Researching migrants who hold nomadic identities

Analysing multi-level dynamic discourses of power

Maria Psoinos
Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, St George's University of London and Kingston University, London, UK

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how the researcher can critically reflect on his/her own identities when interacting with participants who hold nomadic identities and analyses the dynamic discourses of power unfolding at different levels.

Design/methodology/approach – Autobiographical narrative data derived from a research study on highly educated refugees in the UK are analysed in order to highlight the multi-level dynamic discourses of power unfolding between researcher, participants, the community context and the broader socio-cultural context.

Findings – The findings shed light not only on the power relations unfolding at different levels but also on inequalities which arise – particularly in organisational settings - and put at a disadvantage certain groups of highly educated refugees.

Research limitations/implications – The thorough analysis demonstrates how a researcher can be critically reflexive – that is, challenges his/her own authority and gives "voice" to the participants – when studying groups with nomadic identities.

Originality/value – The originality of the paper lies in revealing through a critical reflexive analysis how and why certain migrant groups may be disadvantaged and/or marginalised in organisational settings.

Keywords Migration research, Nomadic identity, Power discourses, Researcher identity, Refugees, Highly educated

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Social researchers, especially in qualitative studies, have often chosen to study populations with whom they share certain characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity), roles, educational and professional background or experience(s) (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). In studies with participants from migrant group(s) the exploration of identities has been particularly appealing to scholars who hold a migrant background themselves (Ganga and Scott, 2006; Kühner and Langer, 2010). Indeed, shared ethno-cultural backgrounds and social characteristics and/or common post-migration experiences have been considered to "bond" researcher and participants and potentially facilitate the research process and its outcomes (e.g. researchers - as "cultural insiders" – having easier access to the field and gaining deeper insight into their research questions) (Merriam *et al.*, 2001).

Nowadays social researchers widely acknowledge the fluidity and complexity of human experience and consequently that affiliation with a minority group in terms of background, characteristics and/or experiences does not denote complete sameness with that group or a necessarily "smooth" research process (Coffey, 1999; Egharevba, 2001). However, the above issue of the researcher's insider or outsider status re-emerges when conducting research with populations who hold a "nomadic identity". This paper

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highlights some important requirements regarding researchers' own identities when studying migrant groups with nomadic identities.

In the field of workplace equality and diversity Prasad *et al.* (2006) point out that researchers should be clear about whether their adopted perspective: is positivist or non-positivist; has a relatively low or high awareness of power relations between identity groups; locates the driving causal forces of diversity dynamics at the individual, interpersonal or macro-structural level of analysis and approaches identities as fluid or fixed.

In this paper the adopted perspective is social constructivist, a non-positivist paradigm which considers identities as constructed, thus fluid. The analysis of data collected from an empirical study with participants who hold nomadic identities demonstrates not only a high awareness of power relations between different agents and groups, but an in-depth exploration of the dynamic discourses of power unfolding at several levels. These several levels include the micro-level (interactions between researcher and participants), meso-level (relations between organisations and agencies in the community with the participants) and macro-level (socio-cultural context and its influence on the participants).

Conceptualising "nomadic identity"

"Nomadic identity" is regarded in the following way: according to Mouffe (1994) the subject is split into multiple and politicised (thus not unitary and homogeneous) "subject positions" that can never stay fixed in a system of ongoing differences. The "identity" of such a subject is therefore always contingent and precarious. In addition, identity is relational as it is usually built on difference; this does not necessarily imply an antagonistic relation, but it means that there is always the possibility of this relation between us/them becoming one of friend/enemy (Jezierska, 2010).

Nomadic identities when compared with migrant or transnational identities are undoubtedly more complex: settlers or migrants, in the language of classic migration studies, move from a less to a more developed country with "permanent settlement" in mind, while in the host country, they are expected to go through processes of "incorporation" and "acculturation". Such migration is often associated with labour market disadvantage and lowering of social status. At the same time transnational identities - especially when discussed in the field of migration and work - refer usually to career professionals who do not migrate out of economic or political compulsion and for whom crossing borders leaves unchanged or even improves their professional and social status (Colic-Peisker, 2010, p. 468).

Nomadic identities are therefore particularly characterised by precariousness and contingency and for the population this papers deals with, that is, highly educated refugees, it is a pertinent identity-categorisation. In the following pages, I describe first the characteristics of highly educated refugees and why they can be considered as holding nomadic identities. Then by drawing on a research study on a group of highly educated refugees in the UK, I demonstrate: how the researcher can critically reflect on his/her own identities when interacting with participants who hold nomadic identities and analyse the dynamic discourses of power unfolding at different levels.

The nomadic identities of highly educated refugees

In the UN Refugee Convention of 1951, Article 1 Paragraph (2), the term Refugee is defined as any person: "Who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted of reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political

opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to return to it". Sometimes the term "refugees" refers to all displaced persons who have applied for asylum regardless of the outcome of their application. In this paper refugees are those granted by the UK Border Agency either Refugee status (as defined above) or ILR status (Indefinite Leave to Remain).

In the UK highly educated refugees (Psoinos, 2007) or professionally qualified refugees (Willott and Stevenson, 2013) (i.e. at university undergraduate level or above) can be considered as potential knowledge workers first, because research shows that on average, refugees arrive with relatively high educational qualifications and strong employment histories (Charlaff *et al.*, 2004; Kirk, 2004); and second because they fled their countries and have dynamically restarted their life in a completely new context, a decision which certainly suggests a resilient intra-individual profile (Psoinos, 2007, 2011). Yet despite refugees' potential to become and be regarded by the host society as knowledge workers they are far from holding this identity:

Refugees are consistently found to be the most unemployed or underemployed group in the UK (Bloch, 2007; Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; Tomlinson and Egan, 2002) despite having both explicit and tacit knowledge (i.e. formal qualifications and knowledge that comprises individual experience, respectively) as well as strong psychological resources. Discussing in detail the causes behind this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper but it is acknowledged that this population's employment-related problems stem from a combination of individual, group and structural factors (Bloch, 2007; Green, 2005).

Refugee employment barriers in the UK have been roughly classified into two categories, internal and external (Shiferaw and Hagos, 2002). The internal barriers are those for which refugees hold some responsibility such as inadequate knowledge of English (Bloch, 2002) or the issue of alien employment culture (i.e. the unfamiliarity of refugees with UK employment culture with regards to application forms and thus their difficulty in engaging in the conventional job search exercise) (Hack-Polay, 2008). There are also external barriers that are beyond their influence such as delayed recognition of refugee status, racism and discrimination by employers and recruitment agencies (Bloch, 2002). In the case of refugee women a double prejudice of racism and sexism has been suggested as one explanation for their high rates of unemployment and underemployment (Dumper, 2003).

Precisely because the above problems are intertwined it is clear that highly educated refugees, despite their resilience, cannot rely exclusively on themselves for coping with the whole range of problems which place them at continuous disadvantage.

Healy (2009) notes how gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability and age are critical factors when trying to explain the nature of inequalities in different countries and their organisations. Indeed, in highly educated refugees many of these features come into play – as mentioned above in the cases of racism and sexism - and render them more vulnerable to unequal treatment in many domains. Therefore highly educated refugees in some ways encapsulate the essence of a nomadic identity - always precarious, and persistently contingent.

Background: the study

Exploring how highly educated refugees in the UK perceive the relation between post-migration experiences and psychosocial well-being.

The aim of the study (for the purposes of allowing blinded review references from the study have been removed so that the author(s) are not identified) was to explore how highly educated refugees in the UK perceived the relation between their post-migration experiences (with an emphasis on employment-related experiences) and their psychosocial well-being. This aim was triggered after observing that the "vulnerable" and "passive" images are too often assigned to this group when discussing their psychosocial well-being, so it would be very interesting to understand how they would regard the latter.

The study consisted of two empirical parts: In the first one, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 highly educated refugees residing in the UK. The aim was to elicit their subjective theories regarding the relation between their post-migration experiences and their psychosocial well-being. In the second empirical part autobiographical narrative interviews were carried out with another group of fifteen highly educated refugees in the UK. The aim here was to elicit their narrative stories with regards to the same topic. For the purposes of this paper, the focus is on the second empirical part.

Research methodology

In this study a social constructivist epistemology was adopted, which assumes that knowledge is not a particular kind of product that exists independent of the knower, but an interaction process between people where meanings are socially negotiated (von Glaserfeld, 1991). This epistemological position is relevant to this study, which regards the participants' viewpoints as constructed through several social interactions in the different contexts they have been in since migrating to the UK.

People's viewpoints can be elicited through various qualitative methods such as "subjective theories", used by the participants to explain the world or "autobiographical narratives" that is, biographical trajectories reconstructed from the narrators' perspective (Flick, 2002, p. 18). The autobiographical narrative interview was chosen as the technique for the data collection.

The interviews were conducted with 15 highly educated refugees (nine men and six women) who were between 25 and 45 years old and originated from Africa, eastern Europe or the Middle East. They were highly educated (i.e. had a graduate or post-graduate-level degree or diploma) and came from different professional backgrounds (political scientists, arts or science teachers, IT officers, university lecturers, engineers). The participants were identified through the snowball technique, that is, four people were contacted through a local refugee support group and another agency, which gives advice and services to ethnic minorities residing in the area in the south-east of England where the interviewees were living.

All interviewees were informed that everything they would say would be kept strictly confidential and that the transcripts would be anonymous. Each interview lasted approximately one-and-half hour. After being interviewed, the initial participants were asked to introduce to the researcher more people who had the same demographic characteristics and might agree to take part in the project.

Interview agenda and analytic procedure

The narrative interview began by using the generative narrative question which refers to the topic of the study and intends to stimulate the interviewee's main narrative. The participants were asked to discuss their experiences starting from the time shortly before migration and continuing by talking about their life in the UK. The generative narrative question was followed by the stage of "narrative enquiries" where narrative

fragments, which were not exhaustively detailed before, are completed (e.g. probing the participants to discuss important issues such as employment-related experiences in the UK).

The first phase in the analysis of the narrative data consisted of repeatedly reading through the whole interview transcript in order to grasp the emerging significant topics. The second phase was to identify the three principal elements that can be found in every autobiographical narrative, that is, narrative tone, imagery and themes (McAdams, 1997).

Narrative tone is conveyed both in the content of the story and also the form in which it is told. For example, the tone can be predominantly optimistic or pessimistic. In addition every autobiographical narrative contains and expresses a characteristic imagery. In order to understand a narrative the researcher must explore the unique way in which the narrators employ meaningful images, symbols and metaphors to make sense of themselves but also others. Finally the researcher has to search for the dominant themes in one's autobiographical narrative for understanding what kind of message the narrators try to convey.

At the same time it was important to look at what (content) and how (form) it was said but also under which circumstances it was presented. Parker (2005) identifies certain ideas in narrative analysis holding the key to the way a story may be heard and retold by a researcher: temporality, event, context and format.

McAdams' (1997) analytic approach takes into consideration most of the above key ideas. The tone in his approach seems to correspond to the format Parker (2005) mentions, while imagery and themes seem to correspond to the events. Yet McAdams' approach belongs to the individually oriented versions of narrative research, which means that this approach highlights the importance of exploring the self through idiosyncratic stories, and gives less prominence to a narrative's contextual basis. Therefore it was crucial to include the dimensions of temporality (the order of telling) and context (the socio-cultural background where a narrative story is set).

Since it was of particular interest to see whether the participants would defy the images of the "vulnerable" and "passive" refugee, the interpretation phase began by tracing this "activism" in the narratives. It was detected primarily in the solutions/resources they said they used for coping with their problems. When narrative tone, imagery and themes were noted for all sections, those narratives focusing on activation of resources and strong life satisfaction were separated and the first story, i.e. the story of hope, emerged. The story of survival unfolded after clustering those narratives which focused on activation of resources yet combined with a modest sense of life satisfaction. Finally, the narratives that mentioned activation of resources but emphasised the inability to cope and concluded with a sense of life dissatisfaction produced the story of disappointment. The dimension of life satisfaction was a good way to distinguish between the three stories, as each group of participants appeared through their narratives as very satisfied, not entirely satisfied and unsatisfied, respectively. These stories were further analysed in terms of temporality and context. The main building blocks of each story can be summarised as follows (Table I).

The need for contextual analysis of the participants' perceptions

The above findings are important first because they had a personal value, as they provided meaning to people's lives. But every personal story can also be seen from a societal perspective. From the standpoint of society, to create and live a personal story is to connect to the grand narratives of one's social world, as stories are created through

Table I.
Summary of the main analytic elements in the three narrative stories

	Tone	Imagery	Themes	Temporality	Social and cultural context
Story of hope	Persistent optimism	Others in the community portrayed as helpful/self as dynamic, active and hopeful	Problems (housing, job and networking) and their solutions/others' help as catalytic/life satisfaction	Linear, problem-solution-sequence	Acknowledging positive interactions (with co-ethnics, colleagues, etc.). Not paying attention to current asylum discourse, focusing on the future
Story of survival	Ambivalent	Others in the community portrayed as helpful or unfriendly/self as persistent, strong, enduring	Problems (housing, job, networking) and solutions/ remaining problems (discrimination, etc.)/others' help as catalytic/satisfaction in some domains	Circular, problem-solution-problem that remained-sequence	Acknowledging positive but also noting some negative interactions. Choosing not to pay further attention to current negative asylum discourse
Story of disappointment	Negativity and pessimism	Compatriots portrayed as narrow minded or unhelpful/British as good but mainly unfriendly/self as strong in home country but disappointed in the UK	Problems (finding housing, proper job and social group)/how unhelpful others were catalytic in showing that problems would not be resolved/life dissatisfaction	Static, problem and how the problem was not resolved sequence, along with a negative evaluation	Pointing out negative interactions (with compatriots, local agencies, employers, etc.). Focusing on prevalent negative stereotypes

social interaction and lived in an active social context. Without this connection there is a danger that people's narratives will capture not much more than the recounting of past experiences and that the way lives are constructed in relations where exploitation and resistance are both present will be obscured (Newman, 1999). In the case of refugees, where power differentials between them and agents in the host society (such as local authorities, employers, as well as researchers) can silence their authentic voices (Muecke, 1992), the need to consider how the participants' own stories are linked to different contextual levels is particularly pressing.

Then it is important to see the participants' perceptions of the relation between their post-migration experiences and their well-being not in isolation, but in the context(s) where these perceptions were formed, as different social actors interacted. This allows for a critical reflection on the dynamic discourses of power at play and the ways in which different perceptions may co-exist and even clash with one another, with various consequences for the actors involved.

The different contexts are found at the immediate level, which refers to the direct interaction between the researcher and the interviewees; the community level, which concerns the interactions the participants had with others (e.g. compatriots, other refugees and British nationals they met in local organisations or at the workplace); and the macro-level, which refers to the interaction of the participants with stereotypes assigned to refugees in the UK.

In the next sections I explore how these different contexts largely influenced the shaping of the participants' perceptions. It should be clarified that in this analysis, the various contexts are not unproblematic external realities that, in a one-way direction, shape refugees' perceptions. When I explore, through the participants' accounts, how the various contexts influenced their perceptions, I am dealing with the participants' retrospective accounts of contexts and not independent observations of the latter. Consistent with the social constructivist paradigm, each presented account/quote emerges from the interplay between context and individual perception.

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

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

It should be noted that this intrusion of mine was not a one-dimensional affair as it also exposed me to the participants' scrutiny. For example, some participants asked whether I found it easy to live in a foreign country, as well as how difficult it was to be a

doctoral student in a well-known institution. At the same time a few participants approached me as a social resource to receive useful information. For instance, some refugees asked me if I knew other local organisations in the area where they could do volunteer work, while waiting to find full-time employment and a few others sought my advice about furthering their university education.

However, despite these aspects of reciprocity during the research process, I was constantly mindful of the dynamic discourses of power inherent in this process. Features of mine such as being white and female or social identities such as being a trained psychologist, a university researcher and volunteer in the local group which many participants turned to, inevitably put a distance between the participants and me thus, shaped how they responded to the research question. Then other characteristics of mine such as being foreign seemed to make some participants be more affiliated with me, but the fact that researcher and researched alike are non-British did not necessarily imply that our experiences and sense-making ways were similar, especially when ethnic and class attributes differ.

Also, when carrying out the narrative interviews, pre-conceived expectations about the data I needed sometimes interfered in the course of the interview. My influence on how the participants constructed their perceptions was seen when, for example I asked a participant who presented a story of survival to elaborate on "what has been good while living in the UK". The interviewee replied first by laughing and saying "Good, well […]", and then after a long pause, by talking about some positive things: "[…] Good thing is my daughter, and knowing the people who are the same as me, they have the same stories, the same background […] And also there are people still opening their door to us, not all people, but I know people who want to help other refugees, at least that's very good". But then she continued this narrative section by saying that "But I just can't say lots of things are very good, you know. There is not much experience I had of good things in here […]", a phrase which signified that her intention was not to talk about what has been good, and that she was prompted by me to add that dimension to her narrative.

It is therefore not uncommon that the researcher's expectations enter either into the research design and/or during interviewing resulting in a situation where the interviewees may be prompted to shift their narrative more towards the direction that the researcher has in mind.

In summary, the immediate context emerges as significant for the shaping of the autobiographical stories. Yet in order to explore further the context in which the participants formed diverse perceptions, it is important to look into another contextual level.

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

Individuals in their narratives capture the unique features of the historical moment and the socio-cultural context they find themselves in Denzin (2000). This is why it is important to reflect on how this broader context influenced how the participants formed their perceptions.

Throughout the narrative interview data the participants saw public perceptions of refugees in the UK as primarily negative. The interviewees discussed how they felt that the general public regard refugees as "useless", "lazy" and/or as "dangerous" and "terrorist threats", images assigned indeed to these groups in contemporary Britain.

A participant who presented a narrative of *hope* clearly discussed this: "[…] well nobody wants to live on handouts, nobody wants to be a refugee in the derogatory terms, like "people who abuse the systems and the benefits" and all that".

There was also a sense of frustration surrounding the issue of public perceptions and media portrayal of refugees in the UK and an observation that the ideas the public holds are unfair. The next quote from a participant who presented a narrative of survival describes this well:

> Some organisations think they are criminals, you know, all the newspapers always making some comment about people looking for asylum. I read about one shop-lifter, he was an asylum seeker and tried to steal a small thing, but nothing dangerous ok? One whole page for this and just a small information about a rapist, because the person was not foreign. I am just very angry sometimes […].

It is interesting that each of the groups who constructed the stories of hope, survival and disappointment, respectively, were also aware of the more particular negative images assigned to them: the first group who constructed a narrative of hope consisted of four interviewees of African ethnic origin. A stereotype in the western media usually assigned to refugees from Africa or other war-torn countries is that of the "vulnerable" and "useless" refugee (Gibney, 1999). By looking at the imagery and themes the participants used, it is obvious they were aware of the images assigned particularly to them. For example, a participant discussed how others often regarded refugees as "people who abuse the systems" and as "not worthy of a better life". Thus by incorporating in their story a narrative which highlights the dimensions of optimism and activism, they seemed to present a self that counters these negative images.

The second group consisted of two women originating from eastern Europe, and three women and two men originating from the Middle East. Another stereotype currently assigned to refugees is that of the "welfare scrounger" (Buchanan *et al.*, 2003), a stereotype assuming that these people are passive, but also willing to exploit what the host country offers so that they have an easier life. From the imagery and the themes the participants used one can see their awareness of these stereotypes. For example, when an interviewee discussed how locals regarded her, she noted that: "most people are friendly but you also meet very difficult people and it's not something you are used to in your country […] And you get people saying racist comments like, you know "if I was you I would first learn English and then work here" (female, teacher, eastern European).

Finally the third group of participants consisted of four men who originated from the Middle East. This group is in the contemporary western context, often widely perceived as a "burden to the host society" but also as a "dangerous" or even "criminal" population (Threadgold, 2006). The participants were also aware of such images applying to them as can be seen in the following quote: "They treat all the people who come to England as people who will exploit the system, like parasites, exploiting the system and taking what they got. That's how I actually felt when I first went there to apply for asylum" (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern).

The participants of this group were aware of the negative stereotypes assigned to them but by using a narrative of disappointment they emerged as too pessimistic and almost resigned from continuing to try to change this situation.

The negativity expressed through the pessimistic tone, the disappointment and withdrawal emerging from the imagery and the themes, the static way of narrating and the focus on the present but also on the past, conveyed the message that this group

did not try to counter the negative stereotypes assigned to them. These participants pursued neither the "hopeful and active" image nor the "enduring and hard-working" one. This observation then makes it necessary to explore the final level of the social context.

The perceptions held by me and the general discourse influenced how the participants made sense of the relation between their experiences and their well-being. However, they did not impact so immediately as the perceptions held by people they met at the community level, that is, in local organisations and agencies, ethnic communities who advise and support refugees and the workplace. This is why it is necessary to move to the community context, and see how the three narratives were shaped by it.

How the community context influenced the shaping of the participants' perceptions

There appeared to be two types of interaction between the participants and the local organisations they visited and consequently two ways in which these seemed to shape the way the participants formed their perceptions: Some interviewees acknowledged the help they received from such organisations and approved of the way they approach their refugee clients. In these cases these groups seemed to shape positively the way refugees perceived and evaluated their experiences. The following quote of a participant who presented a story of hope clearly shows how others in the community contributed to this shaping:

> After my second year in the UK I found out you can ask for medical help, information and stuff from local centers and organisations. I was initially cautious because the Home Office expect you to sustain yourself. So I was hesitant […] then I found out about a local community that helped refugees […] It's good to know they are there, it makes you feel you are not totally on your own (male, engineer, African).

But some other participants did not regard local organisations in a positive way and disapproved of the way they negatively predispose their clients. The following extract from a narrative of disappointment illustrates how others affected the participants' perceptions of their expectations and suggests that the way the local authorities approached the participant apparently formed his expectations about how life in the UK would be:

> When I visited the Home Office and applied for asylum, that was a very important experience for me, you know, in terms of contact with the outside world, and the government agencies. The experience was absolutely bad […] I don't know whether the staff there, people who work there have been chosen or whether they have become like that, you know, with time. They treat everyone, all the people who come to England as people who will exploit the system, like parasites. Later we had just problems. We had to be into contact with the local authorities and the City Council because we were living in a very small place, tactually living in a room, with the baby, you understand […] So we had to be in contact with the local authorities for the housing, actually the housing problem was very difficult to solve (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern).

The effect of the community-level context on the participants' perceptions can also be traced in the next quote where clearly interactions with others in their ethnic communities, shaped the participants' perceptions and evaluation of their post-migration experiences:

> […] Ethnic communities don't have power, political or governmental to do anything for you. Whatever they want to do. For example for hiring teachers in language schools, for many communities, African, Persian, Arab nations, ask them (and they will say) they don't have

> power to do anything and the Heads of them are English and then they, it depends, I am not saying that all of them are racist, but they can display racist feelings. Or if they compare between me and the English people of course the first choice will be English people and the second choice, will be me […] it is natural. But they have to offer to you that position, but they never do, it is difficult (male, researcher, Middle Eastern).

Finally, people at the workplace (i.e. either potential employers or co-workers) also emerged as having influenced the participants' perceptions of their employment-related experiences. For an interviewee who presented a story of hope, the interactions he had with others obviously shaped his perceptions of employment-related issues in the UK as well as his expectations regarding his future employment:

> I was looking for jobs after I finished my studies […] It took me months to find something, it was very difficult […] First of all you need to know the culture […] One big difficulty is that they tell you that you have to "sell yourself" while in our culture even if you have achieved a lot you don't boast. I found this difficult but I had to learn it […] Gradually the meaning of work for me changed. And I changed my priorities […] Being money-oriented is good but only for a while, I would not do it for much longer, that's not me (male, engineer, African).

Another participant narrating a story of survival seemed to have been influenced by her interaction with an organisation regarding her perceptions of employment-related prospects:

> The organisation I volunteered for later they employed me and it was a full-time post […] When I was a student I did various jobs, I worked in cafes, in restaurants, you know, I did cleaning, I had very little money so I had to cope, to stay alive […] Then I got that job because the organisation already knew me, so I had a very close contact with them so it was easy for them to take me. But I don't know whether I would have the same opportunity, whether I would be that lucky to have a full-time job (female, graduate in social sciences, Middle Eastern).

In addition the participant below discussed how a job centre influenced him into believing he would have serious difficulties in finding suitable to his qualifications-employment:

> We went to the Job Center and that was another not very nice experience. We filled in all the forms, lots of questions about what you did in the past, what you can do and what jobs you are looking for. I didn't speak the language but I was a graduate so I had different work experience before I came here […] And the advisor, because I did not speak the language, said there was no way that I am going to find a job I wanted or that I did in the past, I don't think she was in a position of saying this but she did. She said the only option available was to do washing-up in cafes and restaurants, not even work as a waiter […] That was another thing that was very difficult for us to deal with (male, graduate in political sciences, Middle Eastern).

Therefore, in the above discussion it is clear that the interviewees' perceptions were not created in isolation but in a set of dynamic power discourses. Several social actors were influential to the way highly educated refugees perceived their post-migration experiences: the immediate context played an important role on their willingness to be interviewed and on what they disclosed in the course of the interview. The negative stereotypes towards refugees in the UK seemed to affect the shaping of the stories of hope and survival, which emerged not as mere personal accounts, but rather as critiques of these public stereotypes. The community context and especially local organisations played an important role into how the third group created a story of disappointment. By deeming these participants' future employment opportunities as extremely limited and in general by discouraging them, these social actors seemed to play an important role into why this group perceived their experiences and well-being in a pessimistic way.

The third group of participants found themselves confronted by particularly hostile and negative attitudes, compared to the other two groups. They were confronted by suspicion not only from local agents but also from co-ethnics. Interestingly this subgroup consisted of young Muslim men of a Middle Eastern origin, a population which in the "islamophobic context" (Sheridan, 2006) is perceived as unwanted – even by compatriots who are all competing over limited resources – and is consistently marginalised (Weller *et al.*, 2001).

Then it is by far not a coincidence that these participants constructed the most pessimistic narrative and perceived so negatively their psychosocial well-being; the particularity of the discriminatory societal context they were living in and the consequent unequal treatment made all the difference to the way they formed their perceptions and expectations.

Conclusions

This paper was prompted by methodological calls for not necessarily looking at the dichotomous insider-or-outsider positioning of researchers (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Mullings, 1999). It was also prompted by general calls in social research for going beyond imbalances in researcher-researched relationships and reflecting on the political intentions for research and the practical implication of findings at the societal level (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Gillies and Alldred, 2002; Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006). Focusing on research with migrants who hold nomadic identities, the paper highlights the importance of researchers going beyond simple awareness of power relations between different agents and groups and critically reflecting on the multi-level dynamic discourses of power.

There is extensive theoretical work on how social researchers need to explore oneself, the other, the relation and the context of any study they participate in, if they aim to perceive who has relative power, involve others in the study and develop knowledge about them (Angrosino, 2005; Garmann Johnsen, 2010). The complexities of being a reflexive researcher (and convincing audiences of the value of this) especially in organisational settings have been thoroughly discussed (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005; Mahadevan, 2011). In this paper, the analysis focused on dynamic multi-level power discourses but also managed to reveal inequalities lurking at the organisational level. By exploring the distinctive narrative of disappointment and critically reflecting on the different power discourses and relations, it was possible to understand why the group of Muslim highly educated refugee men perceived their well-being differently than the other participants.

Moreover some of the actual dangers this disadvantaged group may face in real life can be identified. What emerges is that not only was this group treated differently, but probably also pushed to learn to expect this negative treatment as inevitable. This belief in inevitability can prompt them to blame themselves for the problems they experience. The above belief entails a very serious form of disempowerment. This is where internalised oppression (Griffin, 1997) or internalisation of deprivation (Hagan and Smail, 1997) may occur, whereby people come to believe the stereotypes about them are true, and may develop distress, low self-esteem and even behave in ways analogous to their stereotypes.

The analysis in this paper illustrated how the researcher can investigate migrant groups who hold nomadic identities. This is methodologically useful, as it demonstrates how a researcher can be critically reflexive in this field. It is also politically insightful and practically important because it reveals how and why certain

migrant groups may be disadvantaged and/or marginalised in organisational settings. In today's multicultural and multi-ethnic societies, "where there is variety of values, attitudes and beliefs, there is not necessarily a consensus about what people should have, should live or about what they should do" (Millar, 2007, p. 3), further research on the interplay between researcher, participants and prevalent discourses at the community and macro-level, with larger samples and mixed-methods approaches is urgently needed.

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About the author

Dr Maria Psoinos is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, at St George's, University of London and Kingston University where she has also worked as a Lecturer. She has held research and teaching posts in Cambridge University, UK, in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and in the American College of Thessaloniki. Her research interests include the psychosocial well-being of highly skilled migrants, discrimination at the workplace, equality and diversity in health and social care and qualitative research methodologies. Dr Maria Psoinos can be contacted at: M.Psoinos@sgul.kingston.ac.uk

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