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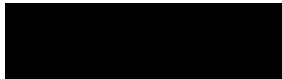
Signed: 

Dated: 28th October 2013

Experiences of African Refugees who Transition to University: A Question of Resilience

Mark Webb

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Science (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science, Edith Cowan University.

Submitted October 2013

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Experiences of African Refugees who Transition to University: A Question of Resilience

Abstract

First year transition to university for students' is associated with significant adjustment to tertiary education practices and environment. Universities are frequently considering ways to support and improve this transition for students inclusive of mainstream and equity target groups. African refugees are one equity group that prioritises education and are concurrently experiencing pre-migration trauma and acculturation stress. However we know little about their experiences of support in transition to university. The aim of this present study was to explore the meanings ascribed by African refugees to their experiences of social support in transitioning to university. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a sample of eleven refugees to gather data on their social support experiences in the transition to university. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data four major themes were identified: superordinate theme of resilience, which framed; pre and post migration impact; formal support and informal support. Interestingly, their optimism and resilience shaped their perception of social support and propelled them through the transition to university and acculturation process. Due to personal resilience and the desire to acculturate and be classified with mainstream students they were in less need and reticent of university support. Further research to understand refugee experiences of resilience, perceptions of support and equity are important for providing appropriate support in the first year transition to higher education.

Researcher: Mark Webb

Supervisor: Associate Professor Andrew Guilfoyle

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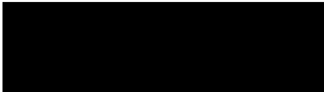
Signed: 

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Experiences of African Refugees who Transition to University: A Question of Resilience

Over the last two decades there has been exponential growth in the perceived significance and centrality of the transition experience for university success (Nelson, Smith, & Clarke, 2011). The result of this is a large body of research, practice and policy intended to improve students' transition experience with the objective to increase retention and the associated behaviour of engagement (Harryba, Guilfoyle & Knight, 2012; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005; McInnis, 2001). The current policy emphasis is on demographic subgroup differences particularly equity groups, such as refugees and those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Nelson et al., 2011). This approach acknowledges that policy and practice with respect to supporting the first year experience must reflect receptiveness to the distinctive experiences and needs of students from these subgroups (Krause et al., 2005). In addition, the need for in-depth qualitative data to complement the collection of statistical information on the first year student experience has been recognised. It provides a way of understanding the reasons and motivations, and identifying the experiences, needs and expectations of diverse demographic and cultural subgroups (Krause et al., 2005).

Refugees are an equity group with all the typical acculturation needs of migrants but whose lives have been characterised by experiences of war and crisis leaving them traumatised, displaced and fleeing their country of origin (Newman, 2012). Australia's humanitarian entrant's program assists those who have been forced from their country of origin and have been recognised as requiring protection from persecution or have been granted refugee status (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012). In the decade prior to 2007 immigration statistics showed African people (with over 80% between 16 and 35 years of age) made up the majority of the refugee and humanitarian intake in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2011). In addition to the war and violence in their country of origin, refugees experience difficult cultural dislocation and estrangement from

family and extended kin networks, which has a significant impact on their psychological wellbeing and functioning (Porter & Haslam, 2005; Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007). Research indicated that the pre and post-migration experiences of refugees are unique and complex advocating the need for further examination of relevant issues facing this vulnerable group during acculturation (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). In particular, an aspiration for higher education is one important acculturation issue suggested to be a priority of African refugees, as they perceive it as a means to provide a better future for themselves and their families (Ahmed, 2007; Sidhu & Taylor, 2009).

Critically, educational institutions have been found to be an important place for the hopes of young refugees to emerge and a powerful resource for refugee youth and their families (Cassity & Gow, 2005). Theoretically, it can be reasoned that educational institutions have a role to play in the provision of social support. For refugees attending university, full participation in studies and the campus community can lead to increased psychosocial wellbeing, student satisfaction, higher retention and graduation rates, consequently assisting them acculturate to the host country (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010). On the basis of this, the challenge is how to deliver adequate support, programs and resources needed to facilitate the learning and socio-cultural adaptations refugee students need to achieve in order to engage with university study and university life (Silburn, Earnest, De Mori, & Butcher, 2010). Despite the importance of these findings, very little is known about providing for the unique needs and successful transition of refugee students into tertiary study (Earnest et al., 2010; Olliff & Couch, 2005; Silburn et al., 2010).

In light of the aforementioned considerations the purpose of this present study is to explore the meaning African refugees ascribe to their experiences of social support in the transition to university, which will enable a deeper knowledge of the complexities involved in the transition for this vulnerable group. Firstly, the importance and factors associated with

the transition to university will be explored. Secondly, a brief overview of the current humanitarian program and pertinent refugee data in the Australian context will be outlined, providing a background for a review of the psychological impacts and resettlement experiences of refugees in Australia. This will incorporate the pre and post-migration traumas, displacement conditions and difficulties. The concept of acculturation and identity provides a known theoretical framework to understand the psychological and cultural changes refugees experience upon arrival in the host culture. Finally, the existing literature in relation to African refugee experiences of social support in transition to university will be discussed along with how the present study will add to this.

The First Year Transition to University

During the last ten years higher education has moved from elite to mass education (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Silburn et al., 2010). Associated with this growth has been an increase in the diversity of the student population. Universities now comprise students from different social and cultural backgrounds embodying different needs and experiences (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Silburn et al., 2010). As a consequence the challenge for universities is to recognise this diversity and provide for the needs of this changing and heterogeneous group of students (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). According to Clerehan (2003) the transition to university as a critical issue was considered more seriously by Australian educational institutions following the release of the commissioned report *First Year on Campus: Diversity in the Initial Experience of Australian Undergraduates* from McInnis, James and McNaught (1995). The report identified gaps between the students' and the universities' expectations and assumptions in relation to engagement and learning. The implication being that it was not only the students' "deficits" that were the cause of difficulties in engagement but the responsibility of both. Due to the combination of a greater awareness, better understanding of identified gaps and a more diverse range of students the

provision of support for students in their first and subsequent years is seen as critical for their success (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Tinto, 2006).

Australian research with first year university students indicated that early experiences on campus are significant as they are predictive of individuals maintaining perseverance in higher education (McInnis et al., 2000; McInnis et al., 1995; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001). This echoes worldwide interest in the significant levels of adjustment students need to make as they transition from school to the first year at university (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001). The literature supports the view that a large proportion of students are not engaged and do not remain at university due to adjustment issues or environmental factors, rather than academic difficulties (Tinto, 2006). Factors that are thought to drive the lack of engagement include; feelings of isolation, mismatch between university culture or the actual course and lack of clarity on the part of the student (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Tinto, 2006).

Furthermore, the student transition has been described in studies as principally the process of socialisation into university life and activities (McInnis, 2001). Researchers have found this initial first year process of socialisation considered by students as stressful, socially isolating and disappointing. This could be as a result of the confusion associated with the change in norms, customs, learning environment and methods (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Krause et al., 2005; McInnis, 2001). For non-English speaking student populations the stresses and anxieties are greatly intensified by adjustment to an additional range of interrelated factors (including language) surrounding acculturation (Berry, 2008).

This dual process of separation from existing environments and transition into the new social and academic community is what places the first year student at greatest risk of withdrawing from their university education (Hillman, 2005; Tinto, 2006). Research by McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) and Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) signified that unfavourable levels of social integration, academic performance and satisfaction with

university life have been acknowledged to be strong predictors of attrition from study. They have suggested effort needs to be concentrated in both social and academic spheres (which are mutually impacting) to achieve successful integration of first year university students (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Furthermore Hillman (2005) advocated for the collection of specific qualitative information on student's experiences and perceptions, in the social and academic domains of their first year, to provide a better understanding of course attrition.

As it appears that the transition of university students is one that is enduring, universities need to make adjustments and modifications to respond to the present-day cohort of university students. However, the needs and expectations in future cohorts are continually changing along with the broader social climate. Accordingly, the first year experience must be continually monitored in order to develop the programs and service delivery to engage and retain students (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001). So as to provide ongoing monitoring, Krause et al. (2005) suggested that systems be developed that incorporate sophisticated monitoring, investigation and analysis of the data. However, due to the diversity and complexity in the of student experiences this analysis needs to integrate, not only the metrics of attrition gathered, but also the experiences of students. Furthermore, the authors contended that in the interests of equity and impartiality that research investigation and analysis must encompass the entire student population, including all target groups, regardless of the size (Krause et al., 2005).

Australian universities have included a number of equity groups, which the federal government define under equal opportunity legislation as targets for equity planning in higher education (Silburn et al., 2010). These groups include the indigenous populations, those with disabilities, individuals residing in rural and isolated areas, women in non-traditional areas of study, the socioeconomically disadvantaged and people from non-English speaking backgrounds such as migrants and refugees. These groups have traditionally been disadvantaged or unfairly discriminated in their access to employment and educational

opportunities (Silburn et al., 2010). Universities monitor the transitions of these groups in order to improve their access, participation, retention and success during their studies (Clerehan, 2003). However it is postulated these groups are at risk of further marginalisation as the majority of transition programs in universities target the first year cohort as a whole, rather than particular equity groups separately (Clerehan, 2003). After examining the plight of refugee university students O'Rourke (2011) concluded that treating everyone the same could be discriminatory, advocating for separately targeted programs as the means of equitable access to university education. One point that is critical to understanding the transition to university for refugees is to appreciate the context of their pre and post-migration conditions, which is reviewed below.

Resettlement of Refugees

Australia offers a Refugee and Humanitarian Program that facilitates the approval and resettlement of refugees as part of Australia's overall immigration plan. There are approximately 13,500 humanitarian entrants granted visas each year with about 25% aged between 10 and 19 years (DIAC, 2012). Recently the Australian government announced a 40% increase in humanitarian entrants to 20,000 annually, which is the largest increase in over 30 years (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, 2012). Although the number of entrants under Australia's humanitarian program remains relatively consistent, the scope and focus changes depending on the evolving dynamics of humanitarian situations worldwide (DIAC, 2012). In the five year period from 2002 to 2007 immigration statistics indicated 33,696 African entrants comprised the majority of the refugee and humanitarian intake into Australia. Of those entrants 68% were under the age of 26 with most (45%) under the age of 16 (DIAC, 2011). More recently, in 2010-2011 entrants from Africa still made up the third largest (25.2%) granted visas (DIAC, 2011).

Studies have postulated that refugee and asylum seeking youth and young adults place a high priority on education; as a consequence the demographic profile of African refugee entrants suggests that most will be of an age to be participating in secondary and tertiary education (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Gladwell, 2011; Save the Children UK, 2009; Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Further research conducted with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the aspirations of adolescent refugees and asylum seekers indicated that their priorities were to commence their education as soon as possible with the intention of reaching and attending university (Brownlees & Finch, 2010; Refugee Support Network, 2010).

Research has suggested that African refugees have a strong cultural aspiration towards tertiary education despite it being unlikely to be available to them (Ahmed, 2007; Dooley, 2009). As a result of fleeing the violence, deprivation and denial of basic human rights in their country of origin, the asylum granted to them in Australia enables them to access education that previously was not available (DIAC, 2008). Despite cultural differences between the diverse countries that make up the African continent there are many convergent cultural factors. The African countries share mutual collectivistic, hierarchical and patriarchal societal values. They have a common history of poverty, political and civil unrest with resultant deprivation and yet, a deep respect for education, family, community and religious beliefs (Dooley, 2009). According to DIAC (2008) the large proportion of African refugees in Australia represents a significant humanitarian group, and therefore, their experience of acculturation and transition to higher education will be the focus of this study.

Pre-migration Factors

Many African refugees have been exposed to traumatic events including torture, rape or sexual abuse, violations of basic human rights, food scarcities and devastation of homes and villages in their country (Schweitzer et al., 2006). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) these experiences represent an accurate account of

events in Africa, where many of the world's conflicts are currently occurring (UNHCR, 2007). Importantly over 20% (and rising) of the world's refugees are residing in Africa (Onyut et al., 2009).

There is considerable research into the detrimental effects of traumatic pre-migration factors on the psychological wellbeing and physical health of refugees (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006; Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Porter & Haslam, 2005; Schweitzer et al., 2007). Schweitzer et al. (2006) reported that the types of pre-migration trauma to which refugees are often exposed centres around human rights violations, torture and systematic violence. Unlike single-event traumas these are often interrelated and generally cumulative. These multiple traumas challenge refugees' sense of empowerment, identity and meaning in life. Schweitzer and colleagues contended that a positive correlation exists between trauma and the level of psychological stress among refugees, with those experiencing three or more traumas being at risk of increased mental health issues. A limitation noted by the authors however relates to the reliance on questionnaire responses to identify probable mental illness.

In addition, to the feelings of profound loss and multiple traumas Milner and Khawaja (2010) noted that the subsequent unplanned and often dangerous passage to seek refuge could significantly compound the psychological distresses already experienced. In a meta-analysis of 59 independent studies, which assessed the extent of any impairment in mental health of refugees, Porter and Haslam (2005) found the magnitude of the psychological consequences and depth of adversity of the refugee experience to be significant. Similarly, the study found the refugee experience is unlike survivors of most isolated traumatic events as it involves various stressors that accrue over the pre-flight, flight, exile, and resettlement periods. In particular, refugees experience enduring post-migration stress including marginalisation, socioeconomic difficulty, acculturation stresses, loss of social support and cultural grief.

In the Australian context research by Sidhu and Taylor (2009) found that African refugees who were granted asylum have significant pre-migration experiences of multiple trauma. These include torture and trauma, deprivation and poverty, high incidence of health issues and extended periods of containment in refugee camps. Thus, suggesting a greater need for settlement support than refugees from previous source regions (Sidhu & Taylor, 2009). Department of Immigration and Citizenship supports this view, noting that emerging African communities in Australia have higher settlement needs due to the severity of the pre-settlement experiences, displacement and long-term residency in refugee camps (DIAC, 2008). It has been suggested by Fazel et al. (2005) that refugees who have resettled in developed countries such as Australia, are up to 10 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), than the age matched general population of the host country. This potentially disabling condition, which is a risk factor for substance use and suicide, can also lead to long-term functional impairment in resettlement (Fazel et al., 2005).

In contrast, evident in contemporary research is a questioning of the pervasiveness of the western medical model that places refugee experiences of trauma in the terrain of psychopathology. Asserting that the trauma narrative rather than a normal reaction to abnormal events often obscures refugee strength and resilience (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012).

Post-migration and Acculturation Framework

The concept of acculturation provides the most comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the process of resettling and transitioning to university for refugees. Acculturation is both diverse and multidimensional in nature and occurs across many domains. It is influenced by a number of factors including the features of the acculturating community, the individual’s demographics and psychosocial profile and the differences between the cultural values of their country of origin and host country (Berry, 2005, 2008;

Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Sam & Berry, 2010). The acculturation process involves psychological and cultural change as a result of the contact between two disparate cultures and individuals from those cultures. Additionally the rate and degree of acculturation varies between individuals (Berry, 2008; Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Sam & Berry, 2010; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Upon resettling, refugees and migrants usually modify or adapt their beliefs, values and behaviours, as they incorporate the social and cultural norms of the dominant culture (Berry, 2005, 2008). There are a number of acculturation strategies that could be adopted such as rejection of their existing culture (from their country of origin) and assimilation with the host culture. They could also retain their original culture whilst integrating and adopting the new culture, or reject the new culture and withdraw in an attempt to preserve the original culture. However this strategy risks marginalisation of one or both cultures (Berry, 2005, 2008; Khawaja & Milner, 2012).

The term adaptation is considered a consequence of acculturation with the level of adaptation based on the degree to which individuals manage sociocultural integration and attain psychological wellbeing (Sam & Berry, 2010). Conversely, some refugees and migrants do not reach a level of adaptation as they experience difficulty, personal resistance and stress in an attempt to incorporate new values and behaviours from the host country, and modify or dismiss ones from their country of origin (Berry, 2005, 2008). This difficulty and resistance together with its psychological impact is referred to as acculturation stress and can affect the physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing of individuals. It is commonly expressed in the form of emotional outburst and reactions, adjustment issues and tense relationships, which is often aggravated by a lack of social support and a sense of isolation (Berry, 2005, 2008; Poppitt & Frey, 2007). Acculturative stress can be further complicated in adolescent refugees in the context of dual cultural membership as they struggle with issues of

identity formation during normative developmental changes (Earnest et al., 2010; Sam & Berry, 2010).

Moreover, during the acculturation process an individual's deepest loyalties to their original culture are challenged by such changes as diet, language, and social interaction norms amongst family and the mainstream community. Subsequently, this source of stress can adversely affect overall wellbeing including normal functioning and decision-making (Berry, 2010; Sam & Berry, 2010). A divergent view as to the sources of acculturative stress proposed by Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, and Westoby (2003) are that frustrations from political and economic barriers, which prevent individuals from making meaningful changes to their social environment add to the stress. Various studies have indicated that for post-conflict refugees the legacy of pre-migration trauma is overlaid on the complex acculturation and adjustment process, resulting in multiple stressors being experienced. Many of these refugees have exhibited high prevalence rates of both PTSD and depression, which can last for years after the contributing incidents have passed (Berry, 2010; Onyut et al., 2009).

Broad divergent differences in societal norms and values are particularly challenging in the acculturation process. For instance, African culture is predominantly hierarchical, authoritarian and patriarchal with explicit gender roles (Hebbani, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2010). In contrast, although Australia supports racial diversity the mainstream culture is largely individualistic in nature with the individual understood to be autonomous and independent, with gender balance and power mostly distributed proportionately (Milner & Khawaja, 2010). Resettlement in a host country like Australia with a dissimilar culture, norms and value system, can create a sense of isolation, confusion, frustration and disempowerment (DIAC, 2008). Milner and Khawaja (2010) contended that the change from a collectivistic, hierarchical and patriarchal culture to an individualistic and a democratic society is strongly associated with acculturation stress. Consequently, the unique and complex pre and post-

migration experiences of African refugees requires further consideration (Dooley, 2009; Sidhu & Taylor, 2009).

Priority for Education

Although there are many diverse African cultures and languages there is a shared set of collective values that include a respect for education, a responsibility to place, family, community, religious beliefs and a strong work ethic (Ahmed, 2007; Cassity & Gow, 2005). Notwithstanding this diversity, the mutual reverence for education (with teachers held in high esteem) and the hope of a bright future arising from this, are important points of commonality across the continent (Dooley, 2009; Olliff & Couch, 2005). Throughout intense conflicts African refugees have sustained a motivation for a better future. The journey to find asylum and security with the opportunity for education and work to support their families is an extremely strong African hope and value (Ahmed, 2007; Dooley, 2009). Once they have arrived in Australia and begun resettling, education becomes one of the most critical post-migration priorities, in order to provide a better future for themselves and their families (Ahmed, 2007; Dooley, 2009). In addition to education being a strong priority for many African refugees, it can also play a central role in nurturing the mental health and wellbeing of refugee students, providing stability and helping them to belong (Sidhu & Taylor, 2009; Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma, 1996, 2002; Woods, 2009).

African Refugees who Transition to University in Australia

There is a growing body of research focused on international students and migrant populations transitioning to higher education in Australia, but only limited research on African refugee experiences in tertiary education (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori & Silvagni, 2010; Silburn et al., 2010). Studies investigating the transition for international students and migrant populations have identified that despite challenges in language and learning environment adjustments, positive social support and acculturation experiences in the host

country are associated with better academic progress, positive engagement on campus and reduced attrition (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; McInnis, 2001). These positive social experiences are relevant for equity groups, such as refugee populations and indigenous groups and are notable issues to be explored during their transition to university (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009).

A study by Earnest et al. (2010), conducted in Victoria and Western Australia, aimed to specifically address the paucity of research in relation to refugees from Africa and the Middle East at university in Australia. Earnest et al. observed that, in relation to social support refugee students relied on informal social networks, generally of their own culture or background. These networks were considered pivotal in shaping and supporting their decisions at university, regardless of whether they were connected on campus or not. They found African and Middle Eastern refugees were motivated and ambitious towards their education, career goals, and desire to fulfil their ambitions, regardless of the difficulties associated with starting and completing their university degree. These refugees were determined to complete their studies, increasing in confidence with each issue or difficulty they overcame. They were inspired by the enhanced career prospects and the sense of pride being the first in their families to obtain a university degree. The authors note the study did not include comparative information on students' academic performance (Earnest et al., 2010).

Earnest et al.'s (2010) research results echoed the findings of Brough et al. (2003) and Cassity and Gow (2005) who reasoned that community development approaches to building formal and informal social supports that connect refugee students with others (including academic and support staff) are critical for the success and retention of refugee students. Similarly Silburn et al.'s (2010) study documenting the experiences, needs and perceptions of refugees, highlighted the extraordinary resilience of students in commencing and completing

their studies despite multiple stressors and barriers. They found their application and commitment to their education unquestionable and vital to their success. Additionally, the study recommended that the design of teaching and learning programs should include the aspirations of students from refugee backgrounds. It was understood that this would enable the equitable recognition and acknowledgement of the different learning needs of this cohort amongst all students (Silburn et al., 2010).

Research conducted by Onsando and Billett (2009) examined African refugee students' experiences of learning at Australian Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions. They identified that despite being in a safe environment, students still face racial discrimination and social exclusion. They also encountered pedagogical practices that did not recognise their socio-cultural backgrounds and refugee life experiences. The authors found that when African students were placed in socially inclusive learning environments they engaged more fully and benefited further from their educational experiences (Onsando & Billett, 2009). To illustrate the importance, Cassity and Gow (2005) and Woods (2009) reported that a study of young Southern Sudanese refugees in Western Sydney identified that educational institutions can be a stabilising feature in the unsettled lives of refugee young people. The authors found that the educational institutions act as safe places where students are able to reconcile the trauma of forced migration, and make the transition to belonging and building relationships, developing cohesion and becoming socially responsible in a multiracial Australia.

Research by Brown, Miller, and Mitchell (2006) in a study and analysis of experiences of Sudanese students in two Victorian secondary schools, revealed that refugee students are eager to engage with the regular academic and social practices within classrooms and schools. Despite the students' motivation to participate fully they were disadvantaged due to their inability to meet language and literacy expectancies within the curriculum

framework and pedagogical practices. This finding highlighted the importance of language and educational attainment for academic and social inclusion at educational institutions (Brown et al., 2006).

To further illustrate the importance of the role of social support and inclusion in the African refugee experience, Naidoo (2009) conducted ethnographic research at the University of Western Sydney to explore the relative success of community engagement programs for refugee tutoring. It was found that African refugee students prioritised university as the most accessible means for upward mobility and developing cultural competence and social capital consistent with Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital. Furthermore, it was found that these learning communities were the most personally transformative and empowering educationally. Similarly, one of the most significant findings from Dooley's (2009) study was that the building of social capital through formal and informal social networks was the most important factor in supporting African refugees into education. Refugees could thereby overcome the immense disadvantages and deficit expectations of a minority group and find good future prospects in the modern knowledge based society. Other studies concurred with these findings suggesting that the securing of new learning, academic understanding and capacity enables refugees the opportunity to move beyond their adversity and engage more productively in social and economic life (Naidoo, 2009; Onsando & Billett, 2009). The Australian literature reviewed provides insight into the diverse and complex range of issues encountered by African refugee students and the importance of social support as a mediating factor for resettlement and transition at university.

Social Support

Social support is broadly defined in the literature as positive regard from others, which can be conveyed as a combination of instrumental (source of information and problem-solving) and emotional (source of comfort) support (Bernardon, Babb, Hakim-Larson, &

Gragg, 2011; Cutrona, 1990). Social support is suggested to be a buffer against the negative effects experienced in periods of change. Foundational to the wellbeing of all refugees is the establishment of social support and a sense of belonging in resettlement (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Types of social support include being with a supportive family, belonging to one's ethnic community and building positive relationships with the wider host population (Olliff & Couch, 2005). Therefore this highlights the need for opportunities at university for the wider family and ethnic community to be involved, which are fundamental for building social networks and a sense of belonging (Chavis et al.,1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Correa-Velez et al., 2010).

In a study of first year students in the United States both a positive relationship between social support and optimism and a negative association between social support and depression and stress was found (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002). The authors' findings indicated that social support represents a means through which optimism is linked with better adjustment to stressful life events, thereby decreasing levels of stress and depression. The results suggested that a supportive social network promotes adjustment and adaptation to stressful life events by encouraging students to perceive their circumstances as less threatening. In addition, the perceived social support may have directly influenced students' efforts to better cope with obstacles at university and their emotional responses to those obstacles. The authors' caution in interpreting the findings until further replicated as this is a first study demonstrating these associations (Brissette et al., 2002).

Studies into the complexity of various aspects of social support such as support-seeking behaviours, assessment of support received, and the means by which support works for diverse groups of refugees is limited (de Anstiss, Ziaian, Procter, Warland & Baghurst, 2009; Rickwood et al., 2005; Stewart et al., 2008). However those studies that have

investigated the effect of social support as a buffer for acculturative stress with refugees have found it to be effective. For instance, Schweitzer et al.'s (2006) study of African families from the Sudanese community found that social support at an emotional and instrumental level was found in family, extended family and social groups within their cultural context. These supports were of particular salience in determining psychological wellbeing whereas the wider community support was not as meaningful. In another study of 120 refugees from Somalia and China the findings indicated that social support not only influence refugees' feelings of belonging or isolation, but also facilitates instrumental support by contact with information providers, goods and services in the new culture and their country of origin (Stewart et al., 2008).

It is suggested in the previous literature that perceived social support could be a mediator of adjustment and adaptation, whereas the lack of social support might lead to feelings of isolation and stress. African refugees, as a traditionally collectivist culture dependent on a strong extended kinship, are particularly at risk as a consequence of their forced displacement and loss of extended family. Accordingly, it is likely that transitioning to university whilst in the process of acculturation would be difficult without their extended social networks. Therefore it is important to consider refugee's perceptions of social support to understand the effectiveness and protective function throughout their acculturation and transition (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003).

Rationale

Although there is important research that provides some understanding and insight into mainstream, ethnic, and migrant students' experiences there are minimal studies exploring various refugee populations' differentiating experiences in the Australian context (Earnest et al., 2010; Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Novera, 2004). There are also limitations concerning research that distinguishes between refugees and other migrants who, although

they both face many similar challenges, also have needs unique to their own situation (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). For example, refugees face more challenges than typical international and migrant populations due to their pre-migration experiences, trauma and asylum-seeking journey (Novera, 2004; Olliff & Couch, 2005). Overall there is a paucity of specific studies concerning the African refugee population in Australia, more specifically Western Australia, and their transition to university (Dooley, 2009).

The purpose of the present study is to qualitatively explore the ascribed meanings of African refugees who transition to university and their experiences of the social support they encountered in Western Australia. Based on a review of the literature, the challenges of negotiating the transition to university will be explored in the context of resettlement and the dissimilar cultural norms with respect to their host society. The use of qualitative methodologies was considered beneficial by providing an opportunity for students to voice their experiences and meaning of social support in this context, which will provide a better understanding of their expectations, intentions and motivations in relation to these factors. Therefore, the research question is "What meaning do African refugee students ascribe to their experiences of social support in the transition to university?"

Research Design

Methodology

The research question was investigated within the epistemological context of social constructionism, as the individual's understandings of their experiences and ascribed interpretations of social support systems, are assumed to be a reality they construct in the context of their unique social and cultural framework (Gergen, 1985; Liamputtong, 2009). The research methodology utilised for this study is interpretative phenomenology as it originates from an epistemological position of social constructionism, which has at its core the fundamental view that there are multiple perspectives of reality, derived and given

meaning by individuals experiencing it within their cultural and social context (Gergen, 1985). The purpose of interpretative phenomenology is to explore and describe the ascribed meaning of participants' experiences or their personal connotations to experiences (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Interpretative phenomenology incorporates within its approach a series of theoretical frameworks including phenomenology, hermeneutics, and social interactionism and each of these will help to answer the research question (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Firstly, this study will be phenomenological in its concern with detailed examination of the participant's "lifeworld" and personal perception or explanation of their "experiences" as opposed to producing their experiences as an "objective" object or event (Smith, 2004). Qualitative methods such as interpretative phenomenology were considered appropriate for gaining insight into their experiences of being a refugee entrant and also a university student.

Secondly, it will be hermeneutic as developed by Heidegger (1962) to contrast with descriptive phenomenology established by Husserl (Creswell et al., 2007; Laverty, 2003; Shepherd, Reynolds, & Moran, 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2008), and is fully and sincerely interpretative as it endeavours to understand the substance of an experiential phenomenon in a complete way. The intent was to focus on the participant's interpretation about their experiences and the researchers own theoretical structures to make sense of their interpretations (Shepherd et al., 2010). The interpretative phenomenological enquiry will draw on hermeneutic principles and seek to understand how refugees were placing themselves in their individual lifeworld of university transition, and how they experienced these transitions, which are essential to the underlying essence of their experience of social support in the transition to university. Finally, this interpretative phenomenology influenced by symbolic interactionism is interested in how refugees ascribe meanings that are

constructed by their social and personal world and how they act on those meanings (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Furthermore, Gadamer (1975) drawing on the use of “horizon” found in Heidegger’s (1962) theories, supposed that descriptions of phenomena symbolise the “fusion of two horizons” that takes place between the participant and researcher’s understanding and interpretation of meaning as part of the hermeneutic reflection in this study. The researchers own interpretations have shaped how data was collected through questions and probes and then interpreting the participant’s sense making; certainly the refugees were the experts in interpreting their experiences, however the insight gained by the researcher through reflexive practice is the integration of interpretations from researcher and participant (Creswell et al., 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The application of this methodology is congruent with the epistemological position; theoretical framework and methodologies used demonstrating theoretical rigour and consistency.

Participants

Refugee populations are known to be vulnerable and difficult to reach due to a range of factors including political, social and logistical elements (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011, 2013). Therefore with the assistance of the Rwandan Diaspora Association of WA, local refugees were informed about the research and interested participants were recruited. In addition, snowball sampling was used with participants recommending other participants who fulfilled the study’s criteria, these were contacted and if interested were subsequently recruited (Liamputtong, 2009).

Following this process, criterion sampling to gain a homogenous sample was used to recruit a purposive sample of 11 Rwandan refugees (7 male, 4 female) who have experienced trauma and had completed the first year at university. A homogenous sampling technique was important to address the research question, with the aim to select those African refugees who

share a similar background, experience and culture in the context of transitioning to university. Despite many similarities in the 50 countries that comprise Africa there are regional differences within each country that could mean that participants may have different experiences (Dooley, 2009; Liamputtong, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). All the refugees were identified as Rwandan and shared a collectivistic, hierarchical and patriarchal culture, with similar pre-migration trauma through war and displacement, and placed a strong priority on education. Homogenous sampling is congruent with the epistemological and theoretical framework as it is a method shared with interpretative phenomenology and evidences theoretical rigour and adequacy by focussing on a sample that share a similar context and experience (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002).

The leaders within the Rwandan community's involvement in the communication of the research aims, purpose and methods helped create a safe context for the recruitment of suitable participants to be interviewed. This approach incorporated respect for the collectivist nature of the Rwandan people on a community level throughout the gathering of data (Rodriguez-Jimenez & Gifford, 2010).

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested a sample size of between three and ten participants is adequate for the identification of prospective themes consistent with the aims of phenomenological research. Additionally, Shepherd et al. (2010) and Smith and Osborn (2008) recommended that homogenous sample of this size enables an in-depth idiographic analysis and integrated meaning to be established.

Materials

An information letter was given to prospective participants with the specifics of the study prior to participation (see Appendix A). Following this an informed consent form was distributed to interested participants prior to the interview in order to obtain consent to begin the interview (see Appendix B). The interview protocol (see Appendix C) comprised five

open-ended questions for the interview. In accordance with interpretative phenomenology interview questions were non-directive and largely open-ended in order to gain in-depth responses (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Multiple probes were used where needed to allow for expansion and further exploration into central areas of interest identified by the literature, for example "That is interesting. Can you tell me more about that?"

In addition to the interview protocols, to aid accurate recall of responses during the data analysis stage, a digital audio recorder was used. This augments the accuracy and enhances the credibility of the data analysis. The recording also allowed the researcher to focus exclusively on the participant and their voiced experiences, rather than on the later transcription (De Witt & Ploeg, 2006). Moreover, extensive note taking, and reflexive journaling was undertaken spontaneously throughout the entire research process to record thoughts and reflections in the form of a journal account; for example, the process of hunches and emotional reactions to the process of data collection (see Appendix D). Finally, a list of contact details for counselling and other support services was offered to participants subsequent to each interview (see Appendix E).

Procedure

A process of building trust and rapport with the Rwandan community leaders ensured the research was conducted in an ethical and culturally sensitive manner creating evaluative and procedural rigour. The researcher had established contact with members of the Rwandan Diaspora Association of WA as a result of conducting pro bono work in Rwanda in 2007 and 2011. Vulnerable populations are considered extremely fragile and need to be treated with the highest ethical standards (Liamputtong, 2009). At a meeting with leaders of the association the proposed research was explained and discussed to ensure questions were culturally appropriate and not likely to cause any distress. This discussion helped in establishing rapport

and trust in the relationship between the researcher and the participants' community demonstrating respect for the collectivist norms and values.

Consequently, the leaders indicated they were willing to promote the research to all their members at an official meeting to commemorate the genocide of 1994, which provided an opportunity to reach an often inaccessible and thus understudied populace. After this offer, ethical approval was sort and received from the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee. Following ethics approval, the researcher attended and participated in the commemoration ceremony and was given an opportunity to provide information on the research to those who might meet the criteria. Subsequently, willing participants met with the researcher who provided further information and consent forms regarding the research. Providing this information early allowed participants adequate time for any questions and to consider their willingness to participate, prior to the commencement of the study.

Following confirmation of informed consent and confidentiality of information, individual interviews were conducted with eleven participants' at a mutually acceptable time, and in a location they felt comfortable (e.g., six took place in participants' homes, five at café's near participant's homes). All interviews were digitally recorded and being sensitive to the lives of participants took their natural course in duration with interviews running between 37 and 114 minutes (Liamputtong, 2009). The interview protocol guided discussion, with questions that were semi-structured and open-ended to gather information. This process allowed both the centrality of the research question to be explored and the interview to remain adaptable and open to modification throughout; probes were also used to gain more in-depth information (Liamputtong, 2009). Data collection and analysis was performed simultaneously as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008) with saturation of the data fulfilled and evidenced upon completion of the eleventh interview making further sampling redundant (Fossey et al., 2002; Liamputtong, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Throughout all interviews, the researcher checked with participants that their understanding of responses accurately reflected their intended meanings. At the completion of all interviews, participants were debriefed, thanked for their participation and provided with a list of available support and counselling services (Appendix E). From the commencement of the study until the completion of data analysis the researcher engaged in an ongoing reflexive practice of journaling and note taking, documenting thoughts and observations, which consequently aided in both increasing self-awareness and maintaining openness to the co-construction of the study (Shepherd et al., 2010).

Comprehensive record keeping and an audit trail were established to document the progress of the study (Liamputtong, 2009). All data including transcripts, notes, journals and digital recordings were kept in the researcher's secure facility throughout the data analysis. Subsequently, all forms of data will be held in secure facilities and will be destroyed following a period of five years.

Data analysis.

Data analysis commenced with the digital recordings of individual interviews being transcribed verbatim in such a way as to maintain the style, meaning and voice of the participants'. The transcripts were then read and re-read several times to enable deep understanding of thoughts and feelings about the meanings of support made by each participant to create an idiographic image that expresses the richness and in-depth understanding of each ones experience before moving on to examine the others, case by case (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This recursive process enabled immersion in the data as advocated by Crotty (1998), which together with the reflecting and reviewing of the researchers notes and observations forms a hermeneutic circle of understanding (Smith, 2004). This reflexive practice engages a double hermeneutic, appreciating the interaction with the participant trying to make sense of their world whilst the researcher is trying to make sense of the

participant trying to make sense of their world. The integration of these interpretations as a form of triangulation allows interpretive rigour to be built. By noting these observances and convergences of themes and meanings from different data sources, a broader perspective and comparison is built into the analysis of the data (Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The researcher then undertook a holistic integrative approach to the texts identifying significant statements, key words, sentences and rich descriptions for highlighting and selective coding into meaning units that reflected the experiences and ascribed meanings. Following this, a writing process grouped meaning units into thematic clusters. They were then arranged together and ordered into issues, themes and sub-themes (Edward, Welch, & Chater, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008; West, Stewart, Foster, & Usher, 2012). The researcher then reviewed the data analysis and themes with the research supervisor in order to reach a consensus on analysis and themes to ensure integrity and trustworthiness of the method (De Witt & Ploeg, 2006; Finlay, 2009; West et al., 2012).

Finally, member checking was employed to ensure the themes that were identified were checked with the participants so as to correspond to the information provided, thus increasing interpretive rigour by establishing credibility (Kitto et al., 2008). Face-to-face reviews with three participants were conducted to review the final interpretations of the main themes and sub-themes in the data transcripts thus confirming that they accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Although no new data emerged participants voiced strong support for the final interpretations and further clarified and expanded on meanings, which aided in a comprehensive and well-validated understanding, which is both rich and credible.

Findings and Interpretations

The African refugee participants in the study willingly shared their experiences of social support and the meanings they ascribed in their transition to university in an Australian

context. The participants provided rich and meaningful accounts of how much the perception of support had given them a basis to commence and attain their university education. Participants discussed the impact their pre-migration experiences and trauma had on their health and wellbeing in the transition and resettlement. The analysis identified it was their personal resilience and optimism that framed their experiences of support, coping and adaptation.

Table 1

Superordinate Theme, Themes and Sub-themes of Experiences of African Refugees who Transition to University

Superordinate Theme	Superordinate Sub-theme
Resilience	Strong and Determined Gratitude Personal Choice Provide a Future
Themes	**Sub-themes**
Pre and Post Migration Impact	Trauma Acculturation Stress Language and Accent Difficulty Sense of Discrimination
Formal Support	Settlement Support University Support Relevant Support
Informal Support	Family, Extended Family and Friends Fragmented The Paradox of Community Support

Four major themes were identified: superordinate theme of resilience, which framed; pre and post migration impact; formal support and informal support. Within these four

themes, a number of sub-themes were apparent in the discourse of the students as they gave meaning to their lived experiences, shown in Table 1.

Resilience

Overall there was a strong sense of determination and optimism in all the participants, which framed the context in which they viewed support. Despite the trauma and hardship from pre and post-migration factors that were openly acknowledged, there seemed to be a desire to integrate and contribute *"to catch up"* in their host country and if possible, assist extended familial and community networks in Rwanda. A number of participants also voiced, *"I want to do something"* to influence Rwanda at a macro level through public policy development or involvement in academic institutions. They reflected immense gratitude at being granted asylum in Australia and were optimistic about the opportunity to start a new life. This finding supports research by Poppitt and Frey (2007) where a striking optimism was found in their analysis of the interviews with an African group of adolescents from Sudan. This optimism was found to be a crucial aspect to the adolescents' perception of coping and wellbeing. According to other research, positive affect (e.g., optimism in the future) is acknowledged as improving the adaptive function of coping (Brough et al., 2003; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Essentially in the present study, participants were so focussed on their achievement needs that they were self-driven rather than support seeking in their orientation. A number of sub-themes emerged relating to strong and determined, gratitude, personal choice, and provide a future.

Strong and determined. The sampling approach was validated whereby all participants had suffered significant pre-migration trauma, in addition to the acculturative stress associated with adapting to the language and Australian cultural norms and values. Despite the trauma and acculturative stress they all expressed how strong and determined they were to make the most of their new life as illustrated in the following:

> *When you go through such terrible things ... it makes you strong ... so I did not rely on anyone ... in my mind I said 'I came here all the way ... I can't say I can't make it!!*

A number of participants expressed a desire to "*quickly get on with it and catch up on what they had lost"* or were deprived of previously. One refugee reported, "*Rwandan people are strong and determined ... we will achieve*." Others further supported this stating:

> *I think that when you are in trouble your brain works so fast ... you know I grew up ... but you know I knew I was Tutsi ... growing up knowing I am different ... knowing no matter how smart I am I will never pass national exam ... never get to university ... I knew I had to work it out I knew I had to make it happen.*

All the participants reflected the cultural value and respect for education and in particular higher education. They indicated that in Africa, education was "*the thing"* that could "*help you escape"* the constraints of gender, tribe or socioeconomic circumstances. It was clear education was highly valued and not accessible for many in their country of origin. However being granted asylum provided access to attain a university education. This participant expressed how valuable it was:

> *Education ... the ... most valuable gifts you can give to someone you love ... to me I think it's the ability you have given someone to be able to look after himself, not only himself but also the people you have left behind.*

A common theme expressed by the participants was a sense of purpose to do what they could for their homeland. This purpose energised them towards achieving a degree and appropriate knowledge and skills from university. For example:

> *I want to do something for my country ... every time I feel like giving up I say no, no you can't stop now you will not be able to do anything ... you will not be able to build that clinic.*

The participants were intrinsically motivated and working hard *"to accelerate"* support for their extended family in their country of origin and studying "*vite (French-fast)"* at university for their future career and dreams. This participant expressed his determination:

> *Going to catch up catch other people so you will have to work out what you want to do and the way that you permit you to accelerate to the ... vite (French-fast) more than other people are using because if I want being on the same level of you...and I am coming from zero from scratch I have really use the highest vite (French-fast) ... so there is a challenge here.*

This finding supports the literature in that the determination to cope and achieve was a method of taking control and not remaining a victim (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012).

Gratitude. Participants showed a genuine sense of gratitude in being *"chosen"* and granted asylum. For example this participant "*did not care"* that the climate was different from their country of origin:

> *Doesn't matter we have cold or hot we have so much ... so many things ... clothes to wear ... to deal with the weather. So it doesn't matter.*

Many of the participants were so grateful for the assistance they have received they volunteered out of thankfulness so as to give other refugees the same support:

> *So now I am a volunteer at 'organisation' helping new refugees showing them how to open a bank account, to catch a bus, a train … just basics.*

This attitude reflects Hannah's (1999) findings that many refugees want to do social work in the community, because they feel they owe something to the world and want to help others.

Personal choice. Most participants described a sense of personal choice to not withdraw from university but to continue with their studies despite the difficulties. They felt so privileged that there was "*no way"* they were going to *"give up"* this opportunity. All participants voiced an understanding that their choice was important in order to achieve an education and to gain acceptance and citizenship. One participant said:

> *I believe if I set example in myself ... if I look at all the opportunities that I'm getting at uni for free cause I'm refugee cause of the way I came … I strongly believe that in good will come in the same way I came … will also benefit the same advantages that I've now benefited from so briefly his life will be as happy as mine!*

Another participant explained that he was ready to learn and achieve at university due to being raised in a strong patriarchal culture. He said he was *"never shy"* because he was expected and prepared to be strong as an individual saying:

> *I felt strong and comfortable to act and achieve at uni because I can't never be shy ... cause ... um ... in our culture ... men are not supposed to be shy. This is for women!*

This finding is evidenced in the literature where the explicit gender role assignments of male dominance are developed in a patriarchal culture (Hebbani et al., 2010).

Provide a future. All participants articulated a desire to build a family, provide a future and opportunity for themselves here. Furthermore all participants were committed to whatever family and extended family remained in their country and to contribute to the rebuilding of it. The desire to achieve was motivated by an intense loyalty to their extended family and it provided their sense of purpose and meaning to life here in Australia. Schweitzer et al. (2006) suggested that an individual's self-concept and sense of meaning in life arises from connection and affinity with family and cultural structures and the African refugee experience in Australia could seriously challenge these aspects. However, it appeared that the participants in the present study had a renewed sense of purpose and achievement built on the transformed identity and belonging as a resettled Australian citizen:

> *You know the resilience is from the what we've been through ... for instance we've been through ... genocide ... and personally one of the strengths ... I don't know how can call it ... but ... you know … people will think to the anger (!!) Yeah … yeah you know … the anger will takes some people to aggression well other people do different things but I think the best way to be angry is to achieve something to show the … the ... perpetrators that you're not finished … you achieve things ... that's personally what drives me … yeah its eh ... the best way to not revenge but … the best way to … to be to show that you are angry with something … you you just manage to do something.*

This finding that "*you're not finished … you achieve things"* converges with research by Tusaie and Dyer (2004), which indicated that intrapersonal factors and competencies such as optimism and a sense of personal narrative and meaning contribute to resilience.

Pre and Post Migration Impact

The participants in the present study discussed a number of factors that had negatively impacted their transition to university such as previous trauma saying *"I am not same as others ... my past..."* They also commented on the additional stress associated with acculturation *"always many changes ... yeah ... stress"* as permeating most of their activities as they resettled in Australia. Four key sub-themes were identified these were trauma, acculturation stress, language and accent difficulties and a sense of discrimination and will be discussed below.

Trauma. For the participants, the trauma they had experienced impacted on their socialisation and participation in campus activities including the shaping of their sense of self and their level of functioning. The participants discussed with a detached sense of emotion the pre-migration trauma and time spent in refugee camps before being granted asylum. It was important for them that people at the university were not aware about these traumatic experiences. One participant said**:** *"I hate people knowing I am from Rwanda ... they ask "were you there?"* Another participant stated how she feels: *"I am careful ... I know you are Australian but I am questioning ... cautious ... you know so."* These statements suggest it is important for their personal history to remain confidential, which causes them to be aloof and isolated at times. A number of participants discussed how the pre-migration trauma interferes at unexpected times during the course of their studies, stating they have "*just run from class"* or university activities and "*distressed by questions"* related to their life in Africa. This participant describes the effects:

> *I am affected with the past and umm now and then it comes back it's something psychological yeah some say psychologically traumatised maybe for ever so yah ... because it's really hard, really hard ... I cry sometimes when someone yells*

Another participant stated how frustrated she felt if people raised the subject of the genocide with her:

> *I feel frustrated and ashamed when people know I am from Rwanda and ask about the genocide ... they look at me funny ... I say I don't want to talk about it.*

The journaling reflected the participants' pauses during the interview and look in their eyes, which communicated the depth of anguish they were still experiencing. There was a real sense of attempting to gauge the researchers' understanding of what they were relating. Below is a statement made by one participant to tentatively discuss what they had experienced prior to resettling here:

> *You know ... so it's a bad experience ... I was a boy seeing all your family being killed ... you know ... so you wouldn't wish that to anybody. At uni people don't understand what I feel ... they just look at me.*

Participants relayed the trauma they carried from their experiences and time in Africa with little emotion and seemingly nondescript words like: *"It was really hard, really hard."* Although the pre-migration trauma was severe it was clear it was *"finished"* and time to *"achieve things."* However, the impact of previous traumas made them cautious of people becoming too close to them. This could possibly be a barrier to them seeking support from their peers or others at university, resulting in feelings of isolation. This notion was further supported by statements such as not "*wanting pity"*, but the outcome was a lack of social networks at university as one participant expressed:

> *Only my family and friends know me ... I have a new life now ... not sadness and pity from people in class ... so I am being cautious when they talk to me.*

This finding is supported by studies showing that social isolation can be a major barrier to the seeking, accessing and the utilisation of support (Correa-Velez et al., 2010).

Acculturation stress. Paradoxically, the participants described themselves as "*strong"* and determined to "*achieve",* yet they expressed feeling constantly overwhelmed by the rate and quantity of change at university and needed some support for the changes and adjustments. Most participants described the overwhelming number of change issues needing to be addressed at once in their first year at university as the most significant driver of stress

for them, which is an indication of the complex post-migration adjustment and acculturation process being experienced. As one participant explained they assumed transition was a *"help yourself"* process. Creating a tension between the attitude of self-help and getting support:

> *Here is university help yourself ... help yourself!! ... Plus the culture shock involved ... as well ... things you have to sort out ... trying to get into new culture ... it's very hard as well ... and trying to achieve ... as soon as possible ... or something ... it's another big step and yeah ... plus your own struggle ... psychological trauma ... it's just ... another burden ... I'm just scared that will have consequences ... in future ... for people overwork ... you know over using themselves ... I'm really scared really.*

Studies of the acculturation process indicate that adjustments are being wrought in basic functions through to social interactions that challenge the deepest loyalties to their culture, which ultimately create significant stress (Berry, 2010; Sam & Berry, 2010).

Language and accent difficulty. The participants reported that the inability to competently communicate in English significantly lowered their confidence and made them feel "*weak"* in their interactions, adding to feelings of inadequacy and sometimes guilt. Many participants made reference to the difficulty in learning English and being able to freely communicate:

> *It is, it is, it's really hard ... I guess one thing that stops people like myself is join some groups, interact with others ... you feel like ... uh when you cant express yourself very well ... sometimes you are even shy to talk in class and in that case you can't really learn much or be free to.*

The difficulty with the Australian accent was a barrier to seeking support. They expressed frustration "*learning another language on top of learning English"* as illustrated:

> *Was hard ... hard yeah ... but time by time I ended up by picking up ... because you know it was not even the language the accent was really hard ... I am used to it now but when I first came ... it was very hard.*

Speaking their own language was reserved for private times with family. Using English at university was an adaptive acculturating strategy:

> *You don't have to stay within your community … it's a good thing … but … get to find out … this is how you get to speak English … you have to embrace the culture … you have to accept … you don't have to feel there's you here and Australia there.*

These results are consistent with earlier findings about the importance of English language acquisition to aid effectual cultural integration and as a preventative measure to minimise future problems (Berry, 2005, 2008). Competence in English is associated with greater self-esteem; educational achievement and career opportunities and less stress as a result of the ability to access support when needed (Brown et al., 2006; Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Sense of discrimination. Participants voiced perceived discrimination, prejudice and avoidance by Australians in the community and on campus, but tended to dismiss these incidents and did not dwell on them. Interestingly they anticipated and accepted this because they were newcomers to Australia, but indicated this would lessen as they became better at the language and more familiar with the cultural norms and practices. "*Its ok ... ok ... umm it will be better. For now I am new.*" So in effect they tolerated this treatment. There was a general acceptance they were progressing in becoming Australians and gaining greater acceptance. Nevertheless these incidents may still be psychologically intrusive and affect self-esteem and wellbeing (Poppitt & Frey, 2007). One participant shared their experience in a class at university where she felt excluded from a group assignment:

> *Most of the time you don't have the evidence or don't know who to talk to about it and you just think they just don't like me ... but you have to deal with it ... it's very subtle they can be very smart in the way they do it ... you wouldn't have any evidence.*

Another participant described specific instances of discrimination with other students in her tutorial group, which she allowed to go unchallenged, because there was little confidence developed in our systems of natural justice and equity. Nevertheless the degree of self-esteem is a factor as to whether there are any attempts to address these issues or not as indicated:

> *If your self-esteem is not strong you don't say anything to the tutor ... because what if the white tutor says 'don't know what you are saying?' you ... what will he say ... you don't know.*

Experiences such as those described by participants on campus are noted in studies to stem from the subtle effects of the behaviour of mainstream populations, which remain constructed around themes of discrimination, alienation and marginalisation, and contribute to persisting and enduring post-migration stress (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Porter & Haslam, 2005).

Formal Support

Most of the participants acknowledged the efforts of the government and service providers in the provision of support. They indicated that this knowledge was beneficial to them as they were "*chosen",* which provided a sense of value and wellbeing and paradoxically a feeling of privilege. This is supported by studies validating that the perception of support availability at an emotional and instrumental level, does aid the individual as they transition to university, and in the ongoing acculturation process (Schweitzer et al., 2006). Support was valued and even though they suggested they did not seek it, they reported there were inadequacies and gaps in the social support service systems. Examination of their meanings of support resulted in three sub-themes: settlement support, university support and relevant support.

Settlement support. All participants agreed that non-university support services have assisted in the initial stages of their resettlement. Ultimately they expressed a sense of confidence that they will be able to study at university as a result of the settlement support. One participant cheerfully stated, *"Everything is being arranged by Centrelink."* One of the participants discussed their excitement about forming a new life and learning all the basic functions in order to commence the resettlement and being able to go to university and said:

> *I was just looking forward to the new life and uni ... was very excited obviously... they had to teach us how to ride the bus, how to keep track of your documents... how to honour your contracts say your rent agreements which was new to me.*

A number of participants described how grateful they were for the support that was shown by various not for profit organisations for refugees. One participant expressed the sense of

"*blessing"* and motivation she felt because an anonymous benefactor assisted her financially through university saying:

> *How lucky am I ... a girl getting supported through uni ... studying economics. It means so much to me ... I will not quit!*

This highlights the need for government to be aware of the importance of policies and programs to assist in the resettlement of this vulnerable cohort.

University support. The majority of the participants had observed and were conscious of services that were available at university. They said directly that the differences in cultural factors interfered with their willingness to engage with services on campus. Surprisingly, they also expressed that they did not use these services much by choice. One participant said: *"Yeah I know there is support ... I want to fit in ... nothing special ... not problem ... not disability."* They conveyed the sense of relief they felt in knowing assistance was available if they were desperate. Nevertheless they were reticent in seeking support alone and approaching official staff in person due to cultural factors. For example one participant explained that in her culture of origin, it was considered "*inappropriate"* for women to speak "*with people"* they did "*not know very well"* or deemed to be in authority*: "I can't just go up to a man, someone in charge and look them in the eye and just say, Hey you! It's not good."*

The participants also expressed that at a cultural and emotional level they tend to be shy, reserved, and afraid of misunderstanding and miscommunicating in English. It was a relevant finding that this cultural tradition tends to limit them as individuals from proactively engaging in help seeking behaviour with formal supports as noted in research (de Anstiss et al., 2009; Rickwood et al., 2005). Consequently, participants suggested that it would be more culturally acceptable if a fellow African refugee or migrant as opposed to a "mzungu" or white person offered assistance academically or socially by support services. As one participant stated:

If it was a Rwandan person offering that service a Rwandan would be willing to accept it ... cause if a mzungu is asking there is a question 'will he know I don't speak English well?' ... 'Will he be suspicious?'.... You are cautious ... But when you are talking to your own you don't feel this.

Another participant described an incident where her English language skill was the barrier to support. Unfamiliarity with Australian colloquialisms caused a misunderstanding on her part but her response was to internalise this. It drove her to work harder and "*show him"* rather than accept support she said:

The lecturer said to me 'If you have any trouble come in and see me' ... you know what it put in my mind? ... Does he think he already and look at me and think that I can't make it? ... I went home so angry and sat down and studied all night and I said 'I want to show him that I can do it without according to him' ... that's the language problem not understanding he is offering help.

Emphasising that the barrier to support was his confidence, a participant told of an experience where he summoned the courage to speak to his tutor individually and was so excited "*is good"* that he was not rebuffed but given assistance:

So this is what is good about university staff. If I ask them to repeat what they said because I didn't understand it ... they do!!

Another participant was very grateful for recorded lectures that were available online. For her this was an excellent form of instrumental support with her initial transition to university because the speed of conversation and the Australian accent were especially difficult to process:

The recorded lecture ... was the hallelujah ... you go back and listen again, and again and again ... taking notes ... because I didn't understand in class, I didn't get what he was talking ... that was my life at uni until I got into third year.

In contrast, though support was available most participants indicated an overriding desire not to rely on any specialised support saying, *"I want to be success ... like others"*. One participant felt that with English language training and appropriate levels of attainment it

should "*more about yourself"* making your own way through the university like mainstream students:

> *Uni is not that bad ... you have working English you ... once you can navigate yourself through ... it's not too bad ... it's more about yourself as an individual and less to do with the organisation as a whole ... cause there is only so much that they can do.*

Another participant expressed her desire to be like the mainstream population, not special but "*normal"*. She felt getting extra special support would make her feel different and stated:

> *I'm not that enthusiastic about special groups or service ... because you are going to feel different and act different when your point is you are trying to be one with everybody else to succeed in the country.*

The participants goal of integrating with mainstream students is commonly found in the literature as an acculturating strategy aimed at successful adaptation (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Relevant support. A number of participants had been frustrated and obstructed in their journey to university through being given wrong information or misguided information in relation to the options for study, training and future career prospects. They were critical of the lack of understanding by authorities in providing support that was not specific to their needs. For example this is what a participant expressed with a real sense of frustration:

> *I wish those people in those positions have had this experience ... been refugees ... it would help them to understand the problems and be able to report it ... translate them.*

Resettlement services seem to focus primarily on TAFE and English classes with little concern for what previous studies at primary, secondary or tertiary level had been completed, or what aspirations or dreams may be held by the refugee for the future. For example:

> *They just focus on basic education you know ... government is helping just to go to TAFE they don't forecast really ... especially to doing tertiary education maybe because they think people not interested ... So there is a lack of connection, there is a lack of ... information in this regard.*

Participants reflected how they felt demoralised that their qualifications and educational experience from their homeland are generally not recognised within the university system. Previous studies indicated this is recognised as a barrier and point of discrimination (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). There was a real sense of their unique circumstances not being appreciated and support not being relevant in the present study.

Informal Support

The participants expressed their need for some support, but did not consider university support services the best source. There was a contradiction expressed in that they felt a sense of isolation and breakdown in support from their extended kinship networks, yet they indicated they were very connected to what informal support they had established since their arrival.

In expounding further they expressed two factors: firstly, their respective informal network supports had been disrupted for some time due to the conflicts and persecution, flight to neighbouring regions and refugee camps and finally resettlement in Australia. Secondly, they were focused on persevering and maintaining strong links with any existing family or extended kin in Australia and local community friends in their country of origin. They used multiple forms of communication (e.g. phone, Skype, internet, social media etc.) to achieve this. Contemporary research is recognising this *diaspora theory effect* where refugees feel less confined inside the physical and cultural boundaries because of travel and the use of the Internet to communicate with family and friends (Björn, 2013).

They expressed dismay that their original familial and community networks had been broken down but resourceful in salvaging as much as they could by way of informal social support in Australia. They had lost some access to practical, informational and emotional support but seemed to access adequate support in their acculturation and university transition.

Three main sub-themes were evidenced across the data: family, extended family and friends, fragmented and the paradox of community support.

Family, extended family and friends. For most, as indicated in studies the African cultural value of strong familial and community connections is still present and actively maintained despite the fracturing that has occurred during the ongoing conflicts and displacement (de Anstiss et al., 2009). The participants indicated it was through their family, extended family and friends that fundamental support was sort during their transition. Some of these friends were on campus and the rest were living locally or connected online. One participant reported: *"I lost all my family ... I have one aunty and some boys from my village at home ... I still close and talk many times"*

Refugee participants indicated how reliant and grateful they are for any family member or extended family or friends that are here in Australia helping them transition to university. As one participant said:

> *I came with ... a with ... a when I came I had friends already ... already here they helped me very much I found them already in the system studying at TAFE ... I thank them very much very much ... but my desire was going straight to university.*

Participants talked of the few family members that remain alive and are present with them with much respect and thankfulness, like this for example:

> *We were a very fortunate because we moved here with our immediate family ... it wasn't as bad ... my new wife has her mom and dad and sisters living close by ... cause we grew up in the refugee camps with them as the rest of our family was scattered ... that's the one family we know.*

Despite only having "*my brothers"* and not having any friends until his second year in university, where he made friends with another international student, one participant described how fortunate he was to have his brothers and their support at university:

> *I only had my family ... my brothers ... I had no friends ... academic support by uni was okay but didn't really help much ... It was lonely ... but I am so lucky for my*

> *brothers they look after me at uni ... I found a friend in my second year ... a boy from Zimbabwe who I could talk to.*

Findings from previous studies have suggested that in collectivist cultures, the help seeking strategy is to seek this support predominantly from these kinship networks (de Anstiss et al., 2009; Stewart et al., 2008; Rickwood et al., 2005).

Fragmented. The formal structure of the Rwandan Diaspora Association of WA has officially commenced in the last two years. Prior to this there was only informal and sporadic gatherings of members of this community. Although participants were aware of this community their responses appeared uninterested. One participant tried to explain her reticence with the community:

> *Everybody knows who you are ... and who they are ... and every now and then it comes up ... but we are in a new country and try to ignore it. ... Which is one of the issues probably I shouldn't tell you this ... but with the Rwandan community it's hard to form one because there are different people and it's hard to get them to come together.*

The response towards the diaspora was as fragmented by the genocide and years of conflict as it is still in Rwanda and bordering countries of Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo. Consequently, the participants did not seek much support from the formal community instead they sort support from personal friends who were of their tribe, Hutu or Tutsis. For example:

> *Only my friends are the ones I look to for talking and help here and with study ...*
> *I do see the difference with the Rwandan community between one tribe and the other.*

This reticence participant's felt towards the formal community was another factor which compelled them to seek support more closely from their kinship networks.

The paradox of community support. The participants indicated their wariness in relying too much on the ethnic community, which could result in not satisfactorily

integrating. One participant expressed the advice he gives to all new refugees he meets, to participate in the broader community and make friends:

> *I tell all new refugees ... the first thing you need to do is ask your friends where you can get a part time job ... maybe office cleaning or carer in a nursing home. Otherwise when you come as a refugee they put you in Balga to ... where other people are and that's all they know.*

Another participant indicated that she had previously become too involved in the ethnic community. She perceived they were starting to resent her progress at university and "*not encourage*" her with her English and studies. Eventually she lessened her involvement by "*not hanging with*" the local African community. She said that "*only aunty and people*" at university were supporting her:

> *It's good to hang around with community (diaspora) but the people you hang around with they have so much influence over your future ... the longer you stay without integrating the harder it is ... I just saw this and stopped.*

Other participants echoed these views. When reflecting on his university transition this participant was proud of the longevity of his multicultural friendships:

> *I still have my Chinese and Indian friends from my university days so like I said these are still my friends now ... so I encourage new refugees to try to make friends with others.*

This finding supports previous research that postulated having multicultural friends is more advantageous than just friends in your own ethnic community for acculturation (Harryba, Guilfoyle & Knight, 2013).

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of the present research was to explore the meanings ascribed by refugees to social support in relation to the transition to university. This qualitative inquiry has highlighted that amidst the vulnerability of their pre-migration trauma and their deep desire to integrate and resettle, African refugees demonstrated a strong sense of optimism and personal resilience, which framed their perceived need for support on campus. The findings of the

present study support the previous research of Tusaie and Dyer (2004) whereby perceived social support or a sense of connectedness influenced resilience in individuals. They found individuals with a negative outlook toward the support being offered may repel it, thus receiving and perceiving less support, with the opposite being true of those who have an optimistic view. This finding reveals how the recipient and the process of social support are both reciprocal and dynamic (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). Furthermore, the participants' in the present study demonstrated a high level of adaptation and a strong and immediate desire to integrate with mainstream students and the host culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). They were focussed on achievement and were self-driven rather than support seeking with respect to the acculturation process and transition.

In the present study the meanings of social support during the transition to university showed a simple yet complex difference between perceived and received support. The social support provided by government and university services was perceived as meaningful and valuable to the participants. It appeared to be a buffer mediating against the effects of acculturative stress and pre-migration trauma. Yet paradoxically, the available university support was not accessed or utilised significantly. It also appeared that compelled by these experiences and a desire to acculturate they sought to be classified with mainstream students, rather than having an apparent unfair or inequitable advantage. The result being that the meanings participants' ascribed to their transition to university comprised optimism and determination to achieve.

In contrast, it appeared the question of the participants' need or desire for support was somewhat vexed in the present study. The participants' meanings indicated they were conflicted at times firstly, between demonstrating perseverance and an intense desire to acculturate and secondly, occasionally needing and wanting support. Participants indicated that when needing support they relied on family, extended family and friends in Australia or

online. This finding concurs with the research on help seeking behaviour (as a coping mechanism) whereby the focus is initially on informal social networks, rather than formal support or professional services (Rickwood et al., 2005). Essentially their own resilience and cultural values meant, when they needed support, they were prepared to first seek support from their own kinship network rather than the university.

In the present study the participants' conceded that although they were at a disadvantage compared to mainstream students they were optimistic and felt a great privilege in being granted asylum in Australia, which provided access to a university education. When discussing the disadvantages, participants expressed that the pre-migration trauma and additional acculturative stressors relating to their resettlement made them feel vulnerable, aloof and cautious with people. Therefore contributing to a sense of social isolation. Also participants' were willing to overlook subtle discrimination and marginalisation on campus, which was both hurtful and demoralising due to their aim of succeeding at university. Notwithstanding these difficulties and disadvantages for the participants' their optimism, sense of privilege and individual resilience drove them to personally negotiate the disadvantages in transition to university.

The present study focused on refugees living in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia, and future research attention to regional differences such as the experiences for those living in more remote areas, needs to be considered. Some factors that might be included in such research could be the provision of social support services, and access to extended family and community networks in remote areas. Also research could examine corroborating information from stakeholders in university student support roles to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges for refugees and alternative ways to support them.

Future research could explore some of the aspects identified in the present study. Firstly, the findings have highlighted the desire for refugees to be classified like mainstream students and not accessing additional supports like other non-local students. Consequently, additional research to further understand refugees' perceptions of equity and discrimination with mainstream students would be valuable. Secondly, Woods (2009) found that educational spaces can be stabilising and proactive features for refugees. Further research could consider how educational environments can be best targeted to reflect the unique needs of refugees. Lastly, it is also important to collect qualitative information on refugee student's experiences of resilience, the elusiveness of perceived and received support, and essentially what 'support' means to them (Hillman, 2005; Krause et al., 2005).

In conclusion, this study has provided further information on the unique optimism, resilience and determination of African refugees, which has characterised their utilisation of support in the transition to university. Also, the study revealed a subtle yet complex distinction made between perceived and received support and the desire to be classified with mainstream students. These findings give "voice" to the uniqueness and complexity of refugee experiences to better apprise universities, settlement services and program developers. Especially as they continue to include the voices of equity groups, like refugees, in the planning and delivery of social support services for culturally and linguistically diverse groups at a university level on campus.

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Appendix A

Information Letter

Experiences of African Refugees who Transition to University

Contact Details:
Chief Investigator: Mark Webb
email: mwebb5@our.ecu.edu.au
Supervisor: Andrew Guilfoyle
email: a.guilfoyle@ecu.edu.au

Information Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Mark Webb and I am a fourth year Psychology Honours student at Edith Cowan University (ECU). This research is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a Psychology Honours degree and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at ECU

As an African refugee who has completed the first year at university you are invited to take part in a study on your experiences in transitioning to university. The study involves an interview with the researcher. The interview will take about 1 hour and will be audio recorded. You can take part in the interview, as you feel comfortable, answering questions from the researcher, and talking about your experiences. The information gathered would then be looked over by the researcher to find common themes that may show the experiences of African refugees in Australian universities.

It is expected that you may benefit from your involvement in the study. The interview will give you the opportunity to talk about your experiences in transitioning to university and may also result in a better understanding of the issues refugees face in transitioning to university in Australia.

Only the researchers listed on the ethics application will be able to see the information gathered. To make sure of confidentiality, no identifying information will be included in the study and the researcher will keep all information in a secured cabinet at Edith Cowan University until the research has finished. Information will be kept at Edith Cowan University for five years following publication of the report, and will then be destroyed.

It is important to know that taking part in this study is your choice. Every effort will be made to lessen any risks associated with this study. In the unlikely event that you do experience some emotional distress or discomfort, you do not need to answer the questions and can

reschedule your interview or withdraw from the study without any need to explain why. All participants will be provided with a list of available support services they can contact if they would like to discuss their experiences or require further support. If you stop, all information you have provided will be destroyed.
If you choose to be involved in the study, please sign the consent form prior to commencing the interview, which the researcher will give to you.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the researcher Mark Webb at email: mwebb5@our.ecu.edu.au or his supervisor Andrew Guilfoyle at email: a.guilfoyle@ecu.edu.au for more information. Also, if you have any concerns or complaints about the research study, and wish to talk to an independent person, you may talk to the following person:

Research Ethics Officer

Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Drive JOONDALUP WA 6027

Phone: (08) 6304 2170

Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Kind regards,

Mark Webb Chief Investigator

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Experiences of African Refugees who Transition to University

Contact Details:

Chief Investigator: Mark Webb
email: mwebb5@our.ecu.edu.au
Supervisor: Andrew Guilfoyle
email: a.guilfoyle@ecu.edu.au

Informed Consent

I, ________________________, understand and agree to the following:

- I have been given an information letter explaining the research study.
- I have read and understood the details given to me in the information letter.
- I have been given the chance to ask questions, and these have been answered.
- I am aware that if I have any further questions, I am able to ask the researcher or supervisor.
- I understand that taking part in the research will involve participating in an interview for about one hour.
- I understand that all information given by me will be kept confidential, and that my identity will not be given to anyone without my approval.
- I understand that any information given will only be used for the research. Findings may be published in a report; however no identifying details will be included.
- I understand that I am free to stop taking part at any time, and will not have to explain why.
- I agree to take part in the study and give my consent.

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ______________________________

Researchers Signature: ______________________

Date: __________________________

Appendix C

The Interview Protocol

This interview protocol is a guide for the interviews. The questions frame the topic and are designed to engage a conversation of what it felt like to encounter this experience. Time will be allowed to answer questions in the interview and pauses and gestures will be recorded.

"Hi my name is Mark and I would like to thank you at the outset for your time and willingness to participate in my research. If you are not comfortable with any questions it is all right if you do not answer. You are also free to withdraw from the interview at any time. I am very interested in hearing about your experiences as a refugee entrant and with the transition to university. I am sure your observations will be not only valuable but also very much appreciated."

1. Can you tell me how you feel about being in a new country and now going to university?

2. How did you feel supported when you first began university? (Prompts: Did you receive any support from family, friends or from community groups? What did having social support mean to you? Can you give examples of when you felt supported or not?)

3. What were your experiences of social activity with local students and other international students? (Prompts: Were these experiences supportive based on cultural or social factors? Did you participate in any social activity or club on campus?)

4. What experiences do you think helped you stay at university? (Prompts: Could access to other support services have helped you better? What support networks were available to you?)

5. I'm also interested in anything else that you feel affected your experiences at university? (Prompts: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?)

Appendix D

Extracts from Researcher's Journal Notes

Day One Observations

13th June, 2013 5:24pm

Commence meeting with Rwandan community:

I was invited to attend the Rwanda Genocide Commemoration hosted by the Rwandan Diaspora Association of WA. This was such a great honour and opportunity to meet with the community. At the commemoration service I was asked to share about the purpose of my research and invite interested participants with any questions or suggestions to meet with me after. I was a little apprehensive at first because it was a very solemn occasion yet I would be using it as an opportunity to meet potential participants for my research. After the ceremony it was clear that my presence was a great sign of respect and support for these people and their culture. They also allowed me to witness their pain from the history and conflict they had experienced. As a researcher I felt that rapport was developed from this opportunity with the community collectively, various individuals I was introduced to and others that approached me with an interest in participating in the research.

It is very confronting being present with a group of people who have suffered so many things and seen so many of their loved ones killed personally.

Interview with Participant 1

24th June, 2012 5:50pm

Commence individual interviews with Rwandan refugees:

In my first interview I was surprised by the warmth and intellect of the participant. He was very interested in the structure and process of the research. I noticed that he understood very clearly my questions and probes. I had to counter the tendency to think that their accent and somewhat broken English was a reflection of their level of intellect or education.

He spoke of the intense determination to study hard at university, get a good job and build a family here. He was aware that he had lost time and wanted to catch up. This made me think about the somewhat arrogant attitude we, as locally born Australians, have and express to refugees. We sometimes express the view that they better not cause any trouble or claim to be traumatised now they are here. They better be grateful because we have been so generous in letting them live here. The fact is (and expressed by my first participant) that they are already extremely grateful that they have been granted asylum and do not want to cause any trouble for them or us. They have seen enough trouble in their lifetime. I thought the first individual interview went well, I felt that as I became more and more comfortable the interview ran effortlessly and the information obtained was richer. This was evidenced by a response by the participant at the end of the interview. He did not want to stop and shared a particularly vulnerable event in his life.

Interview with Participant 5

20th July, 2013 1:55pm

What an incredible joy to interview this participant. I do not think I have met anyone more grateful and optimistic before. He was in his second year of engineering at university here and was so optimistic. He had spent 16 years in a refugee camp and yet spoke with fondness of his culture and country. He did not deny the traumas experienced or the difficult acculturation process he just did not want to give it any place in his future plans and dreams. He wanted to listen back to the recording of the interview as he wanted to evaluate his English language skills and what improvement their had been since being at university. It goes without saying that he was very encouraged by his progress and optimistic about this continuing. He expressed a dream of being able to model the way for future refugees! I was astounded by his attitude.

Appendix E

List of Counselling Services

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Mental Health Direct: 1800 220 400

Mental Health Emergency Response Line: 1300 555 788

Australian Red Cross Counselling Service: 1800 052 222

The Samaritans: 9381 5555

Edith Cowan University Psychological Services Centre: 9301 0011