's applications for asylum were consistently inadequately handled according to the UK Border Agency's own Gender Guidelines model, resulting in inaccurate decisions and refusals. Issues in Hawwi's case included disbelief, where she felt:

*'The judge didn't consider anything about my case, about my suffrage, about my file. The judge only wanted to approve the decision of the Home Office and I disqualified.'*

This was coupled with inadequacies in the legal system. The Home Office currently state: 'Your case owner is the person who will deal with every aspect of your application for asylum, from beginning to end. You will be allocated to your case owner within a few days of making your application for asylum' (UKBA, N.D.d). Hawwi's case owner was changed on numerous occasions, resulting in repetitive questioning:

*'We concluded with my case owner and I submitted all my documents but I don't know, that case owner is not my case owner, and the other case owner changed for me after a month. And the new case owner when she saw my file she called me for another interview, and again I attended another interview, and that is like 125 questions.'*

More concerning, during her appeal for leave to remain, Hawwi's male

representative was not fully aware of her history when presenting her case in court:

*'The man from the Home Office he said, 'to be honest I didn't know the whole story of this file and I didn't get decision, but the Home Office send me to represent and I don't know most of what she is claiming about, I don't know, I didn't see it'. So the judge want to give him again to check the file and the judge will compare that radio show.'*

Considering that the decision to be made at this point of the legal process will determine the future life direction of an individual, as well as her family, this response seriously undermines the UKBA's claim to assess all applications individually and on their own merits (UKBA, N.D.c; UKBA, N.D.d). The fact that her representative was male is also questionable under the current gender guidelines (Home Office, 2004). The issue of subject knowledge was further questioned by Hawwi, who challenged the appeal judgement regarding their Country of Origin Information:

*'They say even the very remotest area in Ethiopia, in the dry regions, they get medication there. But they don't know about Ethiopia, and about my tribe's conflict, and the government don't do any development in that area. It is very hard to convince the truth, and if especially a person like me.'*

Even as indicated by the UKBA interview respondent (Chapter Six), letters of support, evidence and documentation strengthen an asylum applicant's claim and yet Hawwi's application was still initially rejected, further undermining the legitimacy of the official asylum process in terms of 'merit'. Beyond this, Asylum Aid (2011) found that cases were viewed unfavourably if applicants *did not* have written materials, which exposes the unpredictability of the outcomes of a case either way:

*'I have support letters and I have my Ids and everything I have I submitted for the Home Office, I positively waited for the result issue which was I will get Refugee Status. But when the result comes, really, I was disappointed really.'*

Furthermore, the reasons given for her refusal were not unique, indicating that Hawwi's claim may not have been assessed on individual merits according to the UKBA's guidelines. Smith (2004) suggests that refusal letters appear to be recycled in some instances, sometimes even across countries of origin. Hawwi's rejection reasons reflect those found by Asylum Aid (2011) and Smith (2004) and included questioning her government's interest in her politically, as she was able to leave by plane, and that she had been safe for a period of time before leaving Ethiopia (see also Smith, *ibid*). She recalled the UK state's response and her feeling toward it:

*'We didn't believe that the government revoked your job licence. If the government didn't revoke my job licence, if I didn't suffer, why is my intention by leaving my small child and just sitting and waiting for asylum. What am I doing in this country? What pleasure does my mind give me?'*

This feeling of being disbelieved was later a point Hawwi reflected upon:

*'The reality really, to tell someone your reality, to tell someone the truth, it is very hard if you don't have any acceptance, if there is nobody else that believes you, that accepts you, there is nothing that you can do. Like speaking on an air, no-one will reply to you like that. Your suffering, your pain, no-one will understand you.'*

This statement questions acceptance and belief, reflecting feminist arguments around the speaking out of women's experiences of domestic or sexual violence in the Criminal Justice Systems in the UK, and the effects of being cross-examined and disbelieved by patriarchal forces (Lees, 1996; Temkin, 1997). Hawwi also stated:

*'The suffrage that I came through, no-one will understand that. I am not a thief; I am not like a criminal.'*

This is again reminiscent of earlier reports of some victim's feelings of being criminalised rather than being seen as the reporter of a crime (Gregory and Lees, 1999), another indicator of the adversarial nature of the UK asylum system. Having been subjected to violence by police, Hawwi is a victim of

state sanctioned violence as well as sexual violence, and yet she was subject to repeat questioning and disbelief. In her account to the UKBA, Hawwi told of being raped, which has never been brought to justice, but still felt disbelieved in her further experiences of victimisation by the Ethiopian state. She also did not speak about her positive HIV status due to a fear of further stigmatisation:

*'I am not using an interpreter because of my AIDS issue, and the judge cannot understand what I am speaking about.'*

VC: *'Why, why did you not have an interpreter?'*

*'I said I don't trust peoples from my country because of my HIV status, and even the big interview, I didn't have my interview by English like this, but they didn't say that they didn't understand it.'*

These fears reflect wider findings in terms of speaking about HIV or sexual violence. As was discussed in Chapter Six, some forms of interpretation can be precarious dependent on the nature of the information being broached. Whilst interpretation inevitably must be undertaken by a speaker of the language, some languages, such as Oromo, are usually interpreted by a person from the same area as the applicant. As such, fear of wider disclosure is common when discussing personally sensitive topics, and can be influenced by ethnic group background related to divisions and conflicts in the applicant's country of origin.

### **7.5.1 Asylum, Mental Health and Human Rights**

Hawwi's feeling toward accessing rights in the UK asylum system waver from good, in terms of provision, to poor in terms of autonomy and social rights. Her experience of the Right to Health, Article 25 in the Human Rights Declaration (1948) was substantially better in the UK than in Ethiopia. As discussed earlier, Hawwi received inadequate antiretrovirals in Ethiopia, which had a lasting effect on her health overall, and still suffered symptoms from the venereal disease she contracted from being raped. However, in the UK she was able to access food and accommodation, as well necessary

operations:

*'I can't live until now if I am not getting that good treatment in this country. The way they managed me, the good accommodation and the amount of money that they will give to me as a single person is enough for me. It is very interesting, because of that, because I have a good accommodation and I will get good health treatment, shower, good type of food. That's why I recover with that illness, I was very weak and my immune system was very low, because of the treatment really I recovered.'*

However, as wider accounts of asylum show, the UK's system can still have inadvertent implications for the mental health of asylum seekers. As Burnett and Whyte (2010) have argued, denying the right to work can leave individuals feeling under-valued or useless, and can effect self-worth, wellbeing and personal purpose. A general loss of autonomy also appears evident, where Hawwi has been kept dependent against her will on the UK state with little opportunity to make her own decisions:

*'At this moment we are not entitled to buy anything of our own, all the things we are using is from the hostel. We will take £5 in a day and [Asylum and Refugee Service] will fill a form for us.'*

Further problems can be experienced in terms of feelings of loss and changes, evident in Hawwi's reflection of her migration:

*'Leaving your country and claiming asylum is denying you mother you know, no-one needs to leave his country. For myself, my country is like my mother because I born there, I grow up there. I need to help my society, I need to do something good for that society. But it comes to the time that I can't tolerate anymore, because it is only if my life is with me that I can do something for that country, or it is only if I saved my life that I will proceed something more.'*

Moving from 'loss' to adaptation, integration can be hugely problematic for people in the asylum system, particularly as whole cultures and ways of life can be completely new, and often forms of cultural support and integration are not available. Papadopoulos et al (2004) note that these changes can lead individuals to experience further depression and may increase the

likelihood of suicide attempts.

These are problematic issues generally, but may be more harmful for people already living with wider mental and physical health issues, as Hawwi is. If women demonstrate degrees of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which may be experienced by survivors of sexual violence, wider problems of disassociation can result in severe breakdowns in mental health, as has been documented by the Medical Foundation (2009). On her experience of asylum generally, Hawwi indicates adverse effects on her mental health:

*'I am floating, my mind is floating and restless, after I received that decision, and I don't have sleep.'*

*'Every time I try to think about the situation and all the passes that I came through, it is really very, very devastating and very big headache – I prefer not to remind it at all. Whenever I try to remind it I will be very sick. It is very bad, by any means. If it rains gold, really in Ethiopia, if God even created some miracles for that country, I promised myself not to see any good things in that country.'*

*'Now what remains? And I don't know what will happen really, it is very, very hard. [pause] Asylum is not really, it's not, not, not at all an acceptable thing for anyone for anyone, it will not give for anyone pleasure.'*

*'There is no way we are coping with life, and it is very, very hard really. It's very hard.'*

In all, Hawwi's experiences within the UK asylum system do not appear unique, but reflect wider findings from research undertaken in the fields of asylum support, health and human rights (Asylum Aid, 2011; Refugee Council, 2009; Medical Foundation, 2009; Smith, 2004). This indicates that her experiences are structural; however the inter-personal effects of an adversarial system and inadequate decision making have evidently taken a social and emotional toll on Hawwi herself. This links to arguments made in Chapter Four and Canning (2011c) that UK state responses have direct effects on the wellbeing of the individuals within the larger system. As such,

women can be subjected to forms of double victimisation (Temkin, 1997) through on-going emotional harms perpetuated through disbelief, inaccurate decision making under the Geneva Convention, and inadequate protection from further state crimes if women are wrongly returned to their country of origin. Hawwi's experiences within this system also raise further questions regarding the viability and cost-effectiveness of the UK asylum system as it stands:

*'I interviewed and I waited for a long time, for more than a year for response. And my response become negative. This is very, very, something which very disappointed me.'*

As has been argued recently, the asylum system in the UK is not cost effective, particularly in relation to legal proceedings, forced returns and destitution (CSJ, 2008). Hawwi, a trained journalist, was kept state dependent without the opportunity to work for almost two years whilst being provided with state funded accommodation, few resources and £5 per day. Whilst some applicants may not be able to work, particularly in relation to PTSD or mental health problems in the aftermath of torture, there are also applicants such as Hawwi who would wish to, and benefit from, accessing work and independence whilst awaiting asylum decisions.

## **7.6 Overall Access to Support: Speaking about Sexual Violence, HIV and Mental Health Problems**

As Chapter Six has demonstrated, there are limited resources in support for survivors of sexual violence in Merseyside generally, and even less for survivors of conflict rape in the asylum system. Hawwi's access to a range of organisations perhaps owes partially to her own knowledge of NGOs from experience in Ethiopia, but also to her access through HIV related health care which was necessary when she arrived in the UK. What her account evidenced is the positive outcomes that adequate support can have on individual survivors. This is outlined in her oral history, specifically in relaying her changes in suicidal feelings and gradual alleviation of depression, including reduction in anti-depressants. She recalls her time receiving

support:

*'After I start counselling and after I start learning the environment, I got [HIV Support Organisation] members and they are very friendly and many peoples are living in the same situation with me and I saw them, I am happy there.'*

This again echoes Respondent 12's argument that, 'once someone is engaged with services, it does tend to follow that they would get support'. However, a lack of services and funding in the Merseyside region prevents the opportunity of support for many rape survivors. Although one can only speculate, it is likely that the current financial climate will further reduce this access, particularly in light of the direction of the Coalition Government's public cuts, including Primary Care Trusts, the charity sector and women's refuges. Considering the evidence of the positive impact of support on Hawwi's emotional, physical and psychological wellbeing, this is an area for further serious concern for the wellbeing of women in the UK asylum system.

## **7.7 Interview Relationship**

It is noteworthy that this engagement in services also allowed for the facilitation of a research relationship between myself and Hawwi as a respondent. Again, my initial involvement with one local organisation ended in denial of access to women respondents who had otherwise discussed instances of sexual violence, therefore impinging on their personal autonomy (see Chapter Five). During interviews, Hawwi directly and independently addressed the uses of research as she saw them:

*'I believe at the end of the day that this research can make a difference with problems in undeveloped countries as well.'*

This is not to say the relationship between research and discussing personal experience was simple. There were many points at which Hawwi's tone indicated her emotions, for example crying when recalling abuse as a child and anger and hurt when speaking about her husband's strategies of manipulation. The onslaught of memory was something that particularly

affected her:

*'I cried a lot, I cried a lot, I cried a lot, oh [covers face and cries]. Why this will happen to me God? Why this of all things happen to me?'*

*'I can't tell you really, I don't remember. It is the first time since I completely forget about it [cries]'*

This phrasing of memory was something that Hawwi was concerned about, more in relation to the overall research aims and outcomes than in what she was speaking about. Although she indicated she had reflected on her emotions between meeting for the recording of her oral history, Hawwi was also worried that her story was in some way inconsequential to the overall findings, despite the depth of information she was discussing:

*'You need it for paper or research purpose and you know I am just speaking all my emotions and feelings. I didn't told you in the way you are expecting, but I am telling you as if you are my counsellor or as if I am telling you what happened to me or something you know. I am completely out of my mind and telling you all, all the situations, I even don't remind that you are needing for research purposes. Even, today and the second day is better. The first day I am completely overwhelmed by the problems of what happened to me and I am speaking and speaking and finally I blamed myself... 'she needs it for education, how she is getting some idea from me?' I become really very sorry.'*

Whilst this relates directly to her feelings and fears about the research and telling of her story, Hawwi also advocated the use of the research for her own emotional development:

*'God Bless. For me it is like a healing that I express my emotion like that.'*

This final remark embodies the experience of one individual against the theorising of research methodologies and gate keeping. As outlined in Chapter Five, there are tensions in the ethics and politics of researching sexual violence. The argument of allowing autonomy for women to determine

their involvement in research rather than leaving decision making to gatekeepers can be pitched against the reality of researcher exploitation or possibility of re-traumatisation through discussion, as well as the politics of access through gatekeepers.

## **7.8 Chapter Conclusion**

Previous chapters have largely focussed on policy, method, secondary accounts of violence and wider social inequalities. This chapter has moved away from this to some extent, and demonstrates the powerful effect of rape on one woman. The perpetration of rape has evidently ricocheted to impact through many parts of Hawwi's life, either directly or indirectly, including contracting HIV, fleeing Ethiopia and a decline in her mental health due to depression and suicidal feelings. The emotional, physical and social implications of life as a survivor of rape, combined with fleeing conflict and living in the UK asylum system, are transparent in Hawwi's oral history and provide a glimpse to the severity of effects that rape has on many women.

Hawwi's life experience has incorporated inequalities and victimisation at many levels; socio-economic, gender inequality, interpersonal, familial and structural. The last point is influenced by the role of the Ethiopian state, which has contributed to Hawwi's victimisation through physical violence, the denial of freedom of speech, refusal of access to her own home and in detainment without criminal offence. Further double victimisation has ensued in different ways in the UK, where Hawwi was subject to routine prolonged questioning despite serious physical illness and emotional and psychological distress. Additionally, whilst women living in the UK asylum system may experience political subordination and secondary citizenship, either here or in her country of origin, Hawwi's account demonstrates the power and knowledge that women can have, even if it is not always recognised. Hawwi is educated in journalism and has a diploma in teaching, yet lives in a situation of forced state dependence in the UK with little scope or opportunity for personal development without access to work or higher education. In essence, Hawwi's experiences in the UK open scope for wider debates about the

treatment of victims and survivors of rape and torture in the UK asylum system, many of whom are women.

In terms of research, Hawwi's decision to relay her life story may be one that many women survivors of violence would choose not to take, but it remains critical that this choice is available. This chapter, particularly Hawwi's own perception of research, demonstrates the benefits of researching sexual violence with women who wish to participate, but also advocates the need for sustained and available support after interviews if the woman so chooses to access. To return to Kelly (1988) and Stanley and Wise (1993), how women experience and survive male violence is best told by those who survive it, and as such researchers should provide the opportunity to relay their stories if they so choose. Importantly, this overall insight has shown how integral and significant support can be to women, as Hawwi identifies in discussing her changes in mental health in terms of alleviation of depression and reduction in anti-depressants.

In all, this chapter has provided an overview and analysis of Hawwi's life story, concentrating largely on the impacts of sexual violence, state victimisation and access to support in the UK asylum system. It has demonstrated the positive outcomes that support networks can have on the health of one woman, but also argues that these are not available in as great a capacity as they should be considering the effects that sexual violence can have on women in the UK asylum system. The following chapter will briefly incorporate the findings and arguments made here to compare with the previous chapter's interview findings to provide a brief analysis of the structure of support with Hawwi's experience as a survivor, before moving to a final conclusion.

## **8.0 Chapter Eight: Discussion and Empirical Reflection**

### **8.1 Introduction**

As is evident from reflection on chapters Six and Seven, there are a number of resonances between Hawwi's experience as an individual and the availability of support in Merseyside more widely. However, given that each chapter had its own focus, there has been limited scope to draw out further comparisons across the differing contexts.

This chapter will therefore outline prominent themes underlying each context, structural response and individualistic experience, in view of support after sexual violence in Merseyside. It will consider the forms of methodology used and ways in which these have been effective as well as potentially problematic and outline limitations in support as well as the potential consequences of these. It then moves to cast a critical eye on organisational responses to sexual violence in Merseyside, as well as dominant discourses in Home Office responses to asylum seekers which may impact on these.

### **8.2 Sexual Violence: Intersections of Impacts and Continuums of Violence**

The two previous chapters separately highlighted the differing forms of violence that women can experience, and many of the effects that sexual violence can have on women, with Chapter Six also identifying wider social effects on families, resources and relationships. Accounts relayed by support workers and counsellors highlighted the extent of violence that women can suffer during, as well as outside of, conflict. Furthermore, as survivors seek asylum, the impacts clearly transcend conflict. Hence there is a need for on-going support for many women who have survived sexual violence and are in the UK's asylum system or are living as refugees.

The differing methodologies used in gaining empirical data have allowed for a parallel set of findings with regard to structural and individual experiences of

the effects of perpetration. Sociologically, this generates further validation to challenge the public/private binary with regard to preventing sexual violence or providing support. It is clear that gendered abuse in conflict has impacts on all levels, including shattering communities, forcing migration and providing a 'vehicle' for genocidal outcomes (De Vito et al, 2009; Gutman, 1993; Jamieson, 1999; Jones, 2002; Mullins, 2009). Yet, as the consequences outlined through the long-term and in-depth lens provided in Hawwi's account indicate, there should remain a balance in focus when considering this, as impacts on the individual survivor also have wider effects. This then establishes an intersectional continuum of sexual violence against women, as is also evident in accounts in Chapter Two. The forms of violence and times at which women may be subjected to sexual violence are evidently situated at multiple intersections in terms of the nature of violence used, and the point at which the individual may experience this violence. Women may be subjected to violence in the home before, during or after conflict; sexual violence as a tool of oppression; multiple forms of sexual violation including multiple perpetrator rape, sexual slavery and abuse with weapons; and intersections of sexual violence when fleeing conflict, migrating and seeking asylum. Whether sexual violence has been deliberately calculated as an act of warfare, or is opportunistic and based on social hierarchy and inequality, the impacts on individual women can be profound, leading to outcomes beyond those intended or anticipated. This interlinks with wider forms of structural violence, through the denial of human rights (Ho, 2007; Galtung, 1969), protection and prevention of further violence, all of which are made evident during conflict and, as will be discussed later, asylum.

For Hawwi, the aftermath of rape has included HIV transmission leading to further health problems, unwanted pregnancy and termination, depression, institutionalisation and ultimately migration. Whether respondents from organisations worked within asylum, support for survivors of sexual violence or both, Chapter Six indicates that there are many effects on groups and individuals with life histories similar to Hawwi. Therefore, sexual violence is

not confined to the private sphere as a 'woman's problem', but impacts on all societies and communities. As such more public measures should be taken to identify, recognise and name the problem of sexual violence in conflict (including in international declarations and asylum policies) and to challenge the social, patriarchal institutions which silence the extent and impacts of sexual violence. However, with consideration of chapters Six and Seven, it is important that this be undertaken from a woman-centred perspective so as not to bury the gendered nature of sexual violence, as some genocide and conflict literatures have arguably done (Jones, 2006; Shaw, 2003).

### **8.3 Accessing Support in Merseyside**

A key issue in the provision or uptake of support in Merseyside is the recognition of variations in experience amongst diverse groups. As Larasi (2011) argued, for any kind of support to be made available there must first be a level of consciousness with regard to the needs of diverse groups. Chapter Six indicates that that is not the case for all support and response sectors in Merseyside as it was mainly those working specifically with asylum groups that were aware of problems for asylum-seeking women.

Reiterating this concern, recent research undertaken in Merseyside by the Liverpool Public Health Observatory documents in some depth the key sexual violence response agencies in this area (Winters, 2011). Whilst the final report provides interesting and important details of SAFEPlace, Merseyside Police, Merseyside's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre, amongst others, it indicates a gap in recognition of support for asylum seekers in determining support available<sup>12</sup>. Likewise, a local project funded by CitySafe found that women from Black and Racial Minority groups experiencing domestic violence in Merseyside did not know where to go for support (INPUT, 2009), but does not fully acknowledge sexual violence as a concern in and of itself. These gaps reflect the overall findings from chapters Six and Seven, and with consideration of the severity of the impacts of sexual

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<sup>12</sup>Although the report acknowledges BME groups to an extent, it does not recognise asylum seekers as a group.

violence on individual and structural levels noted, emphasises a need to move toward a more cohesive approach to support provision and investigation.

Re-focussing on chapter content, an important finding is that not all respondents were familiar with issues pertaining to conflict violence with regard to women's experiences. Although some were aware of the use of sexual violence against women and girls as a strategy of war, Respondent 10, for example, continuously conflated sexual violence and sex trafficking, despite important differences in experience in the country of origin and beyond. Likewise, organisations which supported women seldom considered women seeking asylum. Hawwi's experience also highlights this, as she was only able to access support through asylum groups and not specific sexual violence organisations.

### **8.3.1 The Uses of Support**

Before applying any kind of analysis to the uses of support for survivors of sexual violence, it is valuable to reflect on the interpretation of one support user's attitude. The projection of Hawwi's voice in Chapter Seven demonstrates a positive influence that emotional support had been having, perhaps even over medical prescriptions with regard to depression and suicidal feelings. Hawwi pinpointed areas of her support that made her, she said, able to move away from medication and take control of everyday problems such as not being able to get out of bed or loss of appetite. These effects were outlined first in Chapter One, but this support outcome is strongly evidenced in Chapter Six. Through responding, service providers were able to discursively demonstrate the positive impacts that support had on individual women they counselled, particularly Respondents 4 and 9.

In reference to supporting a young woman, for example, Respondent 4 commented, '*she's blossoming, she's growing*'. Likewise, Hawwi's oral history was undertaken over the period of around five to six weeks. As touched upon in Chapter Seven, in this time the tone of her experience

moved from emphasising depressive feelings to seeing a future for herself, directly attributing much of her emotion to the main support worker and organisation she had been visiting on a bi-weekly basis. It is examples such as these that so strongly demonstrate the uses and effectiveness of support in the aftermath of sexual violence. Although many organisations across the UK have been encouraged to move to quantitative impact assessment, qualitative reflection and analysis of long term effects and individual survival, as has been undertaken through Hawwi's oral history, provides strong indications of the benefits and importance of formal and informal support for women who have survived sexual violence.

What remains central to this is the woman's choice for what form of support she receives. Indeed, many women may wish to engage in counselling, whilst others may prefer to find other ways of survival. Respondent 9 pinpointed this concern in stating:

*'people like a fixed idea about what's going to help, what's not going to help. These are the guidelines for this... actually it's the person in front of you that will help you figure out the best way of working with them'.*

Hawwi had received various forms of support directly related to surviving sexual violence. These included physical aspects such as anti-retrovirals for the management of HIV, but more relevant was psychological support through hospitalisation. Whilst this is a procedure that may improve the mental health of some individuals, Hawwi emphasised the effectiveness of informal sexual violence and HIV support and counselling as methods which helped alleviate depression. This highlights the benefits of a range of socio-medical responses to survivors of sexual violence rather than the monolithic standardisations of dominant medical and psychological approaches (Kelly, 2011). Burnett and Peel also argue that 'Counselling can be helpful if it is culturally sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities; in this respect it can be useful if members of refugee communities develop counselling skills' (2001: 545), providing a reminder that support should avoid Eurocentric ideologies, but work with what is best for the survivor.

More widely, the multiple issues facing asylum seekers, such as destitution or deportation, can mean a wider range of social support is necessary (Chantler, 2011), even beyond the aftermath of sexual violence. Longevity of support was advocated by most support providers interviewed, as well as Hawwi, highlighting that the process of surviving sexual violence is seldom a short one. What is necessary is to recognise these benefits and provide funding to ensure their provision.

In light of this, and with reflection of Chapters Four, Six and Seven, there is clear evidence that woman-centred policies and approaches are necessary in the provision of support, in asylum organisations as well as wider organisations (for example, HIV support), and by the UKBA in the review of women's asylum claims and appeals.

This suggests a need for more substantive moves toward feminist based policies and woman centred approaches by the UKBA and wider support agencies and organisations. This should be in parallel with recognising the diversity of women's needs and multiplicity of experiences when considering and reviewing women's claims in the asylum system. Core principles of feminism and feminist policy, as Mazur describes, include:

*'Having a certain understanding of women as a group within the context of the social, economic, and cultural diversity of women;*

*The advancement of women's rights, status or position as a group in both public and private spheres and;*

*The reduction or elimination of gender-based hierarchy that underpins basic inequalities between men and women in the public and private spheres.'*

(Mazur, 2002: 3)

As is discussed in Chapter Four, guidelines have been developed by the UK Border Agency (2004; 2007; 2010), which suggests positive steps are being taken in recognising gender as an area for sensitive consideration, particularly in relation to sexual violence and sex trafficking. However, the

extent to which the multiplicity of women's experiences are considered is limited with regard to sexual violence in the guidelines, and arguably continues to overlook violence against women in conflict as directly related to patriarchy. For example, the UKBA's guidelines do indeed point to forms of persecution that women may be subjected to, such as being raped due to political opinion, or flogged because of refusing to wear a veil. However, the guidelines also explicitly state these as 'reasons unrelated to gender' (see UKBA, 2007: 5). In reflection of Mazur's definitions (2002), discussed above, a more radical and feminist based approach to women's asylum claims would encourage the recognition of diversity amongst women, the extent of patriarchal inequalities, and violence against women at a multitude of intersections of her life, during, before and after conflict.

Moving on from this is the recognition that policies must be realised and transformed into action. As Chapters Six and Seven indicate, the development of guidelines does not necessarily mean they have been fully implemented. In relation to the promotion of woman-centred approaches, Hills and Mullett (2002) argue:

*'Government guidelines alone will not guarantee the development of positive practices or positive attitudes toward women. Ultimately, to have a systemic impact on the lives of women, gender inclusive policies and analyses need to be translated and operationalized at the organisational and practice level by organizations other than government'*

(2002: 87).

Although policy is often a first and useful step toward social change, this statement clearly indicates the need for organisations to be independently motivated toward gender inclusivity. As has been discussed, there is evidence from findings of this research that organisations beyond women's groups or feminist based organisations do not place gender inequality as a central concern. Recommendations from existing feminist groups, and policies established thereby, are likely to be fundamental in the creation and progression of equality (for example, see Rights of Women, 2011; WNC,

2009; WRC, 2010). Recommendations from these groups will be more fully developed to incorporate findings from this research in the overall conclusion.

#### **8.4 Problems in Dominant Discourses Projected by the Home Office and UK Border Agency**

Chapters Six and Seven both emphasise the problem of adversarial approaches in the asylum processes and disbelief within the UK Border Agency, previously discussed in Chapter Three. Although there can be instances of illegal entrance from people wishing to migrate for reasons beyond the Geneva Convention, as Respondent 10 emphasised, there are problems in accepting this argument as the dominant discourse regarding immigration. As Respondent 11 noted, this can be the case in *some* instances, but as research consistently demonstrates, asylum applicants have more often than not fled conflict and unrest (Asylum Aid, 2008b; Bohmer and Shuman, 2008; Collier, 2007; Medical Foundation, 2009; Whittaker, 2006), experienced violence in their country of origin and are forced then to live on the margins whilst awaiting lengthy application reviews (Asylum Aid, 2011; Burnett, 2009; Burnett and Whyte, 2010; Smith, 2004). Hawwi's experience in the UK asylum system, spending two years being forcibly state dependent with no right to work, echoing accounts highlighted by Respondents 9, 11 and 13, demonstrating that applications often appear to be treated as fraudulent from the offset, as though guilty until proven innocent.

As Patel and Tyrer argue, a politics of fear and risk exists within the Home Office (2011), which is very much present in official Border Agency environments. Whilst undertaking research, in entering Liverpool's UKBA offices to interview I noted physical indicators of perceived risk, including watching those arriving for interview being frisked, receiving a guest pass to go beyond the foyer, observing also that all doors are locked with swipe card entry and even seeing one sign which indicated that 'we' are on 'high alert' with regard to the threat of global terrorism. This kind of discourse is further notable in the UKBA's bi-monthly news updates which carry headlines

including forgery, fraud, people smuggling, 'stowaways', prevention of illegal working and housing raids on migrants working 'illegally' (UKBA, 2011c). One article even highlights a new 'dedicated marriage interview team' in Liverpool to challenge 'sham' marriages to 'tackle abuse of immigration' (ibid: 12). Nowhere does this article consider the potential abuse of the women in these circumstances, even with regard to trafficking or exploitation, despite the supposed implementation of Gender Guidelines which should, in theory, have been working to develop a consciousness with regard to a potentially increased vulnerability for women seeking asylum.

Reflecting on interviews and Hawwi's oral history, a further problematic area is the list of requirements suggested by the UK Border Agency for making an application for asylum in the UK. The UK Border Agency are quite specific in what 'you must bring with you', despite Respondent 10 recognising it is entirely likely that people may not have gathered the necessary documents when fleeing conflict. This list includes:

*'your passport and the passport(s) of your spouse and any dependants in the UK; police registration certificates, if you or any members of your family have them; other identification documents which will help us to establish your identity and nationality - these may include identity cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates, school certificates and membership cards; any other documents that will support your application; and documentary evidence of your accommodation - this may include recent bank statements, a building society book, a Council Tax demand, a housing benefit book, a tenancy agreement, and/or a phone/electricity/gas bill showing your full name and address in the UK. If you are living in someone else's house, you must bring a letter (no more than 3 months old) from the householder permitting you to stay, plus documentary evidence (see above) showing the householder's full name and address.'*

(UKBA, N.D.c)

This statement is at odds with the claim that the UKBA understand that some people may not have full documentation when fleeing conflict. Indeed, that applicants are expected to know these requirements in the first instance is problematic. As Hawwi herself noted, and as I have witnessed many times whilst undertaking activist work with asylum communities, individuals often

learn the process on a trial and error basis or through support from other applicants rather than having any knowledge of what 'you must bring with you' (UKBA, *ibid*). This may again be compounded by language barriers or time and space restrictions when applications are being put forward.

Any suggestion that somebody who *can* provide the required documents will have their application dealt with fairly and efficiently is not necessarily reflected in reality. It is worth noting that Hawwi experienced disbelief because she *did* have official papers to back her application, including numerous support letters from international agencies and local non-governmental organisations. Although she had documentation to say where she had come from, this was used instead as a reason to deny asylum, on the basis that she had been able to leave on a plane with documentation and as such was not of much political interest to the dominant parties. Also, because she had found means to travel to flee Ethiopia legally, and did not apply for asylum on entry (she did not know how or if she could do this), her claim was rejected.

While this case holds similarities with some of those put forward by respondents working with asylum support agencies, there are also cases highlighted by respondents where applications have been denied due to a lack of documentation or indeed the use of illegal or fraudulent documentation, whatever the reason given for such use. As Bohmer and Shuman note, 'the Asylum and Immigration Act (2004) assumes that those who arrive in the UK without documents are not credible, which makes it very unlikely they will obtain asylum' (2008: 23). Again, this has been another issue I noted in working within asylum communities, leading me to ask 'if having documentation ends in rejection, and not having documentation ends in rejection, what ends in acceptance?' (Diary entry, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2010).

Likewise, the amount of information expected from the individual beyond official documentation is significant. Respondent 10 outlined some of these expectations, including for example remembering the colours of the furniture

on the plane. This issue of memory and merit is expanded on by Bohmer and Shuman, who point to a similar conundrum in the process: 'Then there are the questions that require the memory of an elephant. Asylum seekers are asked about educational history and the last five years of their employment. That includes that name of the school and exactly when one attended it or worked there (the month and year of the beginning and end)' (2008: 42). Considering issues of detachment and disassociation outlined by Respondent 9, and Hawwi's desire to 'forget completely' certain points of her life, the idea of gaining merit through memory can be problematic (see also Herlihy and Turner, 2006).

## **8.5 Benefits and Problems in Existing Information: Linking Oral History and Interviews**

As Chapter Five has outlined, there are methodological benefits and disadvantages to both oral history and interviews. The life story, or oral history, as Chanfrault-Duchet outlines, has 'come to be seen as a successful medium for collecting women's words, that is, for reaching a social "group" that does not often speak on the social stage, or, more precisely, whose discourse has not until recently, been perceived as legitimate' (1991:77). This argument is reflective of those put forward by feminist standpoint theorists with regard to the uses of qualitative methodologies generally, and oral history and interviews specifically (Fontana and Frey, 2008; Harding, 1986, 1987; Hughes, 2002; Oakley, 1981; Ramazanoglu and Holland; 2002). Chapters Six and Seven demonstrate the uses of localised knowledge, and also the value of hearing the voice of a survivor, for example:

*R9: 'I do think there's a real need for people to understand some of the histories of people who seek protection, and then the realities of what life is like in exile. And I think... people's experiences can be really powerful and particularly can be really powerful at a local level.'*

Indeed, this thesis has consistently raised issues of disbelief where women's stories are relayed, either in the context of sexual violence, asylum or both. This included some of the women whom interview respondents had

supported, but also Hawwi at some points of her asylum application. Going beyond this, however, is the *existence* of stories. Hawwi and the women being supported have relayed their experiences to those who have listened, such as counsellors, case workers, support workers or myself as a researcher. Unfortunately, these voices do not always exist in the public domain beyond activist campaigns, rendering women's experiences of sexual violence in conflict disconnected to the survivors applying for asylum and seeking sanctuary in local communities, including Merseyside:

*R9: 'They are single testimonies, and one of the dangers of that is that sometimes you will read a very moving testimony from a woman, and everyone will be moved by that. They won't think, 'so is that the women who come into this country seeking protection with their children and their families?' There isn't a way of helping the public see that this is actually that most of the people who come to the UK have histories of this type, and all are in fear of that.'*

This detachment from global problems, such as war, conflict and civil unrest, arguably leads to a disassociation between localised recognitions of the real life experiences of groups and individuals seeking asylum, and the stories that are relayed *from and about* individuals and countries experiencing conflict. It is perhaps this disparity in consciousness that lends itself to the lack of emotional, psychological and physical aid or support available in Merseyside for women who have been subjected to rape and sexual violence during or whilst fleeing conflict.

Salazar argues: 'The attempt to place some of these testimonies and autobiographies into larger contexts (both material and textual) of relations of power is not without problems' (1991: 93). Firstly, as an agent of knowledge, my own input and politicised motivations to research the lives of (often marginalised) women carries some power (see Reay, 1996 for fuller discussion). As such, I have not attempted to produce a value free thesis, but to accurately reflect respondent's intended meanings as far as possible (Kelly et al, 1994). Secondly, therein lies the issue of value neutrality which, as Chapter Five openly identifies, has been complex where power relations are

concerned. Similar to arguments made by Mason (2002), the findings generated in this thesis are deeply related to information I have chosen to include from hours of transcripts. Whilst this is largely determined by what is most relevant to my research aims, it is also partially constructed from a set of partisan objectives to expose the inequalities experienced by women in global arenas of conflict and unrest, how further inequalities are reproduced with regard to support and access to asylum on the basis of their gendered violations, and in essence to provide a foundation to move the agenda forward in terms of support provision for women. However, whilst, as Becker (1967) identified, there may exist the possibility of researcher 'bias', the dominant discourses set forth by Home Office agendas, such as those highlighted in UKBA articles and wider media, receive few challenges. To reflect back on Salazar's claim, indeed there are problems with regard to power relations in research. However, and to echo Smart (1989), knowledge generated from the top of hierarchies, such as dominant discourses in the media and government in this case, is also intimately bound up with power. Therefore, partisan research in allegiance with sexual violence and asylum support workers, as well as the women being supported, has been necessary and indeed highly beneficial in exposing the experiences of women locally and globally and relaying otherwise often ignored or unheard voices.

## **8.6 Memory and narrative**

As a form of method, there are arguably limitations in the relaying of women's stories through mediators, as has been done by case support workers, counsellors and practitioners. The issue of memory and dramatisation of narrative is key here (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991). Indeed, where 'truth' is concerned, the memory of those relaying events put to them by survivors may vary from the events as they actually occurred. Likewise, there can be difficulty in retaining memory from actual events for survivors, such as Hawwi, where time has gone by or where there have been particularly harrowing experiences that may be affected by disassociation (see section 8.4).

Central to these concerns, and reflecting on the issue of validity in qualitative research, is in fact the commonality of experience. As discussed in Chapter Six, there are some indications that the UK Border Agency take correlations into account as evidence of planning and organisation of applicants to increase their own likelihood of success in their application, as well as 'discrepancies' in single accounts as a motivation for rejection (see also Herlihy and Turner, 2006). On the other side, however, are the correlations in experience with regard to the stories told by support workers and counsellors, alongside varying points in Hawwi's life history (particularly in relation to the effects of sexual violence) as well as those collated by numerous organisations and researchers (Allen, 1996; Amnesty International, 2007, 2009; Askin, 1997; Asylum Aid, 2011; Bastick et al, 2007; Bourke, 2007; Medical Foundation, 2009; Peel, 2004; Smith, 2004). Therefore, reflecting on chapters Two, Six and Seven, it is arguable that although specific events may be altered through memory, national and international accounts document overwhelmingly similar forms of abuse within a continuum of gendered violence against women.

## **8.7 Chapter Conclusion**

From this research, it is evident that there are structural and individual impacts of sexual violence that intertwine the survivor and society in an intersectional continuum of violence. Forced migration as one result of sexual violence in conflict or civil unrest clearly extends to wider and global communities. Hawwi's oral history reflects concerns raised by respondents in emphasising lived experience of the impacts of rape as well as the social marginalisation of asylum seekers. The combined findings indicate that these problems are often overlooked and lie outside of mainstream consciousness of sexual violence response and asylum support.

Recognising the lived impacts of dominant discourses of disbelief provided by the UKBA and Home Office has been a powerful section of Hawwi's story. Whilst this chapter provides some examples of mediated ideologies, Hawwi's anxiety with regard to asylum and fear of being returned has brought reality

to the impacts these discourses have on individual lives, as well as in wider society.

Methodologically, there have been clear benefits in undertaking research from an activist and standpoint feminist approach. As this chapter highlights, the qualitative combination of oral history and interviews has provided scope for structural analyses, whilst also allowing the researcher and reader to hear the voice of a survivor and keeping the lived experience of sexual violence and support as the central focus. This final reflection will be expanded on in the following chapter, where overall conclusions will be drawn with considerations of all chapters in this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter will provide an indication of the contributions to knowledge that this research has provided regarding the impacts of sexual violence in conflict, and how these extend to the UK asylum system, specifically in relation to research undertaken in Merseyside. With thorough reflection on the key findings of this study, recommendations will be provided for improving the experiences of women seeking asylum in the UK with specific regard to support after sexual violence, as well as identifying areas for further research.

### **Contributions to Knowledge: from 'Aims and Objectives' to 'Findings'**

This has been a complex research process relating to a number of global political and sociological issues. Methodologically, the inclusion of oral history, activist participation and interviews has provided a number of findings and considerations from a qualitative perspective. Policy analysis and review of sociological, feminist and genocide literatures has allowed for in-depth historical and contemporary considerations of the issues and problems relating to sexual violence, conflict and asylum, separately as well as combined.

In all, this thesis indicates an urgent need for prevention and support with regard to sexual violence in conflict and civil unrest. Whilst there are many reasons for the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration as a weapon of war, including ethnic genocide (Allen, 1996; DeVito et al, 2009; Jones, 2006; 2010; Sharlach, 2000; Shaw, 2003) and the shattering of communities (Jones, *ibid*; Medical Foundation, 2009), findings from this research indicate that the central social element facilitating this is the unequal and deeply embedded social hierarchy evident in most, if not all, cultures globally. As this chapter will go on to demonstrate, this is further evidenced in slow international responses in legislative development, poor funding nationally and internationally, and little sociological interest beyond feminist academia.

This research has set out to investigate a number of key areas related to sexual violence in conflict and asylum. The central question has been, 'to investigate the impact sexual violence has on women and communities/society(ies)', which has laid the foundation for all chapters, from which wider findings have developed in relation to the eight subsequent aims and objectives. These have been separated into literature and policy findings and empirical findings, and will be followed with recommendations for improving policy and practice in this area. As the next section will highlight, this study has identified significant gaps in literature and policy, and overall contributes to local, national and international knowledge of the impacts of sexual violence in conflict and the forms of support available.

## **Gaps in Literature and Policy**

Rape during or outside of conflict is not a new phenomenon. In investigating and contributing to sociological analyses to the study of sexual violence, this study has provided further evidence that it is both a structural and individual crime that is systematically perpetrated en masse over and again in global and historical periods of unrest. Despite this, and as this thesis has highlighted, studies of rape in conflict are left in very specific, largely feminist, realms. When international communities develop policies to challenge it, it is often side-lined to policies called for by women's rights groups or women's sections of larger organisations. This is also evident locally through reflections on the UK Border Agency's inadequate responses to sexual violence in conflict with regard to asylum, likely also related to a reluctance to include rape in conflict as a reason to seek asylum in the Geneva Convention (1948), leaving only the opportunity of 'Particular Social Group' in certain circumstances (Asylum Aid, 2011).

Mass rape in conflict equates to mass torture and the annihilation of individual women's human rights (Askin, 1997; De Vito et al, 2009; Peel, 2004). The relaying of women's words and stories in this thesis paints a horrific picture of atrocious and almost unimaginable torture and violation of a human. Mass torture of any group of people is not acceptable under any

international human rights law, yet it continues on a daily basis both within conflict situations and non-conflict situations across the world. Rape and sexual violence in conflict has finally been acknowledged *by some* as forms of torture (Copelon, 2004; Peel, 2004; Mulhauser, 2009) and have officially been declared crimes against humanity. Nonetheless, with an overall aim to review policy and literature regarding women's rights within the context of human rights, analysis undertaken throughout this thesis suggests that this continues in the most part to be an issue confined as a separate concern within legislation, policy and criminal justice rather than mainstreamed in first responses.

As argued in Chapter Three, this sentiment is echoed in the disciplinary divide between traditional or mainstream sociology and feminist discourses and approaches. Concerns seen as 'feminist issues' are seldom taken on in non-feminist sociological approaches or discourses, whether or not there are further implications for wider society which, in the case of rape and mass rape in conflict, there indeed are. If sociology itself will take on human rights as a subject stream, as it gradually is doing, contributors should consider carefully whose rights they are integrating. As data and evidence from this thesis indicates, it is not enough to acknowledge that hierarchies exist within human rights, or who is entitled to rights, without acknowledging the gendered divide in production, implementation and experience of rights on global and localised arenas.

Considering these factors, two aspects have been identified in relation to the aim of exploring the impacts of sexual violence. The first, which has most prominently been demonstrated in Hawwi's oral history, is that the individual effects of rape in conflict (or rape in any environment, for that matter) can be hugely significant for the woman who has survived sexual violence. To echo the sentiments of Ruth Seifert, 'When a woman's inner space is violently invaded, it affects her in the same way torture does. It results in physical pain, loss of dignity, an attack on her identity and a loss of self-determination over her own body' (1994: 55). The second factor evident when considering

these effects, is that most physical and psychological or emotional effects on the individual become effects for the wider (even global with regard to sexual violence in conflict resulting in forced migration) society/ies, and vice versa. To emphasise an argument made throughout, when a woman is raped, the effects are seldom experienced by *either* a society *or* an individual. As the empirical reflections below will go on to illustrate, society and the individual are interlocked in a complex web of social and political consequences which may be multiplied when violent tactics become even more extreme, such as multiple perpetrator rapes, and when rape and sexual violence occur systematically and en masse (see Canning, 2010; Medical Foundation, 2009).

#### *Area of Concern: Lack of Research*

In consideration of the impact and effects of rape and sexual violence on women and societies, specifically in war and conflict, the problem is arguably under-researched and underdeveloped within academia (SVRI, founding statement). In successfully undertaking contemporary and historical analyses of women's experiences of sexual violence in conflict, war and civil unrest, this thesis has allowed for an in-depth overview of correlations in women's experiences in varying global, historical and political contexts. Findings from this review, undertaken from a feminist perspective, reaffirm the predominant correlating factor in sexual violence perpetration to be power related social subordination of women as a social group.

As this study has determined, although there is evidence that rape in conflict is recognised as part of a growing literature with regard to human rights and genocide, the position of women is still often problematic in terms of addressing violations under individual or group rights. Furthermore, as Rhonda Copelon pointed out, 'Historically, the rape of women in war has drawn occasional and short-lived international attention' (2004: 332). Although time will tell if recent surges of academic discussion in the area will last, the fluctuation of interest has been especially notable beyond the scope of feminist discourses and approaches.

### *Gaps in Asylum Policy: Role of the State*

As Chapter Four outlined, the inclusion of women as a 'particular social group' (PSG) in need of protection remains a necessity. This is specifically relevant in view of the prevalence of experience of sexual abuse amongst women in the asylum population within which some studies demonstrate that more women have experienced sexual violence than have not (Medical Foundation, 2009). However, many women continue to experience victimisation at the hands of the British State which can result in re-traumatisation of earlier experiences through repetitive interviewing due to disbelief, or additional harms through unsafe forcible return to their country of origin.

Considering also that structural violations such as state sanctioned destitution and social marginalisation through inadequately reviewed claims can increase women's vulnerability to forced prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, it is also essential that the state recognises its duty in protecting women who remain in this country. Failure to do so can expand forms of harm which may not fall under national or international legislation, but that have significant consequences on the emotional, social and even physical wellbeing of already marginalised women. The first step to this is in the initial stages of the applicant's claim, as identified in the UK Border Agency's own Gender Guidelines, which advises sensitivity to gender, cultural norms and discussion of violence (Asylum Aid, 2011). As woman-centred organisations have long demonstrated, it is important that gender sensitivity is embedded in all aspects of working with vulnerable women and not side-lined, approached as an add-on or regarded as optional.

### **Empirical Additions to Knowledge: Original Contributions from Practical Research**

As outlined in the Introduction, this study aimed to explore how women experience the asylum process in the UK, to investigate the impacts of sexual violence and benefits of support structurally and individually, and to

investigate what forms of support are available to women in Merseyside who have experienced sexual violence during or whilst fleeing conflict. Meeting these aims has produced contributions to knowledge which will move from the realms of academia into practice (see recommendations). The central inclusion of women's voices from accounts in literature and from support workers, as well as Hawwi's in-depth oral history, provide tools for increasing the consciousness of practitioners, Home Office policy makers and donors. This is specifically in relation to sexual violence in conflict as an issue in the UK asylum system, challenging the disassociation between conflict and asylum that has been highlighted in Chapter Eight.

## **Women's Words: Contributing Voices and Conveying Experience**

The use of a range of methodologies from an activist feminist standpoint has provided in-depth discussions of the issues raised for survivors of sexual violence with regard to impacts and support. Some key areas of concern have been identified in the previous three chapters. This section will conclusively review the main contributions to knowledge generated from empirical research.

### *Hawwi and the Continuum of Violence*

From a feminist standpoint perspective, perhaps one of the most prolific contributions to existing knowledge and literature in this area is the addition of Hawwi's life experiences, and subsequent sociological analyses of what Liz Kelly coined as a continuum of violence (1988). Through the method of oral history, Hawwi has provided a first-hand insight into the interlocking webs of patriarchy and violence against women, highlighting socio-structural inequalities at individual levels, such as not being allowed to eat in public and having limited access to education because she was female. As Hawwi herself spoke about, violence in the home was commonplace, whilst public space was male-dominated with the threat of sexual violence by soldiers during various conflicts in Ethiopia. This manifestation of patriarchal control is most clearly evidenced in Hawwi's subjection to rape when fleeing

governmental persecution. This reflects Susan Brownmiller's original claims that global patriarchy and women's subordination provide a social legitimacy for violence against women, with sexual violence as the epitome of gendered domination (1975).

### *Effects of Sexual Violence in Conflict*

Clear indications have been made that women in the UK's asylum system may have been subjected to or threatened by the use of sexual violence as part of opportunistic or state ordered violations. It is evident from Hawwi's oral history that issues such as depression, suicidal feelings and disassociation from events can continue right through the process of migration and asylum. This has been reinforced in a number of interviews, and is compounded by social effects including, but not limited to, ostracism from local communities, or forcibly abandoning or losing family members. The latter problem is, in my experience of working within asylum communities, harrowingly common. Many women I have supported or worked with have lost family members, but loss of children leaves some with no indication of whether they are alive and, if so, without contact. Even at the time of writing, Hawwi continues to push to be reunited with her son, causing further distress beyond the primary issues in asylum for women.

### *Intersectional Continuum of Violence*

Leading on from the previous two points, this research has expanded Kelly's concept of the continuum (1988) to establish an intersectional continuum of sexual violence in relation to the processes of conflict, structural violence, and the forms of violence women are subjected to at different points of this. It is evident from account analyses in Chapter Two, and reports from Chapter Six, that women may be subjected to various forms of violence before, during and after conflict. These can include, but are not limited to rape; rape with weapons; multiple perpetrator rape; trafficking and public sexual abuse or the threat thereof. These abuses can be met with intersections of specific periods of a woman's life, including during conflict or post-conflict, as well as in the processes of migration and asylum. It is these final points that emphasise

forms of structural violence that women (and asylum seekers more generally) may face, through the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which 'someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible' (Galtung, 1969: 167). This point is evidenced in depth by Hawwi's life history, as she was subjected to many forms of social, physical and emotional violence at points including during childhood, during conflict, fleeing conflict and eventually further victimisation whilst claiming and awaiting asylum. These findings firmly indicate many forms of violence at varying points, and as such a stronger case can be made in favour of holistic models of support in consideration of the multiplicity of women's experiences and violations, whilst drawing responsibility of structural violence to relevant states.

#### *System as a Wholly Negative Experience*

The empirical findings generated in this study, and in activist participation, indicate that most women, and indeed men, find the asylum process in the UK to be a wholly negative and stressful experience. This coheres with findings in other areas (Asylum Aid, 2008c; Bloch and Schuster, 2002; Bohmer and Schuman, 2008; Burnett and Peel, 2001; Burnett, 2009, 2010; Churchill and Canning, 2011; Crawley et al, 2011a; Murphy-Lawless and Kennedy, 2002; Tyler, 2006) but is again compounded for women who have experienced sexual violence. As has been evidenced through interviews and Hawwi's oral history, forms of depression or other problems related to mental health are exacerbated by confusion, a lack of direction and social or economic support, and feelings of worthlessness due to forced state dependency. There are clear indications in chapters Four and Six that improvements could be made, but there exists a lack of consideration of rape in conflict as a priority amongst UKBA staff, many of whom may not be fully aware of the implications this can have for women. On top of this, asylum seekers continue to be accommodated in some of the most deprived areas of Liverpool. Like other areas of concern, this should be more adequately tackled from a combination of top down and bottom up responses, and considered in more depth when housing asylum seekers.

## **Practice and Support: Problems in Provision**

Evidence of gaps in support within asylum agencies and women's support organisations has been generated from interviews and Hawwi's oral history. The following highlights the main areas of concern identified through this research.

### *Poor Funding, Short Term Funding and Short Term Support*

Interviews and activist participation with organisations in Merseyside have demonstrated a severe lack in sustainable funds. Empirical data collection was mostly undertaken in 2010, during which time the UK government changed from Labour to a Conservative led Coalition government. Therefore, whilst available funding was demonstrably poor during the first stages of data collection, changes to governmental structure became a further concern and a key issue for some respondents. Indeed, national and local council cuts were made (and continue to be made) to many charitable and non-governmental organisations, including support for survivors, in hand with changing asylum policies to 'reduce immigration to tens of thousands' (Conservatives, 2011). This thesis has highlighted the benefits of flexible and long term support for women who have been subjected to sexual violence in and outside of conflict. Findings therefore indicate that current governmental strategies, and further funding cuts, provide serious challenges to sustainable provision of support, for survivors undermine international legislation with regards to providing asylum for persecuted groups and evoke severe concerns for the future of support for asylum seekers in Merseyside, as well as wider areas.

### *Lack of Knowledge and Sensitivity*

Despite changes in legislation, problems still remain in ensuring implementation of gendered measures in the asylum system. In working with women, it is consistently evident that sensitivity is lacking in the interview process, as well as decision making. Furthermore, despite wider discourses and research highlighting the emotional and psychological effects of rape,

emphasis of 'proof of rape' still often lies in physical evidence. Considering that many women receive no obvious on-going physical injuries or any physical injuries sustained may have healed, this can undermine women's experiences and result in disbelief. Although the UK Border Agency contact non-governmental agencies supporting individuals in some cases, cases continue to arise whereby external reports are not properly considered before the asylum appeal hearing (Asylum Aid, 2011; Smith, 2004).

### *Lack of Interpreters and Safe Space*

There continues to be a lack of interpreters available for support sessions within and for voluntary organisations due to poor funding and stretched resources. Furthermore, when interpreters are provided, it is usually on a rota basis and over the phone, affecting the opportunity for interpretation by a woman. As the Women's Resource Centre has shown (2010), this can significantly reduce the likelihood of creating a safe space for women to discuss sexual violence and therefore engage in support. This is further reduced in poorly funded organisations where space is communal, eroding confidentiality, and where the organisation or agency does not adopt a gendered lens appropriate to the form of support otherwise available.

Similar issues in interpretation were also evident in women's experiences of their asylum claim or appeal through the UKBA, which was clear in interviews and activist research with women in the asylum system. Again, this understandably decreases the likelihood of speaking of histories of sexual violence and increases the possibility of disbelief if women do not inform the UKBA during their initial claim. Likewise, non-disclosure can be a form of self-silencing as a way to avoid repercussions if returned to her country of origin. Furthermore, even if women do choose to speak about sexual violence, there is little space to develop an understanding of the complexities in women's histories (as Hawwi's oral history demonstrates).

### *Silencing, self-silencing and strategic silencing*

In most other sectors in society, it is acknowledged that rape and sexual violence is silenced in many cultures (Koss, 1985). Many women do not speak out at all, and research has shown that this can also include to formal support providers (Ahrens, 2006). This thesis has demonstrated that women are often reluctant to speak, or do not have safe space to speak when questioned about reasons for fleeing conflict or for seeking asylum. Yet, looking beyond this, there is also scope for recognition that women may choose to self-silence as a strategy for self-protection, particularly at a point when so much uncertainty pervades her refugee status and possibility of refoulement. Considering the potential for repercussions in her country of origin, and the lack of clarity in who may or may not be privy to the information she gives, a survivor may feel it is in her best interests to withhold information regarding subjection to rape or sexual violence.

#### *Problems in Cultural Knowledge and Congruence*

Cultural divisions remain a priority area for survivor's access to support. As one interview respondent pointed out:

*R9: 'Women won't necessarily see talking as a way of resolving difficulty... talking to a stranger in a counselling setup is a bit of a bizarre notion'*

This highlights a need for flexibility and knowledge of wider cultures, both of which can be limited through a lack in funding, staff and time to develop strategies to allow for the development of cultural sensitivities. However, some interviews, and wider activist engagement in the voluntary sector, suggests there can also be an expectation that women from outside of the UK will not be able to speak English or accept counselling and support. This is not always the case, as evidenced in working with Hawwi and engaging in activist development with Darfuri women amongst many other nationalities. Approaching support in the aftermath of sexual violence in this way sometimes limits or completely eradicates scope for support from the offset.

#### *Lack of a Gendered Lens beyond Women's Organisations in Merseyside*

There are often separations in the gendering of space in asylum support organisations in Merseyside. Again, a lack of government or public funding is one root of this, as space is limited and funds seldom exist to provide wider activities. However, where voluntary support for asylum seekers does exist in Merseyside, space is largely male dominated which can be particularly threatening for survivors of sexual or domestic violence, as well as other vulnerable adults. Activities such as sports, cooking and computer facilities can also be male dominated, further reducing women's opportunities to engage in general communal activities and support:

*R7: 'If they're going to use the computer space they have their children, and who looks after their children? They get there and it's, you know there's just a lot of men that use that space.'*

*R11: 'We've had people who won't come back to the English classes because young men have said things to them. And I suppose once every couple of months we stand up in the kitchen and say 'listen, this is going on and it has to stop'.'*

Gender sensitive approaches should be recognised and adopted as an integral part of support in all asylum organisations, voluntary and governmental. Without this, there is an increased possibility of non-engagement with support agencies.

### *Rape Myths, Socio-Cultural Attitudes and Media Lies*

This thesis sought also to investigate the social construction of representations and ideologies of sexual violence, and if and how this impacts on wider social attitudes toward sexual violence. In relation to this, one key concern for most interview respondents working in areas of support or asylum was the drip-drip effect of inaccurate representations of sexual violence and/or asylum. There is a well-documented occurrence of media amplification and distortion with regard to both these issues (Brown et al, 2010; Coole, 2002; Davies et al, 1987; Kenyon, 2010; Kitzinger, 2009; Lees, 1995; Smart et al, 2005; Tyler, 2006).

In examining cultural attitudes to sexual violence, and UK responses to asylum, findings from this thesis justify these concerns. Whilst there have perhaps been improvements in some areas, attitudes and policy remain discriminatory and exclusionary, marginalising the experiences of women, and asylum populations more generally. Discussions relating to media are complex, however, without advocating a cause and effect model or overlooking the complexity of media/audience relationships, there is a real need for thorough critical analysis of media discourses relating to asylum and sexual violence. Further challenges to mediated ideologies are necessary if moves are to be made toward accurate representation and socio-cultural awareness. In summary, findings from this study suggest that rape myths continue to permeate public discourse, distorting the reality of sexual violence in society, whilst right-wing and tabloid media continually victimise asylum seekers as 'bogus, infusing 'illegal immigrants' as a unilateral definition for all individuals and groups applying for asylum status.

## **Recommendations**

The final aim of this thesis has been to move findings forward to address policy recommendations. As touched upon in section 8.3, feminist and woman-centred organisations have made useful and progressive recommendations around engaging in support for settled women, survivors of sexual violence and women seeking asylum. A number of important recommendations in these areas are applicable to women seeking asylum in Merseyside, as well as survivors of conflict related sexual violence more generally. Relevant examples include:

- Existing legislation, strategies, policies and action plans developed to address different forms of violence against women and girls need to be effectively and consistently coordinated, implemented and monitored across the country (WNC, 2009: 5);
- Recognise the crucial role of specialist women's services and BME women's services in providing longer-term therapeutic and group support for women and girls (ibid: 6);
- GP surgeries need to play a greater role in identifying and responding to violence against women and girls, including the on-site provision of

information and support for survivors provided by specialist women's services (ibid);

- Improve the way that decision-makers assess credibility in cases that involve rape and other forms of gender-based violence (Rights of Women, 2011: 9);
- Reception staff may need more time, including language support, to elicit what the problem is. Miscommunication may result in asylum seekers being inappropriately turned away (Ashton and Moore, 2009: 21-22);
- The importance of keeping to exact appointment times may sometimes not be fully appreciated (ibid);
- On registration it might be useful to provide all newly arrived asylum seekers with practical information regarding the location of other health care settings such as hospitals, dentists and voluntary agencies (ibid).

Focussing back on this research specifically, a holistic and woman centred-model to support and asylum review should encompass:

- Engaging directly with women rather than assume a certain model of support will be most beneficial;
- Recognising culturally or politically motivated violence as also being linked to gender-based violence, where violence or motivations are based on patriarchal gender ordering;
- Country of Origin information to relate directly to women's social and economic positions, instances and likelihood of sexual violence in as a tool of conflict and legislative and social limitations for women's rights. The latter should include realistic considerations of the likelihood of adequate implementation thereof (which should consider research undertaken by Non-Governmental Organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International rather than accepting governmental statistics as wholly and politically accurate);
- In addressing inequalities through policy and policy implementation, staff interviewing women seeking asylum should be made more consciously aware of these issues, not just as being separate to gender, but as a product of deeply engrained gender inequalities;
- The Women's Resource Centre (2010) clearly highlighted the benefits of woman's organisations in challenging inequality and implementing woman-centred policies. Further collaboration between woman-

centred and more general agencies would promote and encourage the use of women-centred space and acknowledgment of diversity in needs and experience;

- Moving away from a standardised expectation that all women will demonstrate medically or psychologically recognisable symptoms of disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In terms of specific needs for support, there currently exists a 'wrap-around' service for women seeking asylum in Merseyside. However this is strongly based on medical and legal models, is not women only and is in close proximity of living quarters, which may discourage women from engaging consistently. Likewise, there is limited or no scope for counselling. As such, addressing the specific needs of asylum seeking women from a feminist perspective should include as a minimum:

- Consistency in support worker, case worker or counsellor, particularly when women have experienced sexual violence;
- In consideration of potential language barriers, spatial disorientation in a new country or area, and lack in travel funds, services should be in close proximity or in one place with clear directions available in multiple languages;
- Support space to be women only;
- Reception, counsellor and support staff to be trained intensively about forms of violence against women, including the potential of multiple subjections and at varying points of women's lives;
- Information regarding women's rights to be made available during asylum application process, including spousal applications, and specifically addressing rights relating to violence against women as well as local and national services for survivors of sexual violence;
- Interpreter to be face to face, with an explicitly stated opportunity for a woman interpreter, and with confidentiality expressed and prioritised.

Additionally, the following recommendations should be considered amongst local organisations as well as donors, including the UK Border Agency:

### *Sustained Funding*

With reflection on the impacts of sexual violence as demonstrated throughout this thesis, a key recommendation is a call for sustained and more substantive funding from organisations and agencies, national and international, to facilitate support for survivors of sexual violence, as well as undertake further research similar to this thesis. It is evident from this research that effects of sexual violence can be long term and far reaching, and impacts of sexual violence in conflict and civil unrest transcend the localised area within which violence has been perpetrated.

### *Implementation of Gendered Policies and Recommendations, and Recognition of Sexual Violence beyond the Physical*

The extent of sexual violence in conflict is well documented, yet disbelief continues in the UK when women do speak of subjection to such violence, and even then a lack of gendered focus can severely reduce disclosure from the outset. Many recommendations exist, and it is perhaps a case of including these at grassroot levels to ensure women a fair asylum application process and an opportunity for adequate support for sexual violence survivors whilst in the UK asylum system. Although funding seriously restricts the amount and type of support available from the UKBA, as well as for non-governmental organisations, it should not prevent the implementation of gendered considerations.

### *Recognition of Sexual Violence as a Sensitive Topic Needing Sensitive Approaches with Regard to Speaking about Violence and Initial and Subsequent Interviews*

Sexual violence remains shrouded in social silences and culturally mediated myths. Women who have been subjected to rape and sexual violence can experience social marginalisation and exclusion, issues which may have instigated migration and application for asylum. As such a personally and socially sensitive topic, it should not be assumed that a woman will speak about instances of sexual violence in her initial interview, and possibly not

even in subsequent interviews and therefore should not lead to a rejection of her application. Rape and sexual violence should be discussed only in confidence and in a 'safe' area. The UK Border Agency, as well as police, may benefit from adhering to woman-centred interview methods (Collier, 2007; Ellsberg and Heise, 2005; Women's Resource Centre, 2010).

There should also be the incorporation of wider training of sexual violence responses and cultural experiences into governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as challenges to rape myths beyond women's organisations or groups. As various respondents (as well as Hawwi) have pointed out, not all people or cultures respond to sexual violence in the same ways, but likewise women from any background can respond to support differently. More flexibility with regard to provision from counsellors, case workers and organisations would facilitate more inclusive forms of support.

#### *Nationally and Internationally*

Providing recommendations for international recognition and developments in this area is a complex issue. Whilst this thesis has not aimed to do this, the exploration of women's subjection to sexual violation, rights abuses and torture has demonstrated gaps in political consciousness with regard to international, and perhaps consequently, national responses to women during and post-conflict, importantly in asylum processes. As such, the primary recommendation to stem from this thesis is to urge grassroots organisations and international leaders to move toward more substantive responses for women forced to flee due to the threat or perpetration of sexual violence. This should, in the first instance, be through forms of prevention. However, as this research has demonstrated, the aftermath of sexual violence in conflict transcends to host societies and therefore more recognition of this violation as an international and domestic problem is needed. Organisations such as the UK Border Agency, local police forces and the British Government should therefore lend more focus to these impacts, and recognise their role in doubly victimising vulnerable women through poor funding and the spinning of punitive and exclusionary

discourses with regard to asylum seekers in the asylum system, as argued above.

## **Where to go from here?**

For recommendations to be implemented, a number of wider issues should also be addressed with regard to research in this area. Firstly, to challenge fully gaps in literature and policy, findings from this thesis will be developed for publication in the form of reports and journal articles. If knowledge is to be extended to bring the problem of sexual violence in conflict to the forefront of academic and practitioner consciousness, as the literature reviews in this thesis highlight, then it should be more accessible in these realms.

Secondly, whilst this thesis has contributed to the expansion of empirical and theoretical feminist perspectives and understandings of the perpetration and impacts of sexual violence in conflict, as well as the support available for women in the UK asylum system, more research in this area would be beneficial for developing further knowledge of women's experiences in Merseyside. This may include (for example) undertaking interviews with survivors to draw further correlations, and assess the direction that more support could take.

Whilst Liverpool is a main area for dispersal, there are many other areas of the UK with high, moderate and low concentrations of women and men seeking asylum, or living as refugees, which continue to be overlooked. As this thesis has indicated, research into the impacts of sexual violence on women seeking asylum is limited, particularly outside of activist or non-governmental realms. As such, more in-depth, long term and comparative qualitative and quantitative studies in this area across the UK would create a more foundational base from which further recommendations can be created, allowing changes to improve the lives of asylum seeking women can be made.

Finally, through the review of contemporary and historical accounts and articles, this thesis has identified that, as conflict and civil unrest in localised states and countries continues or (in some areas) begins, women have increasingly become the targets and victims of conflict. As discussed throughout, much research into this area has been socio-medical or wholly medical and undertaken by non-governmental organisations, and as such there is a limited scope for analysis in sociology. This should be addressed more fully within academia to investigate ways to support women fleeing conflict, move toward bringing global states to account for the protection and abuse of women, and predominantly push to more adequately recognise and challenge the violation of women through sexual violence as a violation in human rights.

# List of Appendices

## Appendix One: Petition to Stop Victim-Blaming Attitudes

To Our Police, Our Press and Our Judicial System,

Representations of rape in local and national media have often focussed more on the acts of the rape victim or survivor than the motive of the rape itself. Recent reports in Merseyside include statements from local police rightly condemning rape attacks, and offering the public much needed reassurance. Unfortunately however, this good work is usually undone with statements such as:

'However, I would like to remind women and teenagers to always take care at night and avoid walking through isolated or unlit areas and ensure you always walk home in pairs or a group and not go unaccompanied'.

What this is reminding women is that they/we should not risk being alone at night - surely an outdated response considering we have spent over 20 years reclaiming it! Placing responsibility of self-protection and regulation on the victim reiterates that the institutions in place to protect us will continue to view women who are raped as practically 'asking for it': a sad reality in an era that dresses itself with a false consciousness of gender equality.

Within a month of publication of the first statement, a QC described a rapist taxi driver from Liverpool as being a 'sexual predator' with a 'high sexual drive', rather than a man with sexually motivated violent tendencies.

The reason rape occurs is not because women and teenagers (i.e. girls) walk alone at nights: it is because they are targeted by violent rapists in a society that does not do enough to combat sexist attitudes and sexual violence, as confirmed by our abysmal 5.6%-6.5% rape conviction rate - the lowest out of 33 European countries.

No-one asks to be raped. The bottom line should not be a message from our police to remind women that the impossible responsibility of avoiding rape lies on rape victims and survivors by avoiding 'unlit' or 'isolated' areas - after all, only a minority of rapes actually occur in these areas - most are carried out by acquaintances. The bottom line is that our society and culture needs to challenge rape myths, to hold perpetrators responsible in our judicial system, and to change how we think about rape survivors and women in general.

### **I Will No Longer Accept Victim-Blaming Attitudes in Responses to Rape Charges and in Rape Reports in Merseyside's Press:**

Name	Email/Contact	Signature

### **More Must Be Done To Support Survivors Of Rape And Sexual Abuse.**

## Appendix Three: Examples of Activist Participatory Exchanges

### Examples include:

- Voluntary time supporting women in organisations every Friday and alterative Wednesdays;
- Working with the Darfur Community Group on developing ideas for the direction of their Women's group most Friday evening for over six month;
- Holding a symposium for Kensington Remembers, a day of remembrance for the victims and survivors of the genocide in Darfur, at my University building;
- Organising a one day symposium focussing on sexual violence, to which local community groups were invited free of charge;
- Raising funds to challenge sexual violence through targeting social attitudes through media materials (see Appendix Five);
- Writing letters of support for Hawwi's case for asylum which was offered *after* the completion of the oral history;
- Copying Hawwi's recorded evidence of speaking against the ruling government as she did not have the facilities to do this.

### Events Organised

March 2010, *The Silent Majority: Sexual Violence and the Oppression of Womankind*, School of Social Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University

January 2010, *Darfur Symposium*, School of Social Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University

May 2009, *It Ain't Ovary yet! Sustaining Women's Activism in Merseyside*, FACT Liverpool

## Appendix Four: Consent Form

### Consent Form

#### **Rape, Impunity, Asylum and Community: The Significance of Sexual Violence in Women's Claims for Asylum in Merseyside**

Victoria Canning, School of Social Sciences, Liverpool  
John Moores University

1. I have read/been read and understood the information provided for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop the interview/conversation at any time, without giving a reason.
3. I give consent for the researcher to use a Dictaphone, and I understand that any personal information, such as my name or address, collected during the study will be anonymous and remain confidential.
4. If necessary, I give consent for the researcher to contact me in the future for further research
5. I give consent for the researcher to use quotes recorded during interviews/conversations in future publications. These quotes will be anonymised.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant  
Signature

Date

Name of Researcher  
Signature

Date

## Appendix Five: Application for Funds

### Staff Community Development Fund

Funding Application Form

#### Project Leader Details

Name	Victoria Canning
Job Title / Department	Research Assistant, School of Social Sciences
Contact Number	0151 231 3364
Email	v.canning@ljmu.ac.uk
Project Title	Challenging Sexual Violence in Merseyside

#### Outline of Project

##### Background

Following the success of LJMU's *It Ain't Ovary Yet!* Exhibition in May, huge gaps in education and knowledge regarding sexual violence for both men and women locally have become evident. Members of the public who attended the event approached throughout the day looking for direction on becoming involved in highlighting gender equality and challenging sexual violence, and in questioning what constitutes violence against women.

##### Outline of Project

It is clear that education on gender equality can be sparse, and important facts regarding sexual violence (for example, the UK has the lowest conviction rate for rapists in Europe, at 5.6%, or that more women die from rape and domestic violence than from cancer) are not always reaching the people that experience it or perhaps perpetrate, and therefore people may not know who to turn to, or even that they are being abused or facing gender-based discrimination. This is becoming even more of an issue for local anti-sexual violence groups as funding has been radically decreased over the last few years, meaning both paid and voluntary staff are unable to promote awareness-raising as money is not available for materials.

This will be a three month project to challenge and educate members of the local public and their opinion of violence against women through leafletting in pubs and clubs, promoting equality through small scale campaigns and also information days at local events. It will be a collaboration between the Social Sciences Department and two local community groups; International Women's Day Merseyside and Merseyside's Rape And Sexual Abuse. Overall, around 7 LJMU staff will volunteer, as well as around 15 volunteers from the other two community groups. Funds are necessary to produce materials, such as leaflets, beer-mats and posters, which will be utilised in providing education.

The overall objective of this project is to provide information and education to people in the local community who otherwise may not be aware of facts, direction on becoming involved or where to go in Merseyside for support.

**Partner Organisations**

Rape and Sexual Abuse Merseyside  
International Women's Day Merseyside

**Location**

Throughout Merseyside

**Budget Breakdown**

Item	Cost
200 Badges	£55
5000 double sided Leaflets	£ 265
Posters	£75
T-Shirts	£140
1000 Beer-mats detailing sexual violence facts	£199
800 Stickers	£70
Total	£804

**When will the project take place / How long will it run for?**

June-September  
3 months

**What impact will the project have upon the local community?**

This is an opportunity to reach people about challenging violence against women and gender discrimination through outreach education. This will be beneficial in highlighting the on-going political need to raise awareness of issues impacting on women on both local and global levels. It aims to encourage staff and local communities to challenge gender inequality in an inclusive and cohesive way. Two local charities (RASA and IWDM) will have an opportunity to broadcast what they do to promote gender equality and support for women, and staff involved in gender issues will have the opportunity to demonstrate what they do as part of LJMU and how this impacts on global knowledge of gender divisions.

**Sustainability (Will the project continue after this initial funding? What will happen to any equipment purchased?)**

One objective of this project is to promote the sustenance of women's activism in Merseyside, and will be an on-going attempt to involve people from local communities who will, it is hoped, go on to continue challenging gender based violence as a result of what they may learn from this project. This will be a positive step for LJMU in terms of active collaborations, and in utilising education as a means to challenge gender discrimination.

Numbers	
Number of Staff Volunteers	7
Number of beneficiaries	0

## Supporting Women's Rights in Nicaragua

The project can do today to help gender  
 discrimination:

Conduct a research project to identify the needs of women in the region and provide the necessary support to address them. This includes providing technical assistance to women's organizations and setting up to build capacity and promote gender equality.

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## Appendix Six: Examples of project outcomes from internal funding application

# Challenging Gender Inequalities

## Sustaining Women's Activism in Merseyside

### Things YOU can do today to stop gender discrimination:

Contact your local representative - what does s/he do to improve gender equality?

Understand that 'being a man' does not mean being violent, aggressive or disrespectful to women.

Don't use phrases such as 'like a girl' as a put down.

Recognise inequality in the home or the workplace and stand up to sexist remarks and challenge gender inequalities.

Communicate clearly in relationships. **No means no.** Never excuse behaviour by saying 'boys will be boys'. Confront homophobia.

Recognise that individual violence is supported by social systems and is based on power and control.

Always listen to people when they say they've been abused.

**Support local women's organisations like RASA and Merseyside Women's Movement!**

Contact:

RASA (Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre)

0151 650 0155

info@rasamerseyside.org

PO Box 35

Birkenhead

CH42 4RX

Merseyside Women's Movement

www.iwdmerseyside.co.uk

info@iwdmerseyside.co.uk



Example of Beermats:

**DID YOU KNOW 1 IN 4 WOMEN WILL SUFFER RAPE OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIFETIME?**

Men can help stop rape and sexual violence by challenging rape supporting attitudes and behaviours and raising awareness about the damaging impact of sexual violence.

*Every time a man's voice joins those of women in speaking out against rape, the world becomes safer for us all.*

**MEN CAN STOP RAPE**

**MEN:  
WOMEN NEED  
YOU!**



**R E A L  
M E N  
D O N ' T  
R A P E**



**GET REAL**

nobody asks to be raped



**ALCOHOL  
BLURS  
CONSENT**



**CONSENT  
THE CLEAR FACTS**

If you're too drunk to understand a person trying to say 'NO'  
If you're too drunk to listen and respect a person trying to say 'NO'  
If you have sex with a person incapable of giving consent:

**IT IS RAPE**

**RAPE IS RAPE  
DRUNK OR SOBER**



All above designed and produced by Chloe Emmott, Hannah Ryan and Vicky Canning

## Appendix Seven: Darfur Community Group Symposium

School of Social Sciences  
with Kensington Regeneration, Liverpool



*discussion forum on*

# Darfur

kensington  
regeneration

- International and national perspectives
- Humanitarian consequences

### Speakers from Darfur:

**John Ruach Jal Wang**, Senior Civil Servant in South Sudan and founder of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLF)

**Dr Ahmed Abdullah**, doctor and paediatrician from Darfur

Tuesday 26 January 2010 5pm  
Room 230 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, School of Social Science,  
68 Hope Street, Liverpool John Moore's University

All staff and  
students  
welcome

## **Appendix Eight: Select Recent Conferences and Invited Lectures**

Canning, V. *Counting the Uncountable: Entitlement to Sanctuary and Asylum for Women Raped in Conflict* European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control Université de Savoie, Chambéry, September 2011

Canning, V. *Support for Survivors: Sexual Violence in Conflict* Liverpool Gender Research Consortium, University of Liverpool, May 2011

Canning, V. *Transcending Conflict: Barriers to Sexual Violence Support for Women Seeking Asylum in Merseyside* British Sociological Association Annual Conference London School of Economics, April 2011

Canning, V. *Academic Activism: Working for Women's Rights Locally and Globally* Global Justice: Meeting Basic Needs through Education St. Louis University, Madrid, April 2011

Canning, V. *The Reality of Rape* Radical Women, Radical City Bluecoat Chambers Liverpool, March 2011

Canning, V. *Non-Gendered Research: Changing the Lens* University of Liverpool February 2011

Canning, V. *Challenging Sexual Violence: A Community Approach*, Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa Leadership and Management for Local Health and Community Development Conference, Hope University, July 2010

Canning, V. and Fletcher, S. *Participatory Mapping as a Tool for Measuring Gendered Spatial Negotiation*, University of Szeged, Hungary, May 2010

Canning, V. *Sexual Violence as a Tactic for Genocide*, Manchester Metropolitan University, February 2010

Canning, V. and Tobin, A. *Policy, Impunity, Safety and Community: Women, Rape and Asylum*, Amnesty International Conference, University of Leeds, January 2010

Canning, V. *Who's Human? Developing Sociological Understandings of the Rights of Women Raped in Conflict* British Sociological Association Human Rights Workshop, University of London, October 2009

Canning, V. *Rape and Sexual Violence during and post Conflict*, Feminist Transitions Conference, Edge Hill University, June 2009

Canning, V. and Fletcher, S. *The Gendered Spacing of the Capital of Culture* University of Innsbruck, May 2009

## **Appendix Nine: Interview schedule/prompt sheet for interview participants**

### **Role?**

### **Support**

- Sexual Violence?
- Asylum?
- How is it supported?
- Key successes?
- Barriers?
- Networks?

### **Women**

- Service users?
- How are women supported?

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### **Sexual Violence**

- Correlations?
- Effects – individual/society
- When? [Conflict?]
- Support for asylum?

### **Sexual Violence [Conflict]**

- Impact?
- Significant in claims for asylum?

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### **Asylum**

- COIs?
- Is sexual violence common? Correlations
  - When – [asylum/displacement/conflict]?
  - By whom?
- Sexual Violence support?
- Could women's experiences of asylum be improved?
  - How?

### **Organisation**

- Improvements? [For Service Users and Staff/Vols]?

## Appendix Ten: Information Sheet

***Title: Rape, Impunity, Asylum and Community:  
The Significance of Sexual Violence in Women's Claims  
for Asylum in Merseyside***

**Researcher: Victoria Canning, Liverpool John Moores University**

### **Information and Background of Study**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important that you know why the research is being done and what it involves. Feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, and please take time to decide if you want to take part or not.

- **What is the purpose of this study?**

This study looks at the social significance of the effects of rape and sexual violence in conflict. It has been developed to try to explore women's experiences of sexual violence, particularly in the decision to flee and need for asylum. This study will form a doctorate thesis to be completed in 2011. On a more practical note, the findings will compile a report to provide recommendations for relevant agencies, organisations and councils to raise awareness of the experiences of women during conflict and migration.

- **What will happen during the study?**

During the study, you will have the opportunity to take part in at least one interview. This should last no longer than one hour. If you consent, you may be contacted by me in the future for further research. Please tick the adequate box in the 'Consent Form' for this.

- **Do I have to take part?**

This is a voluntary study, so you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do decide to take part and you feel like you no longer want to continue participating, you are able to stop at any time.

- **Are there risks involved in taking part?**

There are no physical risks involved in this study, although you may feel upset discussing sensitive topics. You have the right to stop the interview at any time.

- **How will interviews be recorded and will my information be confidential?**

The interview will be taped on an audio recorder unless you object to this, in which case notes will be taken by hand. This is an anonymous interview and any part you have in this study will be confidential.

- **What will happen to any personal information?**

All information you give will be included under a pseudonym, which means you will not be identified as a participant in this study. All information will be safeguarded in my personal computer, and any hand written notes will be kept confidentially until the completion of this study.

The information gained during this study may be published in articles and will be part of a doctorate thesis. Any information you give that is published will remain anonymous.

- **What if I have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, please feel free to ask me before or after your interview.

**If you would like any further information about this research, or would like to ask any questions, please contact me (Victoria Canning) on:**

**Tel: (0151) 231 5106**

**Email: [v.canning@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:v.canning@ljmu.ac.uk)**

## Appendix Eleven: Example of Hawwi's Transcript

Let whatever comes to me I have to have. I left the house, I take a small bag, my exercise book, one clothes and left the others and left her house. I don't know where to walk. [cries] I sit on the street and start crying. Finally [cries] I asked one lady if I can stay with her and work for her if she can help me until I am just getting a place. 'OK' she said. And I start sleeping in her house. For that sleeping I don't have money to pay for her but I am carrying water all the day for her. And I don't have breakfast, I don't have lunch, I don't have dinner [cries]. Nothing. When I am going to class I am hungry [cries] and everything is complicated then. But still I, what can I do? I asked my friends to borrow [sic] me some money. And finally they gave me some money and I used some money. I wanted to shop, I went to shop and asked if he could give me some stuffs and I will sell them and make profits and give him the original money. I told all my stories to others and now, I just, I exposed myself for everything and am telling everyone but I have no-one. I have families that were living there. But then I start doing something. Sometimes I am going to school, sometimes I am not going to school. Still I am in a student list but I stop education. My marks are not particularly good, I am not concentrating. I become very low. Then I start helping myself. I left the old woman's house. I start renting house and sharing with friends. I finished high school with no good marks, with no course to attend University. But not with fail [sic]. I passed to get some amount of job. When I am competing high school, the government transition comes in. the previous government left the country and those guerrilla fighters come and occupy the country. And it's continuously 3 years. And no-one needs a job, no-one doing anything. At this time I complete high school but I can't go to job because the country is completely missed. The new government were not established. During this time I start [sic] job in a factory. Just carrying things from a car, you are dropping and lifting, doing things like that. Because at this stage I am very young, 18 years old. I am physically [sic], all those internal things are not visible. All the males, the factory workers. Peoples know that I don't have anyone who helps me. They attack me. There is a culture, if you don't have anyone they can take you from outside, and in that factory my friends told me twice, 'this person is ready to abduct you. If you are coming next week it is the last day for you.' OK, if I enter this situation it is very, very disaster [sic] for me. So I worked because it is money that I have to gets [sic] I didn't receive that money and I didn't come back to that family again. Because everywhere abduction is there. So I left that money. And then I asked my brother again, he has family and he married and he has family, 'can I come and stay with you until I am getting job or something?' 'OK' he said. I went to his house, I start living in his house. During this time, he got one child and his wife is second pregnant [sic], they are happy at this time again because I am helping and there is a lot of jobs that... there is no grinder, you are making powder in your home, there is no electricity, there is nothing that you are using, so human labour is very, very nice. So whether they are relatives or whether you are anything you need a lady, because you are helpful, your labour is very helpful. So at this time also my brother is happy to have me because his wife is pregnant and I stayed with them. It is good because I don't have any area to stay, and it is good to stay in my brother's house. But

now I am not like before, I am matured, I am finished high school. My thinking is not as previous, I am not crying for food, I am not crying for anything. At this time, I will argue my rights. And one day I mentioned an idea for him, he is a school director. And I told him I need to boil and serve tea for students during the rest time and can you give me some money to start this business, I said. 'OK, let me think on it' he said, and he gave an idea for his wife. She said can I do this for her? At this time his wife extremely becomes sad. 'Why you didn't say to me? Because I don't have job. But when your sister comes you planned to open tea shop'. Starting from that day, my brother's wife became another enemy to me. That idea is completely rejected because they become quarrelled and I become obstacle between them. Still I start crying, 'Oh God'. The country is occupied now, the peoples [sic] who we don't know come in, military power is everywhere. [What year is that?] Ethiopia's calendar is different. I think it is '99. It is every time, everywhere, they have securities and there is [sic] people with rangers and peoples will crush. Wherever you are going you are in fear of rape of the soldiers, not rape of the society. Those soldiers for more than 10 years they were in the desert area. If they saw a woman there is no question, they are just taking her from the street for rape. For a person like me who am [sic] only 18 years old, I have fear of them to do something. I have to stay in my brother's house. Still it is very problematic situation. While I stay in my brother's house, my brother's wife is another problem. She don't [sic] like me completely, she likes my labour but she don't [sic] like the idea of my brother doing shopping or helping me by money. But I am not living as a child forever by depending on relatives forever. I must plan something, I said. At this time I had some money, a little bit of money, so I started working at the market by my own decision. He said, 'why you are doing these rubbish things to us to show that you are in a problem or you don't have any help? Why are you doing these things to insult me in front of people?' he said. 'No, I started these things to help myself and have my own income. I need to have my own income. I need to live my own life, so I asked if you could help me and you quarrelled with your wife so I have to find my own solution and this is working. I need to do'. So because I started marketing, they stopped giving me their food. But still I am coming to their house and sleeping. All the day I am working and staying in the market and studying and doing something. When I am coming home I can't prepare my own dish in my brother's house because it is something that is very culturally bad. I can't eat outside, which is culturally very bad, and you can't eat on the street as a married girl... even if you are married it is cultural very, very shameful for a lady to eat outside. But still, because of the shame of the society I will not go somewhere and I will not eat anything. When I am coming home, like step mother she is attacking me. Oh God, why you are teaching me? At this time I am very, very good Christian and attending Christian groups, and every time the spiritual power helps me whenever those things are happening to me, I am just saying, 'God is teaching me some lesson and I am just struggling with this'. It is like a fasting problem. When I am drinking coffee with them and without proper food I stayed with them for a long time. And finally those military powers got places and the normal transition came in, and peoples started finding a job and I completely left my brother's house and come to the city and applied for elementary school teaching, and then I got a course [sneezes] and then I trained for one

year as elementary school teacher and I graduated one year and started teaching. The salary is very few, extremely few. It is not enough for helping families and things like that. And it is very remote area, from capital you will travel 300 kilometres by car and then when you stop there you will either rent horse or mule and then by horse or by mule you are going the other roads to reach your place. It is very complicated. As soon as I reached there I start teaching elementary. The very challenge in external to my family, the external challenge I faced in status when I got that job.

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