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'We ate bread and salt together': communal cooking and eating as a model for developing trust between hosts and asylum seekers in London, UK

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which communal cooking and eating can offer an environment in which trust can be built between asylum seekers and host nationals. The pervasive culture of generalised mistrust towards refugees and asylum seekers that currently exists in the UK compels us to find ways in which trust can be (re)built. Trust is conceptualised as a two-part journey that begins from a starting point of a 'posture of mistrust' that is transformed into one of trust. This posture then lays the foundation for an 'assessment of trustworthiness' that can lead to a reciprocal trust relationship. These two stages represent two broad approaches to trust in the literature. First, that of trust as a pre-conscious, emotionally-driven, largely intuitive process and, second, that of trust as a cognitive, information-driven, deliberate decision. Features of cooking and eating together were identified in the literature, mapped onto the components that have been identified in the literature as being necessary for trust, and explored in interviews and observations across several communal cook-and-eat events in London, UK. The offerings of communal cooking and eating include social contact, routine, normality, physical and emotional safety and a sense of home. Meals are also explored as a means to reclaim autonomy and personal and cultural identity in a universally acceptable context, in addition to having the power to evoke strong memories. In exploring the overlaps between trust and food, this paper concludes that communal cooking and eating can offer a rich sensory and social environment in which trusting relationships can form between asylum seekers and host nationals. In addition, it is proposed that shared meals offer a simple, accessible and culturally-appropriate context in which trust can be fostered between asylum seekers and those conducting research with them.

Keywords

trust, commensality, cooking, food, asylum seeker

Contents

1. Introduction

The claim that sitting down to eat meals together should foster the development of close relationships is both intuitive and uncontroversial. In the 1987 film *Babette's Feast*, Babette, a French refugee, serves a lavish feast to two Danish sisters from an austere sect. Despite their and their guests' best attempts to the contrary, the social and sensual experience of their meal relaxes tension, unites strangers, heals broken relationships and deepens friendships. From an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust, the sharing of a meal enables a transformation into one of warmth, gentleness and joy.[1] This film is far from alone in its portrayal of communal meals as a unifying, positive force, and this is unsurprising given the absolute universality of food and the rich cultural traditions and rituals surrounding food across the world.

Food has been studied from a wide variety of academic perspectives such as public health, nutrition, security, economics and anthropology. The emergence of Refugee Studies as a multidisciplinary field has invited an investigation of food through several of these lenses as they apply to refugees and asylum seekers, both individually and culturally, as well as from a policy perspective.[2] In a climate of significant hostility and suspicion towards refugees and asylum seekers, with a continued need for their resettlement and integration into host communities, can the study of food offer us an insight into how relationships might form between this group and host nationals? This question underpins my research, which investigates whether cooking and eating together might provide a model for contexts in which asylum seekers and host nationals might build trusting relationships with one another. For the purposes of this paper, the phrase 'host nationals' will be used, referring to British permanent residents. I will not be exploring the ways in which interactions between other migrant groups and asylum seekers may differ, and have only interviewed British residents.

The 'culture of disbelief' towards migrants in the UK has been well documented.[3] Using a year's worth of front pages from all major British newspapers, Gerard revealed the extent to which UK residents are encouraged to actively mistrust migrants, by exhibiting headlines filled with anti-immigrant sentiment and derogatory language across several metres of wall.[4] Portrayal by both the government and the media of migrants as a 'deviant social group', in the form of aggressive political rhetoric and scaremongering tactics, is a contributing factor to this.[5] The consequential hostile attitudes reach individuals at the highest levels of decision-making, meaning international law is interpreted in increasingly restrictive ways, ensuring that receiving legal protection is extremely difficult – if individuals are even able to enter UK territory in the first place. UK asylum policy relating to accommodation, dispersal and the right to work contributes not only to a legal exclusion but to an institutional social exclusion that makes community- and relationship-building difficult, exacerbating the culture of mistrust.[6]

The building of trust relationships is important for three key reasons. First, it enables the building of social capital. Social capital and social networks more broadly are subjects of extensive study in their own right,[7] however, it is important to highlight the concept of social capital, as it offers an explanation as to why trust might be necessary for a functional society. Social capital can be defined as 'the ability to co-operate in a group for the purpose of achieving a collective good'[8] and, while the component parts of social capital are multi-faceted and too complex to explore fully in this paper, trust is seen by many to be a fundamental part of relationships that allow for the building of social capital.[9] It is therefore worthy of further study, given the broad principle that it is beneficial to individuals, small groups and society at large for there to be cooperation between different groups that enables sharing of resources, whether material, financial or social.

Second, trusting relationships between individuals are vital for good mental health from stages of early development through to adulthood. Humans are social creatures and need close, trusting relationships with others, based on mutual vulnerability and sharing of life stories and experiences, in order to make sense of relationships and the world around them.[10] Third, in addition to the benefits to society as a whole and to individuals, there is arguably a moral duty to ensure that individuals are not mistrusted, and therefore disadvantaged, because of stereotypes, as evidence suggests that it is disempowering and psychologically damaging for individuals and communities to be in long-term environments of

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1   Gabriel Axel, *Babette's Feast* (1987).

2   Eftihia Voutira and Giorgia Dona, 'Refugee Research Methodologies: Consolidation and Transformation of a Field' (2007) 20 Journal of Refugee Studies 163.

3   Nando Sigona, 'The Politics of Refugee Voices: Representations, Narratives and Memories' in Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.* (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Oxford University Press 2014).

4   Liz Gerard, 'The Chart of Shame'.

5   Fiona H McKay, Samantha L Thomas and Susan Kneebone, '"It Would Be Okay If They Came Through the Proper Channels": Community Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers in Australia' (2012) Journal of Refugee Studies.

6   Patricia Hynes, 'Contemporary Compulsory Dispersal and the Absence of Space for the Restoration of Trust' (2009) 22 Journal of Refugee Studies 97.

7   Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press 1984); Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster Paperbacks 2000).

8   Peter Nannestad, Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen and Gert Tinggaard Svendsen, 'Bridge over Troubled Water? Migration and Social Capital' (2008) 40 Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 544.

9   Boris Blumberg, José Peiró and Robert Roe, 'Trust and Social Capital: Challenges for Studying Their Dynamic Relationship' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

10   Justin T Sokol, 'Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory' (2009) 1 Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology 14.

mistrust,[11] precisely where asylum seekers find themselves.

The importance of trusting relationships would, therefore, appear clear, but the contexts in which these relationships can develop are less so. In particular, the ways in which commensality, that is, eating a meal together, might enable the development of trusting relationships have not been directly addressed in the literature, and will, therefore, form the focus of this paper.

In this paper, I aim to bridge two fields of study: the social psychology of trust and the anthropology of food. There is a large body of literature on trust, from diverse fields. Hynes[12] and Daniel and Knudsen[13] in particular have done research on the subject of refugee trust and mistrust, and I will draw extensively on their work. Vandevoordt[14] and Lewis[15] write about the role of food in refugee home-formation and community-building. I will draw on their work and that of Fischler[16] on food and identity, and Holtzman[17] on food and memory. In doing so, I isolate the components that are important in trust, and set these alongside the benefits that cooking and eating together can offer (Table 2). I work from a hypothesis that the similarities between these suggest that communal cooking and eating offer an environment that allows for trusting relationships between asylum seekers and host nationals to be built.

The process of cooking and eating a meal together reduces social isolation and improves an individual's sense of safety, as well as being evocative of routine and 'normal' life that has often been disrupted in the process of flight and relocation. To eat food is to smell, taste and see, and these sensory and visceral experiences can contribute to the reconstruction of memory and to an individual's sense of home and identity. To host with food and to share in the practical task of cooking enables a disruption of the 'food handout' hierarchy, of which many refugees and asylum seekers find themselves at the bottom. And finally, food is a universal language that is both safe and accessible, and is a source of rich metaphor and symbolism within which stories can be shared.

I explored these themes in interviews with asylum seekers and host nationals in London, at 'cook and eat' lunches arranged by a recently-started charity. 'Local Welcome' run events whereby members (host nationals) and asylum seekers (living in nearby Initial Accommodation Centres, or IACs) come together to cook and eat a meal. Much of the relevant literature refers to 'refugees' and I will, therefore, use the term 'refugee' where appropriate in discussion of the literature. However, my interviews were conducted only with asylum seekers – those who have not yet received legal protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention[18] – and therefore while these terms will both be used throughout the paper, it is worthwhile to note that the legal circumstances of asylum seekers create an environment of uncertainty in which trust is made all the more difficult.

1.1 Outline of chapters

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the literature surrounding trust and food. Different theories of trust will be summarised, before exploring trust in the refugee context, by looking at elements of the 'refugee journey' that contribute to many refugees developing a posture of mistrust towards others. Theories of food will then be addressed, and similarly explored in the context of refugees. Chapter 3 outlines methodology, including the methodological and ethical limitations of my research. Findings will be discussed across three chapters. Chapter 4 explores the first phase of the development of a trust relationship – what I will call taking up a 'posture of trust' towards another – and suggests how communal meals might facilitate willingness to take this risk, through enabling social contact, routine, safety and a positive emotional environment, as well as representing a 'universal language'. Chapter 5 then examines how cooking and eating a meal together may provide a context in which the second stage, an 'assessment of trustworthiness', might be facilitated, through supporting the sharing of personal narrative, enabling hierarchy to be levelled and personal and social identity to be (re)formed, and providing a place of 'home'. Findings and discussion are concluded in Chapter 6, in which the relationship between researcher and refugee is discussed in the context of trust, and methodological questions about trust in research are considered. In the seventh and concluding chapter, these findings are summarised, and it is argued that the process of communal cooking and eating provides an effective environment for the development of a trust relationship sufficient for the sharing of personal stories.

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11   Katherine Hawley, *Trust: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2012).

12   Tricia Hynes, 'The Issue of "Trust" or "Mistrust" in Research with Refugees: Choices, Caveats and Considerations for Researchers' (2003) 98 <www.unhcr.org>; Hynes (n 6).

13   Valentine Daniel and John Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995).

14   Robin Vandevoordt, 'The Politics of Food and Hospitality: How Syrian Refugees in Belgium Create a Home in Hostile Environments' (2017) 30 Journal of Refugee Studies 605.

15   Hannah Lewis, 'Community Moments: Integration and Transnationalism at "Refugee" Parties and Events' (2010) 523 Journal of Refugee Studies 571.

16   Claude Fischler, 'Food, Self and Identity' (1988) 27 Anthropology of Food 275.

17   Jon D Holtzman, 'Food and Memory' (2006) 35 Annual Review of Anthropology 361.

18   Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 (UN Treaty Series) 1.

2. Literature review

2.1 Literature review methodology

I searched several databases to retrieve articles relating to trust, food and refugees, using keywords including: 'food', 'meal', 'commensality', 'foodscape', 'cooking', 'trust', 'refugee', 'migrant' and 'displaced'. Databases searched included ABI/Inform Global, Academic Search Complete, Cambridge Core, dawsonera, EJS E-journals, HeinOnline and JSTOR. I also searched specific journal collections including the Journal of Refugee Studies, Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, Refugee Survey Quarterly and Anthropology of Food.

2.2 Theories of trust

The concept of trust is one that has been addressed by many academic disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, political science, economics, sociology and psychology. Many consider trust to be a fundamental part of a well-functioning society, a key element of cooperative relationships and, for some, even a resource that can be exploited for business purposes.[19] Across disciplines, trust is widely considered to be a concept worth investigation. However, when it comes to defining, measuring and isolating trust, the concept proves elusive. Seppanen *et al.* identified over 70 different definitions of trust in the academic literature,[20] while McEvily and Tortoriello found 129 different instruments used to measure trust;[21] this invites further exploration of its character.

Trust has primarily been studied through the use of surveys and games. The well-known 'standard question' in survey research asks respondents 'Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted or can't you be too careful in dealing with people?'[22] While some defend the benefits of such broad questions,[23] many researchers would argue that this question is of little benefit, as it uses 'trust' in the vernacular sense, leading to respondents attributing to it any number of meanings including behaviour, decision-making, emotions, loyalty, cultural norms or desired self-perception.[24] Acknowledging the diverse and controversial nature of much trust research methodology is important in contextualising this paper, in recognition that there is little consensus as to what is being measured when we speak of trust.

2.3 Two conceptualisations of trust

Keeping in mind the diversity of the field, major theories of trust can largely be described under two broad headings: intuitive or emotional responses and cognitive decision-making. Table 1 summarises these different approaches under the headings which I will be using, the 'posture of trust' and the 'assessment of trustworthiness'. The terms 'Trustor' and 'Trusted' will be used to identify the individual doing the trusting, and the individual in which trust is placed, respectively.

Author	Conceptualisation of trust	
	'Posture of Trust'	'Assessment of Trustworthiness'
Uslaner (2002, 2016)	Moralistic trust	Strategic trust
Turner (1995)	Emotional processing	Cognitive processing
Mayer et al. (1995)	Propensity to trust	Perception of trusted
Hawley (2012)	'Taking a chance' to move from uncertainty to trust	Trust
Hardin (2006)	Weak trust or generalised trust	Strong trust or interpersonal trust
Lewicki and Brinsfield (2016)	Intuitive/automatic trust	Cognitive trust

Table 1. Two conceptualisations of trust

The first broad approach is to conceptualise trust as a subconscious, intuitive response to an individual or group, a product of emotions, environment and stereotyping. Lewicki and Brinsfield describe trust as a heuristic,[25] that is, a

19   Kaitlin Woolley and Ayelet Fishbach, 'A Recipe for Friendship: Similarity in Food Consumption Promotes Affiliation and Trust' (2016) 27 Journal of Consumer Psychology 1.

20   Risto Seppänen, Kirsimarja Blomqvist and Sanna Sundqvist, 'Measuring Inter-Organizational Trust – A Critical Review of the Empirical Research in 1990–2003' (2007) 36 Industrial Marketing Management 249.

21   Bill McEvily and Marco Tortoriello, 'Measuring Trust in Organisational Research: Review and Recommendations' (2011) 1 Journal of Trust Research 23.

22   Edelman, '2019 Edelman Trust Barometer' (2019) <https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer> accessed 1 March 2019.

23   Eric Uslaner, 'Measuring Generalized Trust: In Defense of the "Standard" Question' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

24   Russel Hardin, *Trust* (Polity Press 2006).

25   Roy J Lewicki and Chad Brinsfield, 'Trust Research: Measuring Trust Beliefs and Behaviours' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

shortcut to facilitate decision-making, citing both neurobiological and facial recognition studies as support for these pre-conscious, immediate judgements. Burns and Conchie[26] and Dunn and Schweitzer[27] similarly identify pre-conscious associations and emotional state as playing a role in trust, consistent with studies into racial bias and stereotyping.[28]

The second approach encompasses theories that take trust to be a conscious, cognitive assessment of the trustworthiness of another, and a deliberate decision to take a risk that the Trusted will not fulfil expectations. Hardin[29] and Hawley[30] argue that without this deliberate and explicit judgement, trust is not possible. Different definitions of trust represent these different approaches, to greater or lesser extents. Mayer *et al.*'s seminal definition of trust: 'A willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the Trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party',[31] largely relies on a cognitive conceptualisation of trust, whereas we may place Rousseau *et al.*'s definition of trust as a 'psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability'[32] more towards the intuitive conceptualisation.

In addition to these two approaches, there have been suggestions that to be 'trusting' is a result of individual disposition, or a moral quality in itself.[33] However, these particular views do not have significant academic support. On the contrary, there is widespread acceptance that to be 'trusting' is not necessarily a positive thing, especially from the perspective of refugees, given that misplaced trust can have severely damaging consequences. In this vein, it is important to highlight that many researchers feel a move away from exploring 'trust' is warranted, towards studies of 'trustworthiness', given the dangers of trusting the 'untrustworthy'.[34] There is a broad consensus that trust is situation-specific, that is, you may well trust an individual to do a certain task but not another, which is important to keep in mind when we speak of 'trusting' someone, in that it needs to be clear what the Trusted is being trusted to do or not do.

2.4 Factors necessary for trust

Across the literature on trust, there have been attempts to identify and isolate the factors or qualities that foster trust or demonstrate trustworthiness. As would be expected, the concepts of 'relationship' and 'friendship' consistently feature in these discussions. These are broad, and difficult to isolate for the purposes of research, and therefore require further breakdown. Rather than critically analysing one particular model of trust, I have conceptualised trust as a two-part journey, starting with taking up a posture of trust, moving through the assessment of trustworthiness phase into a trusting relationship. This allows for an exploration of trust using a variety of perspectives. Table 2 summarises components necessary for a trusting relationship that I have drawn from across the literature.

A sense of safety in a particular context is necessary for trust, as it facilitates a switch from a posture of vigilance and mistrust to a more comfortable willingness to be open to trusting another.[35] This is particularly important in a refugee context, as I discuss further below. Hardin[36] and Daniel and Knudsen[37] also highlight how large differences in power are generally incompatible with trusting relationships. Those who hold the power have little incentive or need to trust those who have less, and those without power don't believe that those in power have the interests of the less powerful encapsulated in theirs.[38] Where structures exist that reinforce the power gradient against refugees, ways to subvert this power relationship must be found in order to facilitate trust.

Familiarity – the sense that the Trusted is similar to oneself in interests, background and morality – is an important element, as it allows predictions about the Trusted's behaviour to be made.[39] The importance of opportunities to elicit details about the Trusted's reputation is also mentioned frequently in the literature[40] and, importantly, there must be the possibility for a repeat interaction at a minimum, and ideally the possibility of a long-term relationship.[41] A sense of individual and cultural identity and acceptance of one's own narrative has also been identified as an important factor in an individual's ability to trust those around them. For refugees, who may be going through the process of reconstructing

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26   Calvin Burns and Stacey Conchie, 'Measuring Implicit Trust and Automatic Attitude Activation' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Mollering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

27   Jennifer R Dunn and Maurice E Schweitzer, 'Feeling and Believing: The Influence of Emotion on Trust' (2005) 88 Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 736.

28   Project Implicit, 'Implicit Association Test' (Harvard University, 2011) <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/> accessed 15 September 2018; Hawley (n 11).

29   Hardin (n 24).

30   Hawley (n 11).

31   Roger C Mayer, James H Davis and F David Schoorman, 'An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust' (1995) 20 Academy of Management Review 709, 712.

32   Denise M Rousseau *et al.*, 'Not So Different After All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust' (1998) 23 Academy of Management Review 393, 395.

33   Hardin (n 24).

34   Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders, *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

35   Daniel and Knudsen (n 13).

36   Hardin (n 24).

37   Daniel and Knudsen (n 13).

38   Hardin (n 24).

39   ibid.

40   Behnam Behnia, 'Trust Building from the Perspective of Survivors of War and Torture' (2004) 78 Social Service Review 26.

41   Hardin (n 24).

identities following traumatic events, this is particularly relevant, as Knudsen highlights in the context of Vietnamese refugees in exile, where "'in whom I trust" is irrevocably linked to "who I am'".[42] Discrimination that, by definition, has been faced by refugees not only undermines trust in the persecutor but also in oneself, when the fundamentals of one's identity have been presented as evil or immoral, and worthy of punishment of any kind.[43]

Studying trust in the context of refugee studies can be explored through myriad lenses such as power structures, gender, race, religion or policy. A significant portion of the literature in this area relates to trust between refugees and organisations such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), often using trust in the aforementioned vague and vernacular sense, and not addressing trust as the primary object of research.[44] Hynes,[45] however, highlights how refugees mistrust or are mistrusted, at many stages and in many relationships – both interpersonal and structural. Daniel and Knudsen, in their widely-cited collection *Mistrusting Refugees*,[46] similarly demonstrate that trust is a complex and multifaceted issue for refugees and asylum seekers, and one that warrants further study.

It is uncontroversial to suggest that refugees are a mistrusted group in the UK and other Western nations. A pervasive 'culture of disbelief', suspicion and fear towards immigrants more generally has been the focus of much research,[47] with much written on the ways in which government policy, the media and racial stereotyping contribute to a generalised 'group-mistrust' of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, both by individuals and the state. The reasons that refugees might mistrust others, however, are perhaps less well-documented.

While being mindful of Malkki's warning that it can be counter-productive to homogenise the experience of displaced individuals,[48] Hynes uses the stages of a refugee journey to describe factors which may contribute to a refugee mistrusting others.[49] Beginning with the cultural and political climate in the country of origin, we find circumstances in which it is self-preserving and extremely wise to inhabit a posture of mistrust towards others. This does not apply only to strangers in other countries, but also family and friends, as refugees may have experienced periods of state-enforced surveillance,[50] atmospheres of oppression and fear[51] and interrogation or torture.[52] Muecke highlights that it is inherent in the refugee definition that individuals mistrust their home government and, indeed, a personal betrayal of trust may represent the trigger for flight.[53] To keep a distance from others and hide one's vulnerabilities may be a life-preserving coping mechanism.[54]

Significant trauma can put an individual in a state of high anxiety and constant vigilance and, during flight, interactions with smugglers or traffickers (and others who may have an interest to exploit) heighten and reinforce this posture of mistrust.[55] Refugees may encounter UNHCR, charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), healthcare professionals or relief workers who, albeit perhaps well-meaning, carry the power to determine a refugee's future. To trust such 'helpers' by revealing vulnerabilities may be to unwittingly receive a psychiatric label, and subsequently lose a resettlement opportunity.[56] Upon arrival to the UK, refugees are met with the UK Border Agency, whose immediate, intense and often threatening focus on a refugee's personal details and narrative do not invite trust and may be experienced through the memories of previous interrogations or torture.[57] If then given leave to remain or refugee status, they must still negotiate a restrictive immigration policy in which they are systematically excluded, and given few opportunities to demonstrate their own trustworthiness.

Trust can be said to rely in part on expectations for another's behaviour. However, the refugee experience can disrupt the most fundamental beliefs about human nature. Turner explains that each individual interprets events through the lens of our cognitive schemata, our model of the world that allows us to make predictions about our environment, and this

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42   John Knudsen, 'When Trust Is On Trial' in E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995). 13

43   Marjorie Muecke, 'Trust, Abuse of Trust, and Mistrust among Cambodian Refugee Women: A Cultural Interpretation' in E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995).

44   Giorgia Doná, 'The Microphysics of Participation in Refugee Research' (2007) 20 Journal of Refugee Studies 210; Eveliina Lyytinen, 'Refugees''Journeys of Trust": Creating an Analytical Framework to Examine Refugees' Exilic Journeys with a Focus on Trust' (2017) 30 Journal of Refugee Studies 489.

45   Hynes (n 12); Hynes (n 6).

46   Daniel and Knudsen (n 13).

47   Rosemary Sales, 'The Deserving and the Undeserving? Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Welfare in Britain' (2002) 22 Critical Social Policy 456; L Schuster, 'Turning Refugees into "Illegal Migrants": Afghan Asylum Seekers in Europe' (2011) 34 Ethnic and Racial Studies1392 <http://openaccess. city.ac.uk/3915/>; Sigona (n 3).

48   Liisa H Malkki, 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things' (1995) 24 Annual Review of Anthropology 495.

49   Hynes (n 12).

50   Knudsen (n 42).

51   Beatrice Manz, 'Fostering Trust in a Climate of Fear' in E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995).

52   Stuart Turner, 'Torture, Refuge, and Trust' in E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995).

53   Muecke (n 43).

54   Turner (n 52).

55   ibid.

56   Knudsen (n 42).

57   Frances Shawyer *et al.*, 'A Cross-Sectional Survey of the Mental Health Needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers Attending a Refugee Health Clinic: A Study Protocol for Using Research to Inform Local Service Delivery' (2014) 14 BMC Psychiatry 1.

can be severely disrupted by trauma.[58] Muecke quotes the psychiatrist Henry Krystal who, describing the experiences of those in a Nazi concentration camp, said: '[t]heir basic trust in the beneficence of God, reasonable behaviour of man, and causality, in general, has been destroyed. This trust is an essential ingredient in that minimum of optimistic faith in the future without which men are not able to plan effectively and live in constant worry and apprehension. The destruction of the feeling of man's goodness…places the survivor in a world of chaos and danger. He suspects everyone and trusts no one, including himself'.[59] This poignant assessment of the consequences of trauma at the hands of others touches upon both the initial posture of generalised mistrust that many refugees find themselves taking up, as well as the more cognitive assessments of predictable behaviour that must follow, both of which are deeply impacted by trauma.[60]

Factors needed for trust	Factors offered by food
Positive emotions	
Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) Lewicki and Brinsfield (2016)	Codesal (2010) Tuomainen (2015)
Safety	
Jensen (2016) Manz (1995) Peteet (1995)	Lewis (2010) Vandevoordt (2017)
Social capital	
Behnia (2004) Hardin (2006) Hynes (2003)	Epp (2016) Tuomainen (2010) Vandevoordt (2017)
Sense of home	
Colson (2003) Peteet (1995)	Codesal (2010) Hage (1997) Parasecoli (2011)
Identity	
Behnia (2004) Daniel and Knudsen (1995) Hawley (2012)	Agutter & Ankeny (2017) Beagan and Chapman (2012) Fischler (1988) Georges (1984) La Trecchia (2012)
Autonomy and equality	
Uslaner (2002) Hynes (2003) Nannestad et al. (2014)	Agutter & Ankeny (2017) Kershenovich (2002) Tuomainen (2010)
Familiarity	
Hardin (2006) Hawley (2012) Sitkin and Roth (1993)	Fischler (1988, 2011) Woolley & Fishbach (2016)
Learning about others	
Reputation Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) Hardin (2006) Behnia (2004) *Time* Colson (2003) Hawley (2012)	*Universal language* Parasecoli (2011) *Reconstruction of memory* Epp (2016) Holtzman (2006) Trecchia (2012)
Shared task	
Hardin (2006)	Agutter & Ankeny (2017)

Table 2. Mapping the literature of food onto trust research

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58   Turner (n 52).

59   Muecke (n 43) 38.

60   E Valentine Daniel and Ywaraj Thangaraj, 'Forms, Formations, and Transformations of the Tamil Refugee' in E Valentine Daniel and John Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995).

2.5 Theories of commensality and food

As with trust, food has been researched by academics in many different fields, such as business studies, health sciences, sociology and anthropology, with the study of food in relation to migration receiving increasing academic attention. While the concept of food provides many angles of study within the topic of migration (such as diet, disease and food security), much academic interest has fallen on the concepts of identity, home and memory. These are significant areas of study in themselves, but ones that I will only address insofar as they relate to trust relationships. Table 2 places themes from food literature alongside those from the literature on trust, giving an overview of their many similarities.

Food is more than simply nutritional intake. Food has symbolic meaning and significant sensorial associations that run deep through our bodies. Cooking and eating are shared human activities, perhaps some of the few that can be said to be truly universal.[61] It is unsurprising, then, that studies have emerged suggesting that those who eat the same food together feel more similar to one another and may indeed cooperate more effectively with each other. Fischler describes how, across cultures, eating the same food, which is subsequently transformed literally to the same 'flesh and blood', brings people closer together by making them feel more alike, increasing the sense of familiarity.[62] Indeed 'ethnic' foods may also be seen, by Western individuals suspicious of immigration in general, as a more acceptable cultural activity in which to participate and share where, for example, 'ethnic' dress may still retain high levels of suspicion.[63] Woolley and Fishbach, coming from the perspective of consumer psychology, conducted an experiment looking at how eating the same food might promote cooperative behaviour and trust,[64] although the extent to which they were measuring trust rather than cooperation may well be debated in the field of trust research.[65] They describe how the experience of similarity that arises from sharing the same food is important in the initial phases of deciding whether or not to trust a stranger. Indeed, they found that participants assigned to eat similar foods were more 'trusting' in experimental games, and concluded that food was a 'particularly strong cue' for trusting others.[66]

The ability to reconstruct one's personal and cultural narrative following displacement is the first step to being able to share that story with others and develop a reciprocal trust relationship. It is widely accepted that food can have transformative effects on the (re)formation of identity, both personal and cultural, with commensality having the ability to strongly reaffirm relationships between individuals as well as religious and ethnic boundaries.[67] This is fundamentally important, as a refugee's sense of self, identity and purpose can be severely disrupted through the traumatic and dehumanising process of flight and seeking asylum in a host country. While I will not explore in detail the role of gender in cooking, it is important to note that food may be particularly significant for women for its role in identity formation in a new country. Loss of traditional roles for women can exacerbate this process, as in many cultures the women are the so-called 'gatekeepers' of food within families: choosing, buying and preparing meals, a role often taken away on arrival at reception centres with cafeteria-style dining halls.[68] Eating food is a marker of identification with a particular collective identity, where the rituals surrounding food and meals provide opportunities for demonstrating to others the richness of one's culture, and one's own skills in preparation of food.[69] This group identity formation lies at the heart of British fears that migrants are living in walled-off communities and are not 'integrating'. However, Lewis highlights that, for refugees, to have some moments of continuity in the form of cultural celebrations involving food, especially in environments that are overwhelmingly new, is fundamental in creating a sense of safety and of home in a new country.[70]

Food can play an important role in situational recollections, but also in the interpretation of one's place in a narrative and the ability to verbalise that narrative. The role of food in the creation of safe spaces is closely related to how food can transform spaces into places of home. Migration is a disruption of the familiar, a change in the 'sensescape' for refugees.[71] Vandevoordt, discussing the formation of home for Syrian refugees, outlines how traditionally Syrian foods evoke strong sensorial associations which make them hugely significant in the creation of a sense of home in environments that are otherwise experienced as hostile.[72]

The extent to which memory and food are linked has been explored extensively. Holtzman outlines how food powerfully evokes cognitive, emotional and physical recollection, and how eating is somewhat unique as an activity that links

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61 Fabio Parasecoli, 'Savoring Semiotics: Food in Intercultural Communication' (2011) 21 Social Semiotics 645.

62 Claude Fischler, 'Commensality, Society, and Culture' (2011) 50 Social Science Information 528.

63 Holtzman (n 17).

64 Woolley and Fishbach (n 19).

65 Mayer, Davis and David Schoorman (n 31).

66 Woolley and Fishbach (n 19) 7.

67 Sidney W Mintz and Christine M Du Bois, 'The Anthropology of Food and Eating' (2002) 31 Annual Review of Anthropology 99; Patrizia La Trecchia, 'Identity in the Kitchen: Creation of Taste and Culinary Memories of an Italian-American Identity' (2012) 30 Italian Americana 44.

68 Karen Agutter and Rachel A Ankeny, 'Food and the Challenge to Identity for Post-War Refugee Women in Australia' (2017) 22 History of the Family 531.

69 Brenda L Beagan and Gwen E Chapman, 'Meanings of Food, Eating and Health Among African Nova Scotians: Certain Things Aren't Meant for Black Folk' (2012) 17 Ethnicity and Health 513; Fischler (n 62).

70 Lewis (n 15).

71 Diana Codesal, 'Eating Abroad, Remembering (at) Home. Three Foodscapes of Ecuadorian Migration in New York, London and Santander' (2010) Anthropology of Food 1.

72 Vandevoordt (n 14).

an intensely personal experience to wider cultural patterns and processes.[73] Within studies of memory we find the term 'nostalgia', and Holtzman outlines two different ways in which this term has been approached in the literature.[74] Traditionally, nostalgia has been approached as a backwards-looking concept, that is, a longing for a homeland, culture or community that has been lost. It is described as a means of transporting the migrant back to a previous time in a different place. An alternative perspective, however, is summarised by Hage, who describes how 'positively experienced nostalgia does not necessarily involve a desire to "go back"; most often than not, [it] is a desire to promote the feeling of being there *here*',[75] a forward-looking posture that sees potential for development of trusting relationships in a new place.

As I discussed previously, power imbalance is largely incompatible with trusting relationships between individuals. Refugees, however, are systematically disempowered throughout their journeys from flight to settling in a home country, and the necessity of food creates regular contexts during this journey for the establishment of power and dependence.[76] Food and food provision are some of the more visible manifestations of unequal power relations that face refugees on their journeys, whether this is through corrupt governments providing lavish feasts in a show of wealth or receiving food aid in refugee camps. Asylum seekers and refugees, having experienced food handouts, cafeteria-style catering or food tokens, may well have experienced this played out with host states expecting recipients to demonstrate gratitude, or even compliance, in return for food provision.[77] Fischler discusses the universal nature of hospitality across all cultures, a gesture that both empowers and dignifies the host but also allows for reciprocity, a fundamental concept in trusting relationships.[78] To eat the same food together can be a powerful symbol of equality, and when given opportunities to offer food and drink as hosts, Vandevoordt describes the potential for refugees to engage in 'temporary subversions of the social order', whereby negative stereotypes of dependence can be refuted, in addition to the empowerment that comes from the ability to host others.[79]

Food and trust, therefore, are two diverse academic fields, with little research that links them directly. My research aims, therefore, to bridge these fields, and weave the two together in light of findings from interviews conducted with asylum seekers in London, UK, highlighting the many similarities between features offered by food and commensality and the elements needed for developing interpersonal trust relationships.

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73   Holtzman (n 17).

74   ibid.

75   Ghassan Hage, 'At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, "Ethnic Food" and Migrant Home-Building' in Julie Langsworth *et al.*, *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West* (Pluto Press 1997) 7.

76   Annia Ciezadlo and Anna Badkhen, 'Eat, Drink, Protest: Stories of the Middle East's Hungry Rumblings' (2011) 186 Foreign Policy 76; Vandevoordt (n 14).

77   Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2nd edn, Cambridge University Press 1977); Vandevoordt (n 14).

78   Fischler (n 62).

79   Vandevoordt (n 14) 609.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and approach

At the outset of this study, I set out to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers and host nationals. I aimed to recruit 5 asylum seeker participants who had been involved with the meal events for a longer period of time, 5 short-term participants, and 5 host national participants ('Local Welcome members', hereafter), to conduct semi-structured interviews with them during a Local Welcome meal event, as well as a follow-up semi-structured interview in another culturally appropriate setting such as a café or restaurant. In addition to these interviews, I planned to use participant observation to observe interactions during meal events. There is comparatively little qualitative data investigating trust. Goodall, in her discussion of working with 'difficult to reach' groups, stated that she didn't know of any study where qualitative methods were used to investigate causality or components of trust at a community level.[80] Given the rich data that can be gathered through qualitative methods,[81] this presents an opportunity to fill this gap in the literature.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Research design received ethics approval prior to the start of data collection. Asylum seekers were from 6 different countries: Syria (3), Eritrea (2), Cameroon (1), Lebanon (1), Iran (1) and the UK (2), n = 10. Staff members of Local Welcome acted as gatekeepers to the Local Welcome meals, as well as one key participant who has resided long-term in the IAC due to health issues. This participant enabled physical access to the IAC, crucial in gathering individuals for meals. All asylum seekers were living in the same IAC in London and had been in the UK for a period of between 3 days and 3 years. In addition, 2 Local Welcome members were interviewed, given that trust relationships are reciprocal and the relationships being studied were those between asylum seekers and host nationals. Participants had all attended a 'cook and eat' event near the IAC run by Local Welcome. Recruitment to these for 'guests' (asylum seekers) was through a process of walking up and down the corridors of the IAC as a small group and asking anyone we met if they would like to come and cook lunch together. Over the course of 5 meals between October 2018 and January 2019, the collected guests (between 6 and 30 each meal) would accompany the group to a nearby church hall, where they sat with members (including myself) around 2–3 tables, and followed a series of cooking steps along with discussion questions that were read out by a table leader.[82]

After the meals, I approached individuals to request interviews if I had developed a rapport with them, and their English was sufficient to allow a meaningful interview. Fieldnotes of interviews and observations were taken contemporaneously and written up in more detail immediately following the events, rather than individuals being recorded. I judged the risk of forgetting details to be an appropriate trade-off for avoiding the possible impact a recording device would have on the research relationship and information divulged.[83] Interviews were intentionally broad and flexible, and, following a brief outline of the research purpose and topic, participants were invited to reflect on any themes they wished to about food. I asked some focused questions following this about, for example, the importance of food in their culture, how their food and cooking habits had changed and how they felt about hosting others. As discussed by Goodall, overt mention of 'trust' was avoided intentionally, given the risk that participants would become defensive when faced with this sensitive topic.[84] Rather, I asked open questions about the components of trusting relationships that were identified in the literature review. I subsequently analysed fieldnotes with a view to grouping together themes identified through the literature review.

3.3 Methodological and ethical limitations

Several barriers emerged that prevented the research design being carried out as initially planned. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, it became clear that mistrust towards myself as a researcher would represent a barrier to interviews. In addition, cancelled monthly meal events and asylum seekers not responding to phone messages led to fewer participants than anticipated. Difficulty getting informed consent prior to the meals meant that interviews during the meals were not possible, and therefore there was limited time after the events for interviews. It transpired that the turnover of the IAC was so quick that there was only 1 participant who was not dispersed within weeks, meaning that, with 1 exception, follow-up interviews were not possible. On several occasions, 1-to-1 interviews were impractical. However, where others joined the conversations, group discussions emerged that led to rich descriptive data and observations of interactions. 7 out of 8 asylum seeker participants were male. This was likely a reflection of English levels, childcare responsibilities and the demographic of the IAC. Given the significance of food to women, in particular, however, the resulting data does not reflect the complexities of gender roles relating to meals and hosting.

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80   Christine Goodall, 'Working with Difficult to Reach Groups: A "Building Blocks" Approach to Researching Trust in Communities' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

81   Graeme Rodgers, '"Hanging out" with Forced Migrants – Methodological and Ethical Challenges' (2004) Forced Migration Review 48.

82   Local Welcome, 'Local Welcome' (2019) <https://www.localwelcome.org/> accessed 1 March 2019.

83   Malin Tillmar, 'Cross-Cultural Comparative Case Studies: A Means of Uncovering Dimensions of Trust' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

84   Goodall (n 80).

There are also limitations in the research design regarding recruitment method, sample size and construct validity. The sample is small, and not chosen randomly – participants were chosen from a group that was willing to attend a social event. Furthermore, in order to avoid coercing participants into accepting an interview, only those who demonstrated an active willingness and who spoke English were interviewed, resulting in a self-selected sample who were already demonstrating a willingness to trust others. There was no control group with which to compare participant answers or observe interactions in alternative contexts. These factors all contribute to results which cannot be generalised to a wider population, but which nevertheless raise interesting points and questions for further research. Perhaps more importantly, however, the subject of trust and its relation to commensality are too complex to distil into distinct interview questions. Jacobsen and Landau emphasise the importance of construct validity, discussing how, if variables are not defined and constructed carefully, the risk is introduced of researching something quite different from what is intended.[85] Trust, as discussed above, is difficult to operationalise, and although attempts were made to identify the components of trust as defined in the literature review during interviews, it was difficult to avoid terms such as 'hosting', 'memory' and 'safety', meaning that results cannot be said to perfectly capture the concept of trust, certainly given its elusive nature.[86] Trust, like many other broad concepts, can very much be said to be socially constructed to a certain extent, and so having participants from several countries makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions.[87] Researcher bias was an ever-present possibility, given the research design. The building of rapport by sharing personal details made sympathetic opinions about the asylum seekers' claims difficult to avoid, and asking particular follow-up questions may have revealed the true research interest in substantiating a connection between food and trust, leading to participants giving my desired responses.[88]

The main ethical issue raised during the research was that of informed consent and the extent to which this is possible when researching vulnerable groups. A further discussion of researching refugees and asylum seekers will follow in Chapter 6, including the nature of consent.

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85   Karen Jacobsen and Loren B Landau, 'The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration' (2003) 27 Disasters 185.

86   Anna Schmidt, '"I Know What You're Doing", Reflexivity and Methods in Refugee Studies' (2007) 26 Refugee Survey Quarterly 82.

87   Eftihia Voutira and Barbara E Harrell-Bond, 'In Search of the Locus of Trust: The Social World of the Refugee Camp' in Daniel E Valentine and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995); Friederike Welter and Nadezhada Alex, 'Researching Trust in Different Cultures' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

88   Hynes (n 12).

4. Findings and discussion: the posture of trust

4.1 Introduction

The first step in a trust relationship, the 'posture of trust', takes place when encountering a stranger and when there is little precise evidence about the individual. The 'posture of trust', then, relies on more intuitive, pre-conscious and emotional associations. It is a product of many complex and interrelated factors and in this chapter I outline the findings of my research, describing first the ways in which a posture of mistrust was visible in both asylum seekers and host nationals, going on to discuss the ways in which cooking and eating a meal together provided an environment in which a posture of trust could be developed. The posture of trust was facilitated by food in four main ways: by representing something routine and 'normal' as well as a means to combat social isolation; by creating a feeling of safety; by enabling a positive emotional landscape; and by providing initial access to a conversation topic that has been frequently called a 'universal language', and is therefore accessible cross-culturally. Before going on to explore specific findings, it is worthwhile to note the role of risk and vulnerability in trust relationships.

4.2 Trust involves risk and vulnerability

Mayer *et al.* emphasise that vulnerability and risk are always present in trust, which distinguishes the concept from mere cooperative behaviour or predictability.[89] When we speak of trust, therefore, we are always speaking about a risk being taken.[90] As mentioned previously, for many asylum seekers, a posture of mistrust may well serve as a beneficial coping strategy, and therefore personal narratives may not be shared. The risk, therefore, that is being presented in the context of this research, is that of sharing a personal story, with the possibility that an individual's story, once shared, might be misused.[91] There are many, perhaps smaller, risks taken along the way before getting to the point of sharing personal details, however.

Right from the start of the process, as one of the Local Welcome members explained: 'there is a vulnerability in having to leave [the IAC], and all these people will be there that you don't know'.[92] The same volunteer described hunger as a particular vulnerability, saying that for those with resources, the symbolism of sharing bread was enough to offset a certain level of hunger, but, for under-resourced people such as asylum seekers, it was vital that they didn't go away hungry, as 'it wouldn't match the social experience'. Given that asylum seekers are foregoing the available food on offer for lunch at the IAC for the promise of another meal, this is certainly another risk. These risks are not balanced, that is, the asylum seeker has much more to lose than the host national, who only faces the risk of feeling awkward or uncertain, or the vicarious trauma of listening to painful stories. It must be remembered that this imbalance in risk remains a constant and difficult-to-remove source of power imbalance.[93]

4.3 Asylum seekers and host nationals start from a posture of mistrust

Many asylum seekers are not merely neutral in their perception of others, but rather hold a posture of mistrust, in particular towards those who are perceived to be part of the immigration system. The start of this process may have been triggered by their initial reception interviews, with the perception that they themselves weren't trusted. Participants described the mistrust they felt towards them during the asylum process, with one stating that: 'In Lebanon, you are innocent until you are guilty, but here they say you are lying before seeing anything', and, describing the border staff member who took his fingerprints: 'she sees criminal things'.[94] Griffiths explains the many inconsistencies, administrative blunders and arbitrary decisions that are found in the British asylum system,[95] which lead to views such as that of one participant who stated: 'I didn't know that guy [border agency staff] was sitting there just to refuse me'.[96] Hawley explains that in environments in which a group or individual is mistrusted, they are then less likely to trust the other party.[97] This may feel intuitive; however, it is a key negative influence on an asylum seeker's development of trust. Views of active mistrust were expressed towards staff running the IAC, with a report from one participant that staff were stealing equipment and donations destined for asylum seekers and selling it on: 'the people running [the IAC], they run it like a gang…I don't trust them at all'.[98] He went on to say that since coming to the UK, he has got 'to the point I don't trust anybody, the only people I trust is church'.

89   Mayer, Davis and David Schoorman (n 31).

90   Rousseau *et al.* (n 32).

91   Daniel and Knudsen (n 13).

92   'Interview 10'.

93   Peter Nannestad *et al.*, 'Do Institutions or Culture Determine the Level of Social Trust? The Natural Experiment of Migration from Non-Western to Western Countries' (2014) 40 Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 544.

94   'Interview 1'.

95   Melanie Griffiths, '"Vile Liars and Truth Distorters"; Truth, Trust and the Asylum System' (2012) 28 Anthropology Today 8.

96   'Interview 4'.

97   Hawley (n 11).

98   Interview 4 (n 96).

During the research phase, when attending 'cook and eat' events, I observed this posture of mistrust from the moment of meeting the asylum seekers. As outlined in the methodology, guests at the events were invited to attend through a process that was far from nuanced. An asylum seeker contact – a resident of the IAC – would go up and down the communal corridors inviting people to come to lunch. Local Welcome members would follow and show pictures of food and an invitation to join for lunch, translated into a variety of languages. These somewhat blunt and unexpected invitations understandably led to many refusals. Many would not meet our gaze or would stay back a distance. Those that agreed to join were largely silent, gathering their coats and standing in the lobby of the accommodation.

This finding was not unexpected and adds to the already substantial body of literature suggesting that asylum seekers both mistrust and are mistrusted by host nationals.[99] However, observations and a comment from one of the volunteers both acknowledge this starting posture, but also point towards a transition. On arrival at the church hall across the road, there was some attempt at conversation from some members, but, as one member described, 'until cooking starts it's going to be uncomfortable, but that changes as soon as the cooking starts when people go "oh I get it"'.[100] This 'oh I get it' moment represents the start of a shift in posture, from one of mistrust to trust, and the following sections will go on to explore the ways in which cooking and eating facilitate this shift.

4.4 Meals are a form of social contact, routine and normality

In order that trust can be nurtured, facilitating two individuals meeting each other remains one of the first challenges. Meals can offer straightforward and accessible meeting places that are normal and everyday experiences. Frisby and Featherstone quote Simmel, who writes: 'persons who in no way share any special interest can gather together at the common meal…there lies the immeasurable sociological significance of the meal'.[101] The importance of daily routine and breaking out of social isolation were raised both across the literature as well as by participants. Several participants described the IAC as being an isolating place to live, with one participant saying: 'it's not like a family…you leave your room, get your plate, sit, and you are alone…people come for 3 or 4 days, getting relationships is not easy'.[102] He said he appreciated the group meal, saying: 'it helps me to know, to interact. This is good. You can sit together and converse… food is a means to socialising'. A participant who has been in the UK for several years recounted several stories of how cooking had enabled new friendships and social contacts for him, concluding that cooking is 'an example of a link between a stranger'.[103] Meals offered host nationals a chance to meet people who were different from them. One Local Welcome member explained that she had been looking for a way to integrate more with her local community, describing her own experience as a young woman in her 20s living, and therefore cooking and eating, alone. She enjoyed the shared meal as a means to be around others, saying: 'it's a cure for loneliness, and there's a loneliness epidemic, we have a serious problem in our country'.[104] This was echoed by a participant who said that when eating a meal with strangers he experiences 'nothing but friendliness, because a meal is a friendly event'.[105] He went on to describe how important a shared space was at the IAC: 'The best thing that [the IAC] has done is the food court so people can meet there. The food court is the place you're supposed to sit and talk, like a family, it gathers people for meals, and the children all play together, and then their parents meet through the children. It is very important, as we can support each other'.

The value of taking part in an 'everyday' activity with regard to creating an atmosphere where a posture of trust can be developed is highlighted in the literature, in particular for those such as asylum seekers whose lives are in periods of disruption. Hynes highlights how the hostile asylum process in the UK makes employment and societal engagement difficult for asylum seekers,[106] with lives being suspended in uncertainty for long periods of time, and there being few opportunities for contact between asylum seekers and host nationals.[107] Epp articulates: 'for those going through a traumatic event such as displacement, activities as basic as cooking and eating can bring relief, sometimes even humour, to personal narratives that otherwise seem to be an endless spiral of tragedy and hopelessness'.[108] This sentiment was echoed by another participant, saying: 'some people, they may have had awful long journeys, they may have swam across the sea, for them, this means heaven, and might be the most important thing'.[109]

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99   Hynes (n 12); Hynes (n 6).

100   Interview 10 (n 92).

101   David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (Sage 1997) 130.

102   'Interview 6'.

103   Lebanon (n 94).

104   'Interview 9'.

105   'Interview 7'.

106   Hynes (n 6).

107   Roger Zetter, 'More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization' (2007) 20 Journal of Refugee Studies 172.

108   Marlene Epp, '"The Dumpling in My Soup Was Lonely Just like Me": Food in the Memories of Mennonite Women Refugees' (2016) 25 Women's History Review 365.

109   'Interview 7' (n 105).

4.5 Meals are evocative of safety

Peteet emphasises the importance of a sense of safety in order to develop a posture of trust, describing trust as a 'fragile and situational concept'.[110] Manz similarly identifies security and stability as necessary for fostering trust. The asylum seekers interviewed were not generally living in environments of safety, either physically or emotionally.[111] One participant recounted a number of personal possessions that had been stolen from his room at the IAC, stating: 'I can't say I feel secure there'.[112] The context of a shared meal, by contrast, was evocative of safety. One participant explained: 'You feel safe with others when you eat with them, it is a safe place, you would never have food in an unsafe place, you would not be eating if there was an enemy at the door, you would be fighting for your life and your body would not want food. Like in battle injuries, there is adrenaline, but when you are safe, your body wants food'.[113]

In addition to a safe physical and emotional environment, participants frequently mentioned the safety of a particular activity and conversation topic as being very important, for both asylum seekers and host nationals. One Local Welcome member explained that sitting to cook together with a set of instructions meant that the cooking steps could be re-referenced, 'which fills potential gaps in the conversation. It makes it easy to go from 0 to 60 because although lots of the conversation is redundant, it's easy to have…it's easy to listen when you're eating'.[114] He added that, at first, deeper narratives 'aren't ones that people want to touch, as they've got the highest risk of being painful'. Another volunteer echoed this sentiment, saying she felt food was a 'safe' topic to discuss.[115] The emotional safety of discussing food was observable throughout the events, in particular as the format of the cook-and-eat events involves all cooking pairs working through a series of questions simultaneously. The first question is about memories of birthplace, and there is generally minimal engagement. The second question, however, is about favourite meals, and this is where I observed the tables collectively start to relax. In one particular meal, a group of women had remained largely silent, physically sat further away from the table. One lady, who hadn't yet spoken, upon hearing this question immediately exclaimed: 'cassava leaves!',[116] and this prompted many agreements and led to discussions about where the leaves could be bought in London. One volunteer described this question as 'an interesting moment in the meal' and 'one of the best questions'.[117] Food as a means of 'breaking barriers' was referenced by two different participants. One participant felt that 'sharing food makes people closer, they share recipes and stories. Sharing food is breaking barriers, people feel more comfortable',[118] and another commented that discussing food 'breaks the ice, it breaks the formality. Food helps me to break these barriers'.[119]

The mention of food as a 'safe' topic to discuss exemplifies the delicate 'tightrope' that must be walked by asylum seekers during the asylum process, between two extremes of personal disclosure.[120] One extreme is the silence and anonymity adopted as a means of avoiding being labelled as a 'problem' or inviting further scrutiny, given that disclosure of mental health concerns to professionals, or being even slightly uncertain or ambiguous when sharing their personal narrative to asylum officials, could jeopardise their claim. This contrasts with the need to give as much detail as possible to support their claim. The shared activity of cooking and eating together is evocative of other contexts which can be considered safe. A key finding that is not, for the most part, addressed in the literature, is that talking *about* food was seen as a safe conversation topic, lacking the intensity and aggression of an asylum interview, and which was an appropriate means of sharing certain personal details.

4.6 Meals provide a positive emotional environment

It was primarily through participant observation during cook-and-eat events that the power of food to evoke positive emotions became clear. It is relevant, if not a particularly contested claim, to note the impact that cooking and eating had on people's visible emotional state. At the IAC, where participants lived, meals were cooked off-site and transported to the kitchen, where they were then reheated and served through a cafeteria-style hatch in polystyrene tubs with plastic cutlery. Residents could then eat their food in the cafeteria. There was a table to the side where residents could self-serve coffee into polystyrene cups. I shared a pasta meal with several participants there, and the cafeteria had little warmth or character, with various participants describing the food as 'plastic', 'soggy' and 'terrible',[121] while acknowledging that the quality of the food served had improved following a series of complaints. A participant who had been at the IAC for 5 days described the way that food was served, saying the kitchen staff 'don't show much

110   Julie Peteet, 'Transforming Trust: Dispossession and Empowerment Among Palestinian Refugees' in E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995) 169.

111   Manz (n 51).

112   'Interview 6' (n 102).

113   'Interview 7' (n 105).

114   'Interview 10' (n 92).

115   'Interview 9' (n 104).

116   'Observations A'.

117   'Interview 10' (n 92).

118   'Interview 2'.

119   'Interview 1' (n 94).

120   Knudsen (n 42).

121   'Interview 1' (n 94); 'Interview 2'; 'Interview 5'.

human character. The kitchen staff aren't acting a friendly way, just like you are clients'.[122] This was then contrasted by descriptions of the cook-and-eat events. As one volunteer commented, after guests arrived, 'people then felt open, and guards came down, they laughed, and had a nice time. It was amazing how quickly that happened. They left calmer, somehow, and not just them but me too. I love it. I think it's equally, if not more, valuable for me, it really adds to my sense of wellbeing'.[123] This was reflected in my observations across all the meals attended, in that laughter, smiles and even dancing emerged following cooking and eating together. It wouldn't be appropriate to claim that food was the only factor causing this outcome, but participants described the ways in which the process of cooking and eating had contributed. A participant explained: 'I really enjoy the first smell, especially garlic and coriander. It makes me so happy, I am dancing and smiling, and I love when people are complimenting my recipes'.[124] He returned to this in a further interview, describing the garlic and the coriander, and grinning. Another participant said that he usually eats by himself but that 'eating together is a good feeling, making dialogue more easy when you don't know [someone]. Eating together is so lovely, so good'.[125]

Vázquez-Medina and Medina, in their study of Mexican migrants at markets, describe the psychological comfort and 'immediate therapeutic effects' that certain foods provide: 'they tranquillise, cheer up, amuse, entertain, eliminate anxiety…',[126] and this could be seen clearly across each of the meal events I attended. Dunn and Schweitzer[127] and Hayes-Conroy and Sweet[128] similarly found that happiness and gratitude increased trust between participants across many different settings. This finding adds to the body of literature describing the positive emotional state brought about by food, and specifically identifies eating and cooking as activities which can create environments in which trust can be fostered.

4.7 Food is a universal language that is accessible cross-culturally

When building a trust relationship between an asylum seeker and a host national, there is likely to be a cultural divide. However, food was described as a key bridge that could bring together people from different backgrounds. One participant said that: 'British [people] are the most open to food [from other cultures]'.[129] The long-term asylum seeker participant gave an anecdote which he felt exemplified the British approach towards him, generally starting as one of neutrality in body language and tone. When his fingerprints were being taken on arrival, this neutrality changed to laughter and enthusiastic chatter when the topic of food came up. He says this happens often when British people discover that he is from Lebanon, saying: 'wow I love that food, and oh my god that's my favourite'.[130] He explained: 'you see, it is not ethnic language or physical characteristics, but food that unites people…because I enjoy cooking food and am making many friends through this, I am living proof that food unites people, uniting the world'.

One Local Welcome member described how he thought that eating a meal together can be beneficial whether or not participants are particularly interested in food or whether there is a rich culture of food in their home country: 'the ritual of breaking bread, it is a great analogy because bread is quite bland, but it is the ancient ritual of sharing a meal that speaks to everyone, it is the most important part, it speaks powerfully to all cultures'.[131] One participant articulated this by saying: 'meals gather us together, food is what we have in common between people, no matter what colour or country, we all gather for food'.[132] These findings support Holtzman's descriptions of ethnic food being a 'particularly palatable form of multiculturalism', as opposed to dress, music and language.[133]

4.8 Conclusion

These research findings suggest that to cook and eat a meal together creates an environment in which a posture of mistrust can be shifted towards one of trust, enabled by a form of social engagement that facilitates cross-cultural interaction, and that is fostered in an environment of positive emotions and safety. This posture of trust creates the foundation for a deepening of this relationship, and a further assessment of the trustworthiness of the Trusted, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

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122 'Interview 5' (n 121).

123 'Interview 10' (n 104).

124 'Interview 1' (n 94).

125 'Interview 3'.

126 José A Vázquez-Medina and F Xavier Medina, 'Migration, Nostalgia and the Building of a Food Imaginary: Mexican Migrants at "La Pulga" Market in San Joaquin Valley, California' (2015) 8 Journal for Communication Studies 133, 136.

127 Dunn and Schweitzer (n 27).

128 Allison Hayes-Conroy and Elizabeth L Sweet, 'Whose Adequacy? (Re)Imagining Food Security with Displaced Women in Medellín, Colombia' (2015) 32 Agriculture and Human Values 373.

129 'Interview 5' (n 121).

130 'Interview 1' (n 94).

131 'Interview 9' (n 92).

132 'Interview 7' (n 105).

133 Holtzman (n 17) 373.

5. Findings and discussion: the assessment of trustworthiness

5.1 Introduction

Having transitioned from an active mistrust of another into a posture of trust, there then begins the next step in the process, the more cognitive, deliberate assessment of the trustworthiness of the other. It is this stage in which information becomes more necessary in order to make a judgement about whether or not the Trusted is likely to fulfil their promises and the Trustor's expectations. The literature suggests that details of the Trusted are key at this stage. For somebody to be assessed as worthy of trust, they must not have a reputation of betrayal and deceit, but rather the Trustor must be given indicators of their behaviour or moral framework. A sense of personal and cultural identity is also important at this stage, especially for refugees as, in order to share their personal details, an individual must have a sense of their own narrative. A sense of familiarity and the sense that one is in a place of 'home' are also both factors that enable an assessment of the trustworthiness of another, and I will explore these factors further in the following sections.

5.2 Food facilitates the sharing of personal narratives

Familiarity, that 'you are like me' or that 'I understand you well', has been identified in the literature as important in the assessment of someone's trustworthiness. Hardin's 'encapsulated interest' model of trust emphasises the importance of familiarity, describing trust as the belief that the Trusted has the Trustor's interests encapsulated within their own.[134] Being able to share information about personal details, preferences and background allows others to make judgements about the Trusted's intentions and moral codes, and therefore make better predictions about their behaviour. For personal details and preferences to be shared, they have to be communicated effectively to the other party, and this involves a process both of remembering details and constructing a narrative in a format that is appropriate to both Trustor and Trusted. Food was described by participants both as a means to recall details, and as a means to communicate these details in a meaningful way.

The ability of food to evoke memories was mentioned by several participants or prompted the recounting of further stories, even if this wasn't made explicit by the participant. A participant who was initially very hesitant to talk to me was prompted by a question about food to say: 'some food reminds me of my mum, some of friends, and not only food, some drinks, some special family cocktails, family tea…'.[135] The three participants present at the time then enjoyed trying to translate different food-related idioms, and this led the initially-hesitant participant to recount a remarkable story of when an Iraqi man had noticed the style of 'mate' straw he had fashioned himself from tin-foil and said he had seen another man make a similar one. The connection led to the participant being reunited with a family member after flight from Syria. This example highlights beautifully the ways in which memories of food can prompt the sharing of personal and moving stories.

A participant who had previously described his love for cooking was more explicit about the way that the senses influenced his memories: 'there is no such thing as food and memory, but there is smell and memory, and taste and memory!'[136] When I asked him if eating Lebanese food reminded him of being back in Lebanon, he replied with an emphatic 'no…the vegetables [in the UK] have no taste. Cucumbers, they have no taste! In Lebanon, they are small and fat…you will see at the market, people shouting, saying I have small [therefore tasteful] cucumbers!' At this stage, he was enthusiastic, and gesticulating as though shouting at the market, and went on to speak extensively about his memories of Lebanese food. Another participant joined in and talked about the way that corruption prevented Syria and Lebanon from thriving despite their rich natural resources and sunshine that could grow tasteful vegetables, reminding us that memories do not just pertain to the familial home, or cultural norms, but can also touch on the political forces that control food.

The rich symbolism of food came up in several interviews. Two participants discussed the Middle-Eastern idiom 'we ate bread and salt together' and described this as meaning there was trust and a strong friendship between people.[137] They explained: 'otherwise we wouldn't share food. You wouldn't share food with a stranger…if you eat their food, it shows that you trust them'[138] and: 'sharing bread and salt, it means we'll never betray each other'.[139] One went on to discuss the rich symbolism of bread across cultures: 'bread specifically, bread is common to nations, grain is universal, and it is symbolised by bread. Bread is mentioned in the Bible and the Quran, and each country makes it their way… across cultures, different bread'.[140] The discussion of bread in this way can be seen as a representation of continuity in the otherwise disrupted 'sensescape' brought about by migration.[141] One participant highlighted the appropriateness of discussing food as a means to sharing information about yourself, saying: 'talking about food will lead you to talk

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134   Hardin (n 24).

135   'Interview 3' (n 125).

136   'Interview 1' (n 94).

137   ibid; 'Interview 2' (n 118).

138   'Interview 1' (n 94).

139   'Interview 2' (n 118).

140   'Interview 1' (n 94).

141   Codesal (n 71).

about yourself. By saying "I like…" you are sharing your personal emotions, sharing part of my personality. If you were on a train and you met someone, you wouldn't just start to talk about "I like this, I like that", but if you were talking about food, oh! Then! This would be normal'.[142]

The literature highlights how food can also be used metaphorically to tell stories that are too painful to describe otherwise, exemplified in the article title, 'The dumpling in my soup was lonely just like me'.[143] Clark describes the ways in which stories about food can transmit emotional burdens and deeper understandings.[144] In addition to 'safe' conversation topics (highlighted in Chapter 4), food stories may also raise topics that are too sensitive to discuss explicitly, such as 'bread and salt' as a means to discuss trust and betrayal – sensitive subjects in themselves. Without exception, these interviews demonstrate how the discussion of food prompts recall of memories, and although the ill-defined natures of memory and trust must be acknowledged, this evidence still adds to the large body of literature that suggests the sensory experience of a meal is powerful for memory and therefore the reconstruction of narrative.[145]

5.3 Meals provide opportunities to subvert hierarchy and reclaim autonomy

An (un)equal balance of power, and the way that hospitality impacts on this, were recurrent themes in almost every interview. As outlined in the literature review, a power differential is generally incompatible with a trust relationship and disincentivises trust on both sides of the power gradient. Uslaner states: 'When your resources are abundant, you can absorb occasional losses by people who exploit you. When things look bleak, you look at people you don't know as rivals for what little you have'.[146] It is therefore in the interests of fostering trust that contexts are found in which the power gradient between asylum seeker and host national can be levelled.

One participant explained that he felt he wasn't seen in the UK as someone who could contribute: 'people here see me as someone who just wants to take',[147] adding that the UK government 'give you things in return for your cooperation', demonstrating the impact of this hierarchy on his self-perception. I was only able to interview one female asylum seeker, and she felt the power dynamics of the IAC very strongly. She explained that while she knew the staff at the IAC were trying to help, she still didn't like to be served and preferred to cook her own meals in her own kitchen. According to the participant, the IAC serving her food and doing her laundry made her feel 'weak', 'vulnerable' and 'disempowered'. She explained: 'the kitchen is my kingdom'.[148] One of the Local Welcome members described the relationship as often being: 'oh you're the poor you, and I'm the do-gooder', but that eating together had been different: 'we both like eating and we can do this together'.[149] She also described the cook-and-eat events as 'all a bit chaotic', but clarified that this was a good thing, as 'it's not slick where they just sit and receive, they can contribute, and improve it'. She said that one of her meal partners had been a professional chef, and she, therefore, could allow herself to receive knowledge and skill-sharing from him.

Hosting was seen as a means of reclaiming power. For example, one participant said: 'hosting means, people consider you as someone who gives, as being generous. People come to receive, you are considered a good somebody'.[150] He felt that at the IAC he had been 'treated like a little boy…'. At this point he was silent and lowered his head, gently shaking it. 'Hosting is something I would have loved to do if I had the means'. Another participant described the joy of his experience of cooking for people in the UK, saying with much pride: 'When you are cooking for a group and they don't know what you are making, and then they start to see and say oh my god, that's the result!...To be able to say "voila", and they say "that's a masterpiece, wow!"'[151]

These findings add to the literature outlining how asylum seekers are often made to feel that they should be grateful for what they receive from the UK government,[152] and that there is a significant power imbalance between asylum seekers and host nationals. They suggest, in addition, that meals are excellent contexts in which knowledge can be reciprocally shared, tasks can be completed with a shared goal, and where autonomy can be reclaimed in the form of hospitality towards others.

5.4 Food contributes to the (re)formation of individual and cultural identities

In order to be able to engage with another individual with a view to developing a trust relationship, knowledge of the other is necessary, but so is knowledge of oneself. Daniel and Knudsen state that: 'one of the most important components in the recovery of meaning, the making of culture, and the reestablishment of trust is the need and the

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142   'Interview 2' (n 118).

143   Epp (n 108).

144   John Clark, 'Food Stories' (2004) 4 Gastronomica 43.

145   Holtzman (n 17); La Trecchia (n 67).

146   Uslaner (n 23) 15.

147   'Interview 4' (n 96).

148   'Interview 8'.

149   'Interview 10' (n 104).

150   'Interview 6' (n 102).

151   'Interview 1' (n 94).

152   Bourdieu (n 77).

freedom to construct a normative picture of one's past within which "who one was" can be securely established to the satisfaction of the refugee'.[153] Hawley, in addition, explains that a certain level of trust in oneself, both in the sense that we can trust our judgements about others and that we are ourselves trustworthy, is necessary for the ability to trust others.[154]

Discussions of identity, in particular where this related to cultural pride, occurred frequently in interviews. In contrast to mentions of asylum interviews, in which personal identity markers were frequently dismissed or downplayed,[155] answers to questions about their cultural food were the longest and those that appeared to bring the most pleasure and confidence to participants. Pride in one's ethnic cuisine was a recurring theme in the interviews, such as: 'olive oil for the Lords', 'best olives in the world' and comments praising Syrian food's taste and variety.[156] One participant stated in relation to food: 'for some people, it may make them proud of their country, and it gives them emotional support',[157] and another said: 'I'm proud of that aspect of my culture. I don't mean to offend, but the British kitchen is not very rich. I hear that hummus is the most popular thing you can buy for lunch!'[158] This emphasis on a positive aspect of their culture in contrast with British culture subverts the predominant and damaging narrative that the national identity of asylum seekers – unlike that of their host national counterparts – has been destroyed.[159]

During one of the meals, I observed a young Iraqi man who had worked as a chef. He spoke very little English, but stood guard over a pan of potato rostis, being unwilling to serve them until they were perfectly cooked. He appeared proud of the food when eventually serving the rostis (which were only ready once people were starting to clear away the plates!), and this moment of pride was enabled by a fairly simple cooking activity.[160] In this action, he transformed his identity from the receiving guest, having been dependent on the food handed to him through the IAC cafeteria hatch, to a host and provider.[161]

Cultural and religious beliefs surrounding food rituals can also reinforce identity. One participant observed that some Muslims became stricter in their observations of Halal when coming to the UK: 'It becomes a matter of identity, "this is me, this is my identity"',[162] supporting a significant body of literature outlining the ways in which beliefs and rituals around food can reinforce cultural and ethnic identities.[163]

5.5 Meals are evocative of home, a place of trust

The importance of a sense of 'home' in the development of a trust relationship must not be overlooked. Home represents stability, relationships, security and the putting down of roots – home is an environment in which trust is not only often taken for granted, but also necessary. There were numerous references to 'home' in interviews, and several participants highlighted how food and group meals fostered this sense of home. One participant described one of the cook-and-eat events: 'here it is like family, and because we have abandoned our family, this is very important. It brings back memories of eating with our families, a sense of feeling of being back home'.[164] He acknowledged that memories of home would be strengthened when he ate familiar foods: 'the feeling would be stronger with the actual food, but the experience of family is still there, it is 50 per cent of the food because always there are jokes and talking'. He returned to this theme later in the interview, saying: 'Although people have different stories, most people went through the same feelings, the feeling of losing home, so eating together they can have the feeling of being at home, the best feeling of home'. In his description of home as being primarily with family, he highlights that 'home' is not merely a nation-state, but rather a sense of warmth and familiarity. Family, similarly, is a place where trust between members is assumed,[165] affirming the notion that a sense of home is important in developing trust relationships.

Sitting on the floor was discussed by several participants, with one explaining that since individuals from certain regions would have their meals sitting around a stove, 'here [the UK], it is a new culture, a new beginning…sitting around a table is not familiar. That chimney in Lebanon, it makes no sense to sit on chairs around it'.[166] This was also mentioned by another participant, who described how if you were taken out for a meal by someone, you would go to a restaurant

153　E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen, 'Introduction' in E Valentine Daniel and John Chr Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees* (University of California Press 1995) 5.

154　Hawley (n 11).

155　Daniel and Knudsen (n 153).

156　'Interview 1' (n 94); 'Interview 2' (n 118).

157　'Interview 2' (n 118).

158　'Interview 5' (n 121).

159　Daniel and Knudsen (n 153).

160　'Observations B'.

161　Vandevoordt (n 14).

162　'Interview 2' (n 118).

163　Paulette Kershenovich, 'Evoking the Essence of the Divine: The Construction of Identity through Food in the Syrian Jewish Community in Mexico' (2002) 5 A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues 105; Mintz and Du Bois (n 67); Sara Greco Morasso and Tania Zittoun, 'The Trajectory of Food as a Symbolic Resource for International Migrants' (2014) 15 Outlines – Critical Practice Studies 28 <http://www.outlines.dk>.

164　'Interview 7' (n 105).

165　Peteet (n 110).

166　'Interview 1' (n 94).

and sit on chairs, therefore 'when you sit at a table, you are a guest, but when you sit on the floor, you are home'.[167] A third participant confirmed that sitting on the floor 'helps me to imagine I'm sitting in my house',[168] highlighting how important the physical context and set-up of a meal is for enabling a sense of home. Indeed, Vandevoordt describes how everyday objects and familiar routines are vital for the feeling of being at home.[169] The one female participant described how eating together gave a feeling of 'warmth' which she had been seeking,[170] providing an example of Hage's conception of nostalgia both as looking backwards, but also seeking to establish home, here.[171] For asylum seekers who have fled, and often been forced to leave behind objects that provided this environment, food, drink and the rituals surrounding cooking and eating appear to take on a greater significance in restoring a sense of home.[172]

5.6 Time is a necessary component for the assessment of trustworthiness

Time is vital for the development of trust. Trust research highlights that without the possibility of repeat interactions, there is no sense in speaking in terms of 'trust', as sufficient information about one another cannot be gathered, and there is little incentive to demonstrate trustworthiness or to make a judgement about the trustworthiness of another.[173] The UK dispersal programme makes repeat interactions with asylum seekers living in IACs extremely difficult, given that they are often quickly dispersed to another city with little warning. A Local Welcome member recalled, however, that while guests usually only came to a cook-and-eat event once, he had attended a meal where there were many of the same guests, and this enabled a richer exchange: 'the stories came easier, especially during the second meal, as we were past the trading of identity tokens, and onto sharing narratives'.[174]

5.7 Conclusion

The cook-and-eat events and one-off interactions and interviews that formed the basis of my interviews and observations cannot be said to have led to trust relationships, given their time span. However, participants described, and I observed, a clear transition from a posture of mistrust to a posture of trust. This is admittedly just the first step in what is a long journey to judge another as trustworthy, but these findings nevertheless demonstrate that cooking and eating together offer an excellent context for the assessment of trustworthiness to take place (once more physical stability has been established for asylum seekers). This is enabled by a meal's ability to offer a place of home, and a means of reconstruction of individual and cultural identities. Meals provide ways to reclaim autonomy through hospitality, and through the evoking of memories, that can then be communicated in a rich, descriptive way through the powerful imagery of food.

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167   'Interview 2' (n 118).

168   'Interview 5' (n 121).

169   Vandevoordt (n 14).

170   'Interview 8' (n 148).

171   Hage (n 75).

172   Malkki (n 48); Codesal (n 71); Lewis (n 15).

173   Davide Barrera, Vincent Buskens and Werner Raub, 'Embedded Trust: The Analytical Approach in Vignettes, Laboratory Experiments and Surveys' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016).

174   'Interview 10' (n 92).

6. Findings and discussion: trust in research with asylum seekers

6.1 Introduction

In discussions of methodology in refugee research, trust between researcher and participant is frequently mentioned in an offhand way as being important to consider, often in the context of ethical concerns, regarding the ways in which participants may mistrust researchers' motivations. Trust relationships can also be presented as such an obvious component of research that the concept is generally not interrogated further, due to it not being practicable to do so, despite trust's centrality to the gathering of rich qualitative data.[175] For example, Rodgers, in his encouragement to 'hang out' with forced migrants, advocates for the long, slow, deep relationships that are very much necessary for the development of trust, but this is not made explicit.[176] In contrast, when researcher–participant relationships have been ignored – or even discouraged – merely polite, formal and superficial responses result, prompting a call to researchers to acknowledge and engage with the nature of their relationships with their participants as an integral part of methodology and data analysis.[177] Despite making this call, Miller doesn't explicitly address what is a significant gap in much refugee research, that of trying to identify the specific elements, techniques or contexts within which these trusting relationships can be formed between researcher and participant.[178]

6.2 Research starts from a posture of mistrust

Hynes identifies researchers as a group that refugees might mistrust,[179] and despite the researcher–participant relationship not being something that I explicitly asked about during interviews, this posture of mistrust towards me was nevertheless observed. On the first meal that I attended with a view to conducting interviews, I attempted to recruit participants prior to the meal. There was universal hesitancy, with nobody willing to commit to speaking to me for research purposes. This was made clear either through verbal refusals, silence or through body language that communicated suspicion or discomfort, exemplifying the general posture of mistrust towards those who may appear to be linked to authorities. The process of getting a consent form signed was uncomfortable, as participants who were unfamiliar with research were understandably hesitant, with two participants giving verbal consent but ultimately refusing to sign, raising the possibility that other participants felt coerced into signing the form in what may not have been truly informed consent.[180]

6.3 Reputation and time are important for trust-building

Having a link with a participant who was seen to be trustworthy was instrumental in roughly half of the interviews. An invitation from this participant who has lived long-term in the IAC appeared to bestow credibility onto me that immediately sped up the development of rapport, very much reflecting the trust research suggesting that reputation is vital in trust.[181] Sitting with this long-term resident, and him beckoning others over and encouraging them to speak to me, had a visibly relaxing influence on other participants, who then allowed me to interview them. As discussed previously, there was insufficient time with all participants to build a relationship that was truly based on trust. Asylum seeking participants all lived at the IAC, and therefore were waiting for compulsory dispersal in a matter of days or weeks and so were understandably unwilling to commit to a follow-up interview given their unstable circumstances. Miller highlights the large time investment required in order to build trust sufficient to gather meaningful data,[182] and therefore it is possible that the data gathered in this research may well only represent superficial and self-protective behaviours.

6.4 Meals enable a redistribution of power in contrast with asylum interviews

Food played a prominent role in my ability to engage with participants. One participant spontaneously highlighted that the principles we were discussing in our interview applied to us as two individuals, saying: 'before we ate, we were strangers, now we're not'.[183] The basic practical task of cooking a meal together was a simple way of disrupting the narrative of powerful researcher interviewing vulnerable asylum seeker. Participants were, by and large, more skilled at cooking than I was, and appeared to enjoy watching and correcting my clumsy attempts to remove seeds from

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175 Fergus Lyon, 'Access and Non-Probability Sampling in Qualitative Research' in Fergus Lyon, Guido Möllering and Mark NK Saunders (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2016); Kenneth E Miller, 'Beyond the Frontstage: Trust, Access, and the Relational Context in Research with Refugee Communities' (2004) 33 American Journal of Community Psychology 217.

176 Rodgers (n 81).

177 Miller (n 175).

178 ibid.

179 Hynes (n 12); Hynes (n 6).

180 Jennifer Leaning, 'Ethics of Research in Refugee Populations' (2001) 357 The Lancet 1432; Richard Hugman, Linda Bartolomei and Eileen Pittaway, 'Human Agency and the Meaning of Informed Consent: Reflections on Research with Refugees' (2011) 24 Journal of Refugee Studies 655.

181 Hardin (n 24).

182 Miller (n 175).

183 'Interview 2' (n 118).

a chilli. This shared activity was symbolic of a levelling of this hierarchy and was a sentiment echoed by one of the members: 'it was a really bonding experience, as I was chopping onions really badly, and he was showing me how to do it'.[184] To begin an interview with a shared task and equal responsibility for its outcome, working towards the same end in which we were both equally invested, provided a micro-model of a relationship in which our goals and interests were shared. This contrasted with the dynamic that is often in place in research with refugees, that of the researcher collecting, measuring and analysing information extracted from refugees, with little space for shared creations and an equal investment in the encounter.[185]

Interviews themselves had the potential to be evocative of stressful asylum interviews, despite my making it clear that I was not connected to the Home Office.[186] One participant was eager to present himself as trustworthy and, perhaps anticipating that I would not trust him, said several times: 'I don't tell lies' throughout our discussion.[187] The gentle, slow and methodical task of chopping an onion, however, and the enjoyment of the smell of herbs contrasted with the fast-paced, direct and often bewildering style of many asylum interviews, providing a sensory disruption to this memory and enabling a relaxation of the vigilance which is associated with these high-stakes interviews.[188]

6.5 Food enables the sharing of stories

When speaking to participants at the IAC outdoor courtyard, aided by my asylum seeker contact, one participant was much more hesitant to speak to me. He initially only spoke in Arabic to the other participant, and we exchanged only a few awkward words about how long he had lived at the IAC. However, when I asked him about his favourite food, he began with 'I like food' and laughed.[189] He became more enthusiastic talking about food, joking and laughing about preparing Syrian dishes, and telling me about all the different dishes that his mother used to cook, demonstrating how a simple question about food can lead easily to the sharing of rich stories in a research context.

6.6 Conclusion

These findings address a significant gap in the literature regarding specific contexts and activities that enable the gathering of rich data. I propose that through the physically and emotionally safe context that it provides, and the way in which a relationship of power can be subverted, as well as the sensory contrast with aggressive asylum interviews, cooking and eating a meal together can offer a simple and accessible context for research with refugees and asylum seekers.

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184   'Interview 10' (n 104).

185   Rodgers (n 81).

186   Catriona Mackenzie, Christopher McDowell and Eileen Pittaway, 'Beyond "Do No Harm": The Challenge of Constructing Ethical Relationships in Refugee Research' (2007) 20 Journal of Refugee Studies 300.

187   'Interview 4' (n 96).

188   Hynes (n 12).

189   'Interview 2' (n 118).

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I set out to investigate whether there is an overlap between two diverse fields of study: that of trust, and that of food. Features of cooking and eating together were identified in the literature and explored in interviews and observations across several communal cook-and-eat events in London, UK, and mapped onto the components that have been identified in the literature as being necessary for trust. In exploring this overlap, I conclude that communal eating and cooking can offer an environment in which trusting relationships can form between asylum seekers and host nationals.

I began the paper by laying out the context of a culture of mistrust that is pervasive in the UK. Through media and policy influence, British host nationals are encouraged to mistrust migrants of all categories, and this generalised mistrust is reflected in restrictive immigration and refugee policy. Exploring the 'refugee journey' gave an insight into the many ways in which refugees are mistrusted, as well as the many reasons that they may mistrust. In the literature review, I outlined the social and individual benefits to fostering trust between different groups, as well as the moral imperative that refugees should not be subjected to the damaging psychological consequences of being mistrusted. Subsequently, I have given an overview of the different conceptualisations of trust in the literature, highlighting the diverse and elusive nature of the concept of trust across different fields including social psychology and refugee studies. There are many different models and definitions of trust used across the literature, and little consensus as to what constitutes a trust relationship. Given this diversity, and by drawing from various authors in the field of trust studies, I conceptualised trust as a two-part journey that begins from a starting point of a posture of mistrust that is transformed into one of trust, allowing for an assessment of the trustworthiness of the other. These stages represent two broad approaches to trust in the literature, that of trust as a pre-conscious, emotionally-driven, largely intuitive process, contrasting with trust as a cognitive, information-driven decision.

I have not isolated one particular model of trust. In fact, it would be unfounded to state that I have measured, or even directly observed and enquired about trust. On the contrary, the word 'trust' was explicitly avoided during interviews given its sensitive nature, in particular for refugees who will often have experienced environments in which mistrust has served as a life-preserving strategy. Rather, the individual component parts of a trusting relationship that have been identified in the literature were explored with participants.

I then explored the extensive and diverse literature surrounding food, and discussed the social and sensual experience of eating a shared meal. In particular, the significance of the meal ritual for refugees and asylum seekers was discussed, given its evocative, and deeply symbolic nature. Food is presented across diverse fields as a powerful sensory tool for the recollection of detail and stories, as a universal symbol of family, home and cultural identity, all themes which also emerge as those which are necessary for trust. Using fieldnotes from a series of semi-structured interviews and observations, I have explored these themes in Chapters 4 and 5 as they relate to relationships formed between asylum seekers and host nationals sharing a meal that they had cooked together, and identified where food played a role in fostering a sense of trust between them, in contrast to the clear posture of mistrust from which they started.

Communal cooking and eating events were identified by participants as a means by which they could break out of the social isolation of IACs into an activity that felt routine and 'normal'. Meals were described as enjoyable, friendly events and, in particular, places of safety. This is vital for the relaxation of a posture of anxious vigilance that many had come to inhabit, into one of openness towards others. The universality of food was discussed in abundance by participants, which brought ease to cross-cultural interactions that could otherwise be felt as difficult and stilted.

Given the emphasis in the literature on having an equal power balance between the Trustor and the Trusted, the ways in which asylum seekers felt that autonomy and power could be reclaimed through skill-sharing in cooking and hospitality are key findings. In addition, having a formed personal and cultural identity has been identified as being significant in forming trusting relationships. The research literature on food's influences on refugees' and asylum seekers' identity (re)formation is echoed by findings in this paper in which participants described a sense of personal pride at their cooking skills and cultural pride in their nation's culinary heritage. Asylum seekers, by definition, have fled their homes, and live in a state of uncertainty as to their physical and legal status. The ways, therefore, in which food and meals are evocative of a sense of home are powerful tools for asylum seekers to allow some continuity in their otherwise disrupted sensory experience, allowing the formation of home in a new country. The significance of talking *about* food in the development of trust that emerged from this research is a significant finding, given the ease with which this can be incorporated into any exchanges between host nationals and asylum seekers.

To conclude my findings and discussion, I propose that when conducting research with refugees and asylum seekers, the setting of a shared meal offers features that enable the building of trust between asylum seeker and researcher. The aforementioned power imbalance that hinders research relationships is well-documented, but few proposals are offered for ways in which it can be countered. Shared cooking and the possibility of sharing knowledge and skills are identified by this research as supportive of a context in which asylum seekers can contribute to an activity, in particular, by hosting the researcher. The experience of a meal, evocative of safety and a sense of home, contrasts with aggressive interviews conducted as part of the asylum process, invoking a different sensory experience and allowing for trust to develop. I, therefore, propose that meals are an easily-accessible and culturally-appropriate environment in which research with refugees and asylum seekers can be conducted.

All of the elements that have been mentioned, to greater or lesser extents, require time. Not having the luxury of long periods of time in which to conduct interviews, and, in particular, given the high turnover of IACs in line with

the UK's dispersal policy, these findings do not reflect the time that trusting relationships inevitably take to form between asylum seekers and host nationals. They do, however, provide a foundation on which further research can be conducted into how food and communal meals can be incorporated into different stages of a refugee's resettlement or integration journey in a host country to facilitate trusting relationships and subsequently build social capital in their new communities. This study is not unique in investigating trust, indeed, in the field of refugee studies, trust is a frequently mentioned concept, generally recognised as being of great importance when conducting research with refugees. This paper, however, fills a significant gap in the literature regarding the types of environment and contexts which foster and support the building of trust relationships, and I conclude that food shared between individuals is a rich and powerful context in which relationships based on mutual trust can be built between host nationals and asylum seekers.

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