

Understanding trauma and trauma intervention in new ways through an examination of the Suitcase Project, a project for unaccompanied refugee children in Hillbrow, Johannesburg

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, February 2016

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in another university.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Glynis Clacherty'.

Glynis Clacherty

On the 10th day of February, 2016

For the Suitcase Children

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CONTENTS

<i>The Suitcase Children</i>	1
1. THE PLACE	5
1.1 Hillbrow	5
2. THE CHILDREN	9
2.1 The participants in the Suitcase Project	9
2.2 Being a refugee in South Africa	11
3. THE PROJECT	13
3.1 Art-making	13
3.1.1 Suitcases	13
3.1.2 Journals, body maps and photographs	17
3.2 The storytelling	18
3.3 The exhibitions	19
3.4 Writing the book	20
4. THE RESEARCH	24
4.1 Rationale and research questions	24
4.2 Literature review and conceptual issues	28
4.2.1 Reflecting on a frame	28
4.2.2 Interventions to support refugee children	31
4.2.3 The need for a broader understanding of trauma	35
4.2.4 Child agency	38
4.2.5 The everyday as a way of resisting violence and trauma	40
4.2.6 Children	41
4.2.7 Voice	44
4.3 Methodology	49
4.3.1 The art the children produced	49
4.3.1.1 Looking at images conceptually	50
4.3.1.2 The art therapy frame	51
4.3.1.3 The visual methods frame	53
4.3.1.4 Arts-based research frame	57
4.3.2 Transcripts of the storytelling	59
4.3.3 Transcripts of discussions about the project	64
4.3.4 Reflective field notes	65
4.3.5 Analysis of data	67
4.3.6 Reflecting on the data analysis	69
4.4 A note about language	71
4.5 Ethics	73
4.5.1 Ethical approaches applied during the intervention	73
4.5.2 Using an existing data source	74
4.5.3 Othering and objectifying	76
4.5.4 Ownership	77
4.5.5 Intervening in children's lives	77

5. CHILDREN’S TROPES OF TRAUMA AND MEANING-MAKING	79
5.1 Theme 1: Tropes of trauma	79
5.1.1 “Edge-of-existence experiences”	80
5.1.2 How these experiences have “untethered” us	93
5.1.3 Living on the edge	102
5.2 Theme 2: Tropes of meaning-making	116
5.2.1 What we have lost	116
5.2.2 What we have found	135
5.2.3 Tropes of identity	146
6. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND TRAUMA INTERVENTION IN NEW WAYS	162
6.1 Meaning-making	162
6.2 Accepting fragments	166
6.3 Art versus talk	168
6.4 The power of metaphor	170
6.5 Space to express agency	174
6.6 Objects and the everyday	176
6.7 A community of grief	179
6.8 Conclusion	181
References	183

Acronyms

ACMS African Centre for Migration and Society

NGO Non-government organisation

SAPS South African Police Services

DSD Department of Social Development

PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

DRC Democratic Republic of Congo

IRIN Integrated Regional Information Networks

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Notes on quotations from the children

i) I have identified the quotes from the children in the project with their sex, their age at the time of speaking and their country of origin.

ii) Some of the quotes (or extracts from the quotes) from the children are repeated as they are used to illustrate different points.

iii) Some of the quotes from the children and reflections of my own used in this thesis are extracts from *The Suitcase Stories* (2006). They are all verbatim extracts taken from transcripts produced from recordings made during the project. This thesis contains further extracts from the transcripts that were not used in the book.

The Suitcase Children

In 2001 I met a group of children who were living in two large neighbouring apartments in Hillbrow, Johannesburg that was used by a local religious organisation as an informal shelter for unaccompanied minors. There were 27 of them aged between six and 18 and they came from Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia and Angola and later Zimbabwe.

I work as a contract researcher for international and national non-governmental organisations and had been commissioned to do research on xenophobia for *Soul Buddyz* (a children's television series). I had approached the religious organisation asking if they could help me find a group of children to participate in a workshop to collect information for the scriptwriting process. I worked with the group over two days and then decided to stay in contact with them through informal meetings. The main reason for this decision came from the children, who said they had enjoyed working together and asked if we could meet again.

Initially the meetings were purely recreational but through this informal contact it soon became clear that many of the children had been deeply affected by past experiences of war and displacement. It also became clear that most of the children's present lives were stressful. Many did not have asylum seeker status papers and spent their lives dodging the ever-present police who sought out illegal immigrants in the streets of Hillbrow. Three of the boys had been arrested for not having papers. At least half of the children at this stage did not speak English well and struggled to communicate with the others. In addition, food at home was limited and often insufficient for growing teenagers. Most of them also experienced some kind of xenophobia, either at school or on the streets (Soul City Institute, 2001).

As I got to know the children, I noticed behaviour patterns that suggested that many of them had been affected by their past and present experiences. A few were withdrawn and interacted little with peers or adults. Others acted out by behaving inappropriately. For example, one small girl of five, the youngest in a large family of four siblings, stole small things from everyone. We chose not to respond punitively but gave her an opportunity to return everything by saying at the end of every

meeting, “Well maybe today some of us borrowed things from the others so we have to place everything that has been borrowed today here in this box at the door so it can all be given back.” She always returned everything.

If I was not to reinforce destructive relationship patterns in their lives I felt I needed to formalise the meetings to create a more defined role for myself and to interact with them in a more clearly defined environment. And I wanted to find a way of helping them cope with the emotional stress that their behaviour suggested was there.

However, the children were very sceptical about anything that looked like ‘healing’. When the group discussed what kinds of activities they could do together they were quick to say that they did not want to tell stories about past difficult experiences. They resisted any sort of ‘feeling expression’ game and told stories of negative counselling experiences in the past. One girl summed up her experience of previous counselling,

It didn’t help me. She (the psychologist) just wanted me to cry about it. I got bored so I did and then she (the psychologist) felt better. (Girl, 15, Burundi)

Given this kind of scepticism, whatever we did had to be different from the conventional counselling model. I thought that making art together could be one approach. I had previously worked with art alongside a clinical psychologist (Clacherty and Kistner, 2001a and b). This work was done with a group of ‘hard-to-reach-boys’ in Katlehong, outside Johannesburg, who were equally cynical about ‘therapy’. Art-making had proved an effective tool for facilitating meaningful interaction between the psychologist and the boys about issues that deeply concerned them. So, in 2002 I asked Diane Weltering, the artist who had facilitated the work in Katlehong, to join me in working with the refugee children. She used a creative mixed-media art approach where the children were given many different kinds of techniques and materials and were allowed to decide how they would use them.

This was when the idea of using suitcases arose. A suitcase is about a journey; all the children had taken journeys. A suitcase also has an exterior that everyone can see and a hidden space inside that we can choose to expose or not. A number of old suitcases were sourced in second hand shops around Johannesburg. All the suitcases had been

on journeys too, so perhaps the children would relate to them. By this stage the group was meeting every Saturday morning in a large art room at Barnato Park High School in Hillbrow, two blocks away from the apartments the children shared. Each child chose an old suitcase to work on and the art materials were set up in the large open space. We suggested that the children use the outside of the suitcase as a place to put images about their present life and the inside as a space for stories about their past life. Over time Diane introduced them to different media and art processes. Her demonstrations included wax resist, printing, painting, collage, drawing with many different media, pastels, and sculpture with clay and found objects. Once instructions for the day's activity had been given, the children worked uninterrupted for two or three hours with support from Diane.

In one of our first meetings one of the girls asked if we could make a book about their stories because "people need to know why we are here!" Because of this request I brought along a tape recorder to the meetings. While the children worked on their suitcases some children, alone or in pairs or small groups, came out to sit under a tree with me to talk about the stories they had represented in their artwork. If they chose to share these, we recorded their stories for our future book. The group met for five years and we moved from working on the suitcases to making journals and objects to go inside the suitcases to journey maps on large pieces of hand-made paper. Over the five years I transcribed the children's stories and worked with them to publish some of them in a book titled *The Suitcase Stories* (Clacherty, the Suitcase Storytellers and Welpering, 2006).

The initial group of children and young people no longer meet regularly though I do have ongoing contact with most of them. I felt the project needed to be institutionalised so I worked with a local psychosocial NGO to set up a support group for newly arrived migrant children. It is called The Suitcase Group and it works in a similar way to how we worked at Barnato Park High School. The counsellors and psychologist at the NGO have run this group for almost nine years now.

In 2011 the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) gave me a grant to work on a paper describing the thinking behind the Suitcase Project (Clacherty, 2015). The grant gave me the time and opportunity to explore thinking and research in the area of

trauma and migrant children. As I began to read the research literature I realised that my practice (even though I was partly unaware of this at the time) was reflected in certain recent theories about the psychosocial needs of migrant children and in particular how we perceive trauma. I saw too that the transcripts I had of the stories the children told around the artwork contained a particular view of trauma that was not present in the literature. I realised that recording, reflecting on and making explicit the praxis of the Suitcase Project would not only add to the pool of possibilities available to organisations looking for ways to work with migrant children but also build theory around our understanding of ways of responding to trauma in contexts where the mainstream trauma theories might have limited currency or credibility.

CHAPTER 1. THE PLACE

1.1 Hillbrow

The Suitcase Project took place in Hillbrow in Johannesburg, South Africa between 2001 and 2006. It is important to understand something about this place at this time as it plays a central role in the story of the Suitcase Project and the children who participated in it. Hillbrow is an area of Johannesburg very close to the central business district and about one kilometre square in extent. It has historically been a high-density residential area though it was only during the 1950s, after building height restrictions were removed, that the tall apartment blocks (or ‘flats’ as they are called in South Africa) that characterise the area were built (Morris, 1999b). Up until the late 1970s, as a result of the apartheid government Group Areas Act, the residents of the area were exclusively white. Because it was the home of mostly young couples and many young expatriates from Europe the area was known for its vibrant night-life and a certain urban edginess even at this stage in its history.

During the 1970s the lack of housing and the changing economic and political landscape saw the demographics of Hillbrow change as black people began to move into the area and by the end of the 1980s the apartments in the area were rented predominantly by black South Africans. It was at this stage that Hillbrow became a place to ‘land’ for many migrants from rural areas in South Africa largely because it was a rental area and apartments could be shared. The informal street economy was also strengthened at this stage and life on the street, necessitated by the fact that families shared the apartments, became a characteristic of the area. But at the same time as the suburb became more vibrant and culturally mixed so the apartment blocks began to deteriorate and the neglect of the city council became apparent.

The mid 1980s marks the time when the physical decline of inner-city apartment blocks in Hillbrow began to be a concern. There were a number of interrelated processes and actors involved in this process of physical decline – landlords, tenants and tenant’s organisations, the policies of local and national government, property administration, caretakers and the redlining of the neighbourhood by the financial institutions all played a role. (Morris, 1999a, p. 509-510)

From 1990 onwards the move towards democracy meant that more and more immigrants from beyond southern Africa began moving to South Africa (Morris, 1998). For the same reasons that migrants from the rural areas of South and southern Africa had used Hillbrow as a 'place to land', many of these migrants rented rooms in apartments in Hillbrow. Morris quotes figures that estimate the population of immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Johannesburg at 23 000 in mid 1995. Legget (2003), reporting on a 2002 survey, suggests that a quarter of residents in Hillbrow were foreign-born by this stage, with 89% of these people having arrived in the last five years. At this stage in 2002 at least 6% were Zimbabwean though this number would rise greatly in the next few years as conditions in that country deteriorated.

As early as 1998 Morris described the xenophobia experienced by Congolese and Nigerian migrants who arrived in the early 1990s. Most of the migrants in the study he undertook lived in Hillbrow and all had "harrowing tales of prejudice and intolerance" (p. 1117).

Every informant had experienced verbal abuse. A young Congolese woman described one such incident: 'one night I was walking in Hillbrow and this woman started shouting at me: "I know you're not from this country. Just go back. We don't need you here. We don't like you here"' (Marie). Generally, fear prevented the immigrants from responding 'I say nothing when they insult me because if you react they can stab you' (David). (p. 1123)

Respondents in Morris' study also report the use of the insulting name, *makwerekwere* so common in the lives of the Suitcase Children. The name is a play on words - the languages that migrants speak sound like *kwere kwere* to South Africans.

McDonald, Mashike and Golden (1999) reporting on a 1998 survey of migrants from African countries in three South African provinces respondents said they were treated "badly" by black South Africans and police officers (p. 17). As well as xenophobia Morris's, and McDonald, Mashike and Golden's respondents also reported ongoing

fear and avoidance of crime and violence as part of their everyday life in Hillbrow. A third dominating aspect of migrant's lives was their unstable citizen status and the police brutality (usually related to their uncertain legal status and the constant need to produce status documents).

So, Hillbrow at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s (when the Suitcase Project began) was a place of deteriorating high-rise apartment blocks, a transitional, 'port of entry' neighbourhood. What the Johannesburg Inner City Design Implementation Plan of 2009 calls a "complex area with complex problems, ranging from physical collapse of infrastructure to a vibrant culture of slums, informality, crime and poverty" (Johannesburg Development Agency, 2009, p. 54).

But, alongside this geopolitical story, it is important for an understanding of the Suitcase Project to look at the role that Hillbrow plays in the collective imagination. In 2001 Phaswane Mpe wrote a novel about Hillbrow called *Welcome to our Hillbrow*. This novel sums up the duality of the place within the popular imagination. He calls Hillbrow a place "of milk and honey and bile, all brewing in the depths of our collective consciousness" (Mpe, 2001, p. 41). Mpe also describes Hillbrow as a place of quiet and intimate spaces, "Vickers Place struck you as a fairly quiet building. You never expected any quietness in our Hillbrow." (p. 7). This is one description of the dual identity of Hillbrow

As legend has it, Hillbrow is one of the deepest circles of Dante's hell, a chaotic swirl of drug dealers and murderers that any visitor would be lucky to escape. A post-apocalyptic Wild West that leaves hardened police pale with fear. People might even compare it to a war zone. But it is NOT a war zone. Alongside this, there is life, a vibrancy and a sense of community that is certainly not found in any of Johannesburg's walled-off northern suburbs and sterile malls. (Nessman, 2002, p. 194 cited in Winkler, 2006, pp. 80-81)

Winkler (2006) in her paper looking at the role of faith-based organisations in Hillbrow describes another important aspect of Hillbrow. Winkler describes Hillbrow as "typical of 'port of entry' neighbourhoods, which are temporary places of abode, a place to 'land', find your feet, strengthen your networks, and, ultimately, move from"

(p. 82).

Hillbrow is a domain to which few want to belong or in which few are able to establish their roots. Still, it keeps alive residents' hopes for stability and security somewhere else . . . Hillbrow thus has much in common with other sub-Saharan urban contexts that are becoming accustomed to ever increasing uncertainty, cross-border mobility, and informalisation. Here, nothing is what it seems, as cities are being encoded with a multiplicity of projects that create 'coincidences of the unexpected' (Simone, 2004). These 'coincidences of the unexpected' contribute to the disconnect felt by many sub-Saharan urban dwellers, where residents live with fewer resources and capacities as life becomes exceedingly precarious. The sub-Saharan urban therefore functions as a platform for people to engage in processes and territories 'elsewhere' (Appiah, 1997), and urbanization "rarely results in permanent settlement" (Englund, 2002, p. 137). Many urban residents thus embrace an eventual 'return to the home' sentiment and this sentiment concludes a migrant's career, at least in rhetoric if not in practice (Englund, 2002, p. 139). (Winkler, 2006, p. 83)

All of these tropes: Hillbrow as the promised land, a bitter place to live, Dante's hell, war zone, place of quiet spaces, place to find a community to belong to and temporary place are evident in the way the children of the Suitcase Project described their new home. These descriptions and the role this physical and psychosocial landscape played in the lives of the children are explored further in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2. THE CHILDREN

2.1 The participants in the Suitcase Project

The children who participated in the Suitcase Project are all survivors of war. They came from Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. The initial group of children was aged six to 18 but younger brothers and sisters often participated and even the babies of the older girls, one of whom literally grew up with the project, learning to crawl around the art-making process and eventually making his own suitcase. Some of the older children also grew up in the project; having joined when they were 15 they were almost 20 by the time the project terminated. A core group stayed with the project for at least five years but often they brought friends or relatives who stayed for as little as one week through to a year. So the group was quite changeable. It is important to keep in mind that most of the data represented in this thesis comes from the core group of about twenty children in the five year period between 2001 and 2005.

Many of the children had been through traumatic experiences in their countries of origin. These experiences included witnessing extreme violence and being the victims of direct violence. They had seen their homes burn, their mother's murdered, come home from school to abandoned houses and no family and run through streets filled with gunshots. Others had escaped in the midst of rumours of war, seeing suitcases piled up at the bus stop as people tried to escape advancing soldiers or being sent alone on a bus by parents who tried to save them from war. A few of the group had lived in refugee camps, mostly in Tanzania.

All of the children had made long journeys through Africa to Johannesburg. Some had made dangerous illegal border crossings others had walked for long distances. Most had at some stage travelled by bus and others by train. They had all left familiar places and extended family at home. Most of them were unaccompanied, their parents having died in the war in their home countries or on the journey.

Most of the group had been in South Africa for at least a year and some for longer, such as the Angolan boy of 15 who had been abandoned in Johannesburg at the age of six. When the project first began most of the group were living in two apartments

rented by the Jesuit Refugee Service in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. The unaccompanied children had been placed by the church organisation in the care of two refugee women in these two apartments. Both women did informal trading that brought in only a little money. Beyond this the informal families survived on the minimal food supplied by the church organisation. There was no money for extras like clothes or even school stationery.

Almost all the children had registered with Home Affairs when they arrived and had temporary asylum seeker documents (see section below for details of this process). But because of the complexity of renewing these most were not renewed every three months, as they should have been' some had lapsed for many years. This meant that they could be picked up in the streets as illegal migrants. This was a particular threat for the older boys because the police patrols focussed on illegal male immigrants.

The majority of the group of children had originated in rural areas and spent their childhoods in large extended family contexts. So the new place they found themselves in, in South Africa was unfamiliar and even frightening. The high-density inner city area of Hillbrow filled with tall, often decaying, apartment blocks was very different from the mango trees, village paths and market towns they were used to. When they arrived in South Africa, none spoke English but by the time they joined the group almost all of them could speak English and isiZulu. Those who did not speak English soon learned it as a matter of survival. For example, Jean spoke almost no English or isiZulu when he first joined the group but within six weeks he could tell us stories about his life in Rwanda as a child.

Many of them had missed some years of school; a few had no schooling at all. For example, Aggie, who had spent her life moving from one war situation to another, had never been to school. Many of the others had arrived in South Africa and been placed in lower grades than they expected, mostly because of their lack of language competency. Children who had been in the country for some time also often missed many years of school because of their marginal economic status. Antonio, for example, had lived in the country from the age of six but his informal guardian had not been able to afford school uniforms so he had dropped in and out of school for years. Others had arrived in the middle of the school year and been denied access to

schools so had lost a year of study while others moved often because of not being able to pay rent, moving schools each time. So in spite of all being very committed to education many of them were unable to achieve the results that they wished for and that would allow them to access the tertiary education that would give them access to future economic stability.

So, like many other unaccompanied refugee children elsewhere (e.g. Mann, 2010; Kohli & Mather, 2003) the children had to deal with most of the following:

- Past experiences of violence;
- Grief for lost places and people;
- The shock of a new, unfamiliar and decaying physical environment;
- Alienation or little sense of belonging and xenophobic violence
- Educational difficulties;
- Poverty.

2.2 Being a refugee in South Africa

It is important to understand the context of refugees in South Africa in order to make sense of the children's lives in Hillbrow. The South African government adopted a refugee policy in 2000 which, in contrast to most other southern African countries, does not require refugees to live in camps but gives them the freedom to choose where to live and work. Most refugees in South Africa are classed as asylum seekers who have a permit to work and study while their refugee status is determined. However, the process of determination can take many years (Amit, 2015). While waiting for their applications for refugee status to be processed asylum seekers have to renew their permits every few months at a Department of Home Affairs office. This process is deeply corrupt and inefficient and there is waning political commitment to improving the system (Amit, 2015) so it is almost impossible for asylum seekers to access refugee or permanent residence status. This places them in a situation of status limbo for many years.

The position with regard to unaccompanied minors is governed by Section 32 of the Refugees Act which states:

Any child who appears to qualify for refugee status and is in circumstances suggesting he or she qualifies as a child in need of care under the Child Care Act must be brought before the Children's Court who may order them to be assisted in applying for asylum. Section 33 provides that a person who qualifies for asylum under the Refugees Act must assist any dependents to apply, or apply on their behalf. (cited in Palmary, 2009, p. 12)

What is important here is the requirement that an unaccompanied refugee child would be a "child in need of care" and the onus would be on a state social worker in the Department of Social Development (DSD) to place them in care. In 2000 when the Suitcase Project began there were no explicit guidelines for the DSD to follow in respect of unaccompanied migrant children (see Antonio's story in Chapter 5). This has since been rectified in the amendments to the Child Care Act (Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007) but in reality most state social workers do not have the resources to deal with migrant children, do not always know what to do with them and often do not see them as their responsibility (UNHCR, 2013).

A few of the children in the Suitcase group had an asylum seeker permit but most had no documents at all or their status documents were held by adults they no longer lived with. The South African Police Service (SAPS) constantly patrolled Central Johannesburg, and Hillbrow in particular, on the look out for undocumented migrants. Xenophobic attitudes and corruption meant that this patrolling became violent harassment of anyone who did not look like a South African or could not speak a South African language. Police often and without even asking for proof of status arrested men (and sometimes women) on the streets of Hillbrow, placing them in a van and taking them to the Hillbrow Police Station. Usually the issue could be settled with a bribe and the person was allowed to go once reaching the police station but sometimes the arrest meant a few nights in the police cells and even removal to Lindela Repatriation Centre outside Johannesburg.

The older boys in the Suitcase Group were often harassed in this way and as they show in Chapter 5 their movement around Hillbrow was dominated by their fear of and need to avoid the police.

CHAPTER 3. THE PROJECT

This section of the thesis describes the activity of the Suitcase Project. It outlines how the artwork was produced and how the stories linked to the artwork were told. It also describes the process of creating the book that the children and I wrote as well as the various public activities, such as the exhibitions. My field notes are used descriptively here so the reader has an idea of what the process entailed.

3.1 Art-making

3.1.1 Suitcases

When Diane Weltering, the artist and art teacher, agreed to work with the group she suggested we use suitcases as a focus for the children's artwork. We found old suitcases in local second-hand shops and brought them to a Saturday morning group meeting. The suitcases were introduced to the children with a ritual. This ritual is described in the extract from my field notes below; note that the approach to and use of the field notes is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Field notes: 2. 2. 2002

I was worried about them fighting over the suitcases so I decided to create a ritual to manage the choice. It was amazing because what started out as simply a mechanism for managing the group's behaviour became this powerful ritual that gave the suitcases emotional weight as special objects. I placed the suitcases in the school courtyard – each was placed some distance from the other so the children could walk amongst them. Then we stood in a large circle around them and I told them that we were going to use the suitcases to tell the story of our lives. I told them that there was a suitcase meant just for them and they would know it was theirs when they got to it. We stood in silence for a short while and then I told them to walk amongst the cases until they knew that they had found theirs. They took it incredibly seriously – even the little ones and the older boys and girls. In total silence they walked around and chose a suitcase and then took it aside and looked inside it and inspected it. They did it all in total silence (they don't do that often!). It was quite magical! Now these suitcases have real weight in their lives.

After they had each chosen a suitcase I used the activity described below to introduce the idea of ‘artwork that told a story’ on the suitcases. The description of the activity below is taken from my notes made to prepare for the workshop. I wrote the words out as I would say them in the workshop as I wanted to make sure the idea was very clearly understood by the children. I felt that the success of the ongoing artwork rested on their understanding of the metaphor of the suitcase. I suggested the children work on the outside of the suitcases and their lives ‘now’, as I thought this would be less emotionally threatening for the children than telling stories about their past.

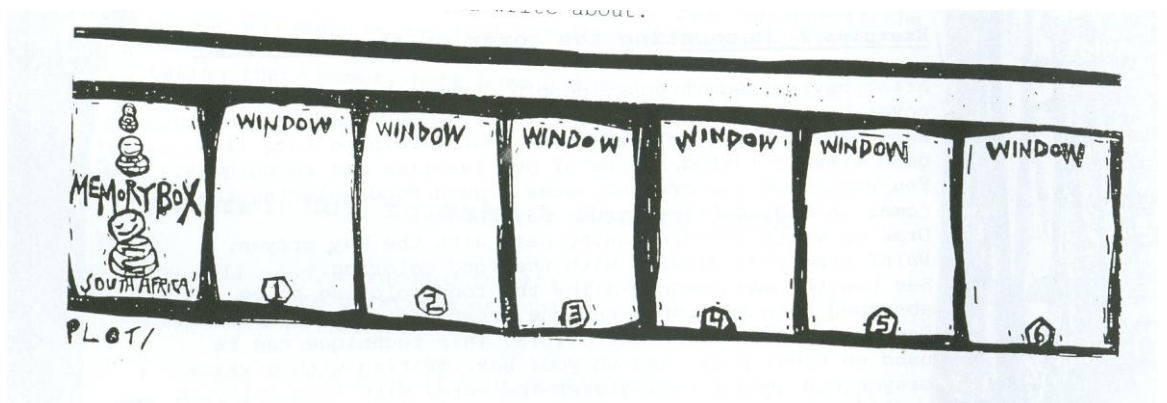
Planning notes for first workshop: 2. 2. 2002

A suitcase is something we take on a journey. You have all been on a big journey from the place where you were born to Johannesburg, so your life is a bit like a suitcase – it has been on a journey. So this suitcase is going to tell the story of your life.

On the outside of the suitcase we will tell the story of our lives **now**. On the inside of the case we will tell story of **the past** – what happened to us long ago – because we carry our past inside us.

Today we will start with the outside – ‘My life now’.

Your life now is big. What do you do in your life? You go to school, play with friends, do housework at home etc. That’s a lot of things and your case is small so you need to choose things to show your life now. These windows may help.



Each window is a part of the story about you and your life now. Choose windows that will tell anyone who is looking at the suitcase about your life now. Go and sit alone around the garden for a little while with your suitcase.

Decide what you will show in each window and draw a small picture of it - friends, house, school – one for each window.

The windows activity used above is one developed by narrative therapist Jonathan Morgan. Morgan describes how the window exercise, “allows people to begin to think about what is most important for them to be expressing and **dealing** with ... Each of the six windows in the windows exercise allows participants to think about different parts of their lives and to make sense of these in story form” (Morgan, 2003, p. 12).

In the second workshop I told the children to choose one of the small windows they had drawn to make a bigger ‘window’ to paste onto their suitcase. They chose one of the different art media that had been set up for them and made visual images of each window.

The artwork the children produced was influenced strongly by the artist and art teacher, Diane Weltering. She used a creative mixed-media approach where the children were given many different kinds of techniques and materials but were allowed to decide how they would use them. The extract below taken from *The Suitcase Stories* and written by Diane explains how she worked.

The suitcases made for a portable, easily packaged format for the art-making process in the field, and for future display and exhibition. Individual children were allowed to choose their own suitcase. They used the suitcase in an extremely flexible way. Individuals chose to display or conceal information in the suitcase at will. Some children took great pleasure in finding suitcases with a locking device, so that they could control access to the interior. They made excellent containers for the storage of work, and their three-dimensional character was used to the full, for the exploration of exciting tactile, visual and three-dimensional qualities.

I encouraged them to treat the outside of the suitcases in a very tactile way using a wide variety of found materials. I encouraged each child to undertake the re-invention of their suitcase in their own way. At no stage was anyone told what to do.

There were several things that I considered when I worked with the children. I would make a very free creative space in which they could work – one central point where most of the materials were, then other areas which might get very dirty, such as printing areas. I would give them a lot of freedom with the materials, except if they were not concentrating and focused in their use of them. They often re-invented the purpose of the materials. For example, the wood glue became a staple ingredient for many creative purposes: children often coated objects with it, and then textured the glue or embedded objects in it. I did not mind how much of a material was used, as long as it ended up being used productively on their artwork.

Working with a variety of art materials was a most important factor – some children related more easily to certain materials. Some children worked fast and others extremely slowly; some liked colour, while others preferred texture and boldly expressive marks. The main techniques I worked with were wax resist, simple relief-printing techniques and collage – using found images from magazines. The suitcases were enhanced with a wide array of tactile materials. Bright beads, mosaic chips, string, cardboard, their own images and words were all explored. We also looked at pulp and papermaking. Small journals for inside the suitcase were created, as well as objects in clay.

I deliberately confined my role to that of art facilitation only. Obviously I did observe certain aspects of behaviour related to the production of the art, but it was never my primary focus. In fact, on busy days I would just keep the art production dynamic going, often quite oblivious of how much had been done. I would only realise the fruits of our endeavours when we finally packed up. I would dialogue openly and simply with the children as their work developed, never embellishing their stories for them, never assuming that I knew what was behind the drawing, nor expecting them to enlighten me. I would say things like, “That is a very detailed drawing,” or “Those colours are exquisite,” or “I like that texture there.” Simple things, like, “You are working well today,” or “Wow, you are an art-making factory!” I left all judgemental or qualitative comments out of my dialogue. I never layered my

interpretation onto their work, never made the children feel as if I was observing them. My main concern was to encourage the children to be confident in their ability to communicate through their art. I never judged their ability to draw, and I responded to everything they produced, validating it as an effective means of communication. I never allowed them to throw away anything, and I was meticulous with the collection and packing up of all their work. By giving absolute value to each child's endeavours, I reinforced a sense of their own value. I consolidated a respect for each child's uniqueness and individuality. (Clacherty, the Suitcase Storytellers & Welvering, 2006 pp. 157-165)

Once the children felt the outsides of their suitcases were finished they began work on the insides. The insides of the suitcases were about memories of their pasts. This section of the work was introduced through the idea of "windows into your past". The children represented these different windows in different media and pasted the pictures inside their suitcases.

3.1.2 Journals, body maps and photographs

Once they felt the insides and outsides were finished (and this took some of them over 14 weeks) they began work on a set of small journals that would go into the suitcases. Children were encouraged to work on these journals in a tactile way with many different media. Some of the children also made constructed objects from found fragments of clay (baked and polished with boot polish), papier-mâché and wire. The children chose the materials and the ways they wanted to represent their ideas.

During 2004 Diane taught the children to make paper and we then used the paper as the base for drawings with black pen. Many of these drawings were of past memories. They then made large pieces of paper and drew and pasted a map of their journey on these large, textured pieces. In late 2004 we gave the children a disposable camera and asked them to take photographs that would tell people about their lives now in Johannesburg. They then used the printed photographs in a large collage (using large pieces of hand-made paper as the base).

In 2004 we also started work on a set of body maps. I wanted the children to think about moving on, and about their futures, so I suggested they draw around their bodies with their suitcase on their shoulder or in their hand and ask themselves, “Where am I taking my suitcase?” Every week the suitcases were brought to the group so children could keep thinking about their own lives, past and present. Often children would add something to their suitcase long after they had declared them finished. It is important at this point to talk about the process of the project again. The art facilitator and I always treated every image as ‘sacred’. Diane often retrieved images that the children had thrown away in the bin, smoothing them out and saying what lovely colours they had or what interesting things they represented. We encouraged them to place these on and in their suitcases or in their journals. We also always took great care of the suitcases. They had to be packed up every Saturday at the end of our meeting as the room was used as a classroom during the week. The suitcases were carefully carried to my car by their owner and packed away so that nothing was broken or torn. I think this symbolised how important we thought the work was.

3.2 The storytelling

Soon after the group began meeting regularly, I reminded the children about the young Ethiopian girl’s request to make a book. I asked if they wanted to do that. Everyone agreed so I brought my tape recorder along every Saturday. As they finished a body of artwork in their suitcases or on the maps, I invited them to bring the artwork with them and come and tell me about what they had made, I usually said, “Who wants to tell me the story in their artwork today?” Note that the form of the stories the children told is described in more detail in Chapter 4 but it is worth mentioning here that the term ‘storytelling’ is used to refer to the children telling me what was ‘inside their drawing (or painting or print)’, telling what ‘this artwork tells about my life’. It was not ‘storytelling’ in a more conventional sense where a story has a beginning, middle and end. Very often, even at the later stages of the project we still called the individual artworks “windows into my life” in reference to the initial activity we had done at the start of the project (see page 14).

The storytelling took place under a tree in the school courtyard while the group worked in the nearby art room. Sometimes they came in pairs or small groups (usually

friendship groups), sometimes alone. When working in groups the others would listen quietly, witnessing the story (see page 69). The choice to talk was theirs, and for a long time some of the children did not come forward and tell stories, some never did. They often opted to talk to me alone, especially if the story was a painful one. I always gave them the choice of switching off the tape recorder, but they very seldom asked for this. If they asked for the recorder to be off I did not take notes then or later, I respected that all they wanted was for the story to be heard. I was interested in the role of the recorder and reflected on it in the field note reproduced below.

Field notes: 26. 11. 2004

I have been thinking about the recorder. Last Saturday I spent time with Pierre and he told his so sad story from his body map. I asked, ‘Are you sure you want the recorder on?’ He said ‘yes’. I thought why would he want to record this. Then I was reminded of when Jenny told me the story of the rape. I also checked that she wanted the recorder on. [She later requested that the story not go into the book]. It is as if the recorder is important to them. I wonder why? They are very clear that they don’t want others to sit and hear while they speak but they want the tape recorder. I can only think that the act of recording gives the story more weight. “This story is really important, it is worth recording for someone else to hear.”

I think it has something to do with witnessing – I know S [a clinical psychologist I had worked with previously] talks about witnessing when you listen to a story and there is just no response that is adequate, you can’t say “I am sorry” or worse, “it will be better” but all you can do is remain silent as if you have witnessed the horror.

The idea of witnessing violence-narratives is explored in more depth in Chapter 4.3 of this thesis.

3.3 The exhibitions

During the project the children’s artwork was exhibited three times as a complete body of work. The first exhibition was at a UNHCR World Refugee Day celebration in 2002. The children agreed to the exhibition of their work but did not attend the

exhibition. The suitcases were returned and many of the children continued to work in and on them after the exhibition.

The children were more directly involved in the next two exhibitions. We were invited by the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits University (now the African Centre for Migration and Society) to exhibit the suitcases at the launch of a book published by the programme in 2003. The children set out the exhibition of suitcases and some chose to stand next to their work and talk about it with visitors to the exhibition. The impact of this exhibition on the children is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The third exhibition was at the launch of the book *The Suitcase Stories* in 2006. Again, the children were involved in setting up the exhibition, though this time they did not talk about their suitcases as they chose rather to tell visitors about the book we had made together. The main aim of the exhibitions was to raise awareness of the lives of refugee children in Johannesburg. The children and I discussed this aim and they were pleased to be made visible and to tell people about their lives. This public face of the project was very important for the children.

I think the exhibition was a cool thing to do, because it will make people know about what real foreigners are doing – most people just stay in their offices saying they are helping foreigners, without seeing the real lives of people.
(Girl, 15, DRC)

The exhibitions also played an important role in the formation of identity beyond ‘victim’ and ‘refugee’. This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.4 Writing the book

Writing *The Suitcase Stories* was another important part of the project. By the end of 2004 I knew that I had recorded more than enough for us to put a book together. I initiated a discussion with the children about what was to go into the book. I reminded them that they wanted the book to tell people about the lives of refugee children in South Africa. I knew that the book would work best as an advocacy tool if we told a

few powerful stories. My planning notes from this time reflect my concerns at this stage.

Planning notes: 13. 11. 2004

I am going to have to help them decide this week which stories we will use in the book. I will use artwork from ALL of them but how to help some not feel left out? This is crucial given the loss and disappointment they have faced all their lives. I think it just has to be a decision they make. I think the best will be to talk about why we want the book, what advocacy is, what we want to advocate about, what we want to tell people about refugee children in South Africa. If we make a list of these things and then we look at each other's stories and decide which stories fit the issues best and choose in this way.

And this is what we did. They generated the following list (note that I wrote the list on to a flip chart as we worked and edited the ideas as I wrote, though I did check with them that I had expressed the ideas correctly).

“We want people to know

that we left lovely homes and people behind – we were not always poor
that we did not choose to come here – we came because of war mostly
some of us made long journeys
some of us have been abused by adults on our journey
some of us were abused by people in our family when we got here
some of us lost our families but others found them
life is not easy for refugee children in Hillbrow – we can get raped or hurt
the police abuse and arrest children, especially the boys
we have made friends here in South Africa.

We also discussed the fact that the book should represent the different countries the children came from. They then gave me the responsibility of choosing the stories we would use to represent these ideas. We then spent some time discussing the issue of confidentiality. They were almost all unanimous in wanting their identities to be kept confidential in the book. Three of the boys did not mind being identified. Apart from one of these boys, whose face appears on the imprint page, we decided to use no

photographs of people's faces in the book. I introduced the idea of a pseudonym. They liked this idea and one of them suggested they choose a name for themselves. Interestingly, most chose names of relatives - grandparents and aunts mostly.

We held these kinds of discussions throughout the book publication process. Once I had chosen and edited the stories into a book I showed them the typescript. Each child read their story and though few asked for it, they were given the opportunity to change or correct anything. My field notes after this session are reproduced below.

Field notes: 11. 3. 2005

I brought the typed stories to the group today. We did our usual art work but I asked those whose stories were in the book to go and sit outside and read the stories to let me know if they were happy with them. Paul said he did not want to read his story as it would make him sad. So I said I would bring it again next week and he could see if he wanted to read it then. But Jenny, CJ and Jean, Philip and Pierre all read their stories. I kept a close eye on them as they sat outside reading as I was worried it may be upsetting. There was a feeling of intensity about the reading. You could almost see a bubble of concentration around Pierre and Jenny and maybe I am being imaginative but the sadness too was like a part of the bubble. It is that same feeling I feel when I have worked with a research group and someone has told a sad story and there is just nothing you can say. It is like a third person in the room. I went and sat next to Pierre and Jenny at some stage just to make sure they felt supported. They did not look up but just kept on reading.

They brought their typed stories back to me, Jenny said, "It's my story" and nothing else. But she was smiling and seemed proud of it. I didn't want to discuss too much with her as she had read with such quiet intensity. I knew the experience was emotional but next week I need to find out if it can be published as it is or if we should change any details. CJ, Paul and Philip had sat together reading their stories, talking about them and remembering details together. They wanted to know what artwork would go with their stories. Paul said that he was happy to be reminded of his dog that he had talked about in his story. Paul said again that he wanted his real name to be on his story. They

seemed quite proud of what they had made. I went to sit with Pierre as I wanted to discuss changing some details. He was feeling very sad but determined to have his story published, even with the details. I had to explain quite a bit why we had to change some details so his family do not get angry with him. We just can't take the chance.

What is clear from these field notes is the degree to which the story they read had an emotional impact on the children but it also seems to have changed their sense of themselves as a written text. The role that the book played in developing their sense of identity is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4. THE RESEARCH

4.1 Rationale and research questions

*The global realities of multiple conflicts around the world, of pluri-cultural societies, and of ongoing transnationalization (through migration, media, and the globalization of markets) make an ongoing analysis of ‘trauma’ imperative, with a view not only to deconstructing underlying assumptions but ultimately to making it possible to **imagine alternatives** [emphasis added].*
(Zarowsky and Pedersen, 2000, p. 291)

What Zarowsky and Pedersen call for is reflected in the growing movement away from what could be termed a “PTSD-view” of trauma, which assumes homogeneity in human response and imposes pathology on those who have experienced the violence of war (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1997; Englund, 1998; Summerfield, 2000; Young, 1995; Zarowsky and Pedersen, 2000). Slowly, (Chan, Mercer, Wong & Griffiths, 2009; Lustig, Kia-Keating, Knight, Geltman, Ellis, Kinzie, Keane & Saxe, 2003) in line with this movement, individuals and institutions working with refugee children have begun to ‘imagine alternatives’ (see Tolfree, 1996 and also Kalksma-Van Lith, 2007 for examples). This growth of interest in alternative interventions related to trauma is evident to some extent in the literature on children in care (for example, Callaghan, Young, Richards, Vostanis, 2003) and refugee children. Maegusuku-Hewett, Dunkerley, Scourfield & Smalley (2007), for example point out that,

As far as refugee children and youth are concerned, studies into their well-being and resilience tend to be situated within a quantitative paradigm, drawing upon western models and normative values surrounding childhood and development. Moreover, there is an overemphasis upon pathology and particularly on post-traumatic stress disorder, which Bracken (1998) and others argue should be regarded as a cultural construct that applies only in certain specific cultural settings. ... There is relatively little literature that advances an alternative view of protective processes and positive outcomes. Ultimately, as Boyden and De Berry (2004) and Newman (2005) advocate, this more rounded approach is needed to provide a holistic view of children

and young people's responses to stressful situations. (p. 311)

In relation to refugee children specifically a clear set of guidelines in relation to trauma intervention and refugee children has begun to emerge. For example, Boyden, (2003), Kohli & Mather (2003), Boyden & De Berry (2004) emphasise the need for alternative approaches to take into account child agency that moves “from a position of viewing ‘mental health difficulties’ as a set of prescribed diagnostically based terms associated with trauma to a more ‘holistic’ approach, that takes their strengths and hopes into account as well as their fears and worries” (Kohli & Mather, 2003, p. 201 and 202).

Luthar (1991), Boothby (1996), Ungar, (2005) and Maegusuku-Hewett et al. (2007), suggest that interventions should take into account the fact that children display resilience and successful adaptation to adversity. Palmay (2005) and Eagle (2005) suggest that interventions need to take a constructivist approach that takes into account contextual and cultural realities and Bracken (2002) and Ungar (2005) that collective coping strategies and relationship building should be important components of any intervention for war-affected children.

The Suitcase Project is part of this growing movement to imagine alternative ways of understanding trauma and add to the small (Chan et al. 2009; Lustig et al. 2003) collection of documented interventions for refugee children and unaccompanied children specifically. What is more, the Suitcase Project included a focus on child agency, was informed by resilience theory, was constructivist in its approach and focussed on relationships between the children. Thus, it included elements that recent scholarship sees as important in programmes for refugee children and because of this it is important to document it.

Additionally, the project created a set of narratives from young migrants that present their understanding of trauma. A close documentation of the project and these narratives may reveal theory made within the praxis of the project, give us an alternative view of trauma informed by children themselves and ultimately add to our collection of alternative possibilities for support and healing work with migrant children.

Moving outside of the psychological literature into the anthropological provides another rationale for the work. Scheper-Hughes (2008) in her work looking at young militants in South Africa and women in the slums of Brazil suggests that surviving is purchased at the price of relationship, of intimacy and “all those emotions and dispositions that render humans vulnerable to pain, to loss, to grief, to despair and hopelessness” (2008, p. 43). Scheper-Hughes recognises human nature as “both resilient *and* frail” (2008, p. 42 emphasis in the original). But Scheper-Hughes does not suggest how we can strengthen the frailty while acknowledging the resilience.

Walker (2010) in her work with men and women living within ongoing violence in eastern Sri Lanka takes this work one step further by looking at how grief, pain and trauma are resisted through the normalcy of small daily tasks and actions. Through the planting of trees, fishing, cooking and sewing, men and women resist and create small safe spaces as they continue with their lives. Walker is not suggesting that violence has become so everyday that people do not need supporting. Rather, her work shows that the women and men she worked with were deeply affected but, as an alternative to the narrow PTSD model, their trauma and frailty was woven together with resilience and even a quiet resistance to those who created the trauma. Walker explores in her work how involvement in simple activity, ritual and group interaction support this everyday creation of resilience. It is this very search for an intervention approach that acknowledges frailty and resilience and creates opportunities to access the resistance of the everyday rituals of past and present in order to be stronger that is at the heart of my research.

In addition, the book project, which was the advocacy aspect of the Suitcase Project intervention fits in with recent thinking about the need to link psychosocial support to social transformation. Hamber (2009) describes how survivors of the Northern Ireland and South African violence found “value in activism” (p. 195).

Through [protest] activities, most of which were shaped by survivors themselves, I merely watched as some individuals were transformed through their participation. There were individuals, for example, who joined the group as introverted and frequently ill, suffering from somatic complaints, who were

slowly transformed into active, talkative and engaging members who developed a wide range of social relationships and networks as they became increasingly active and valued members of their community and society once again. (Hamber, 2009, p. 196)

This process is resonant with what happened in the Suitcase Project as young people began to work together to make their book and to exhibit their artwork. Documenting and reflecting on this process in the context of Hamber's work could provide valuable understanding of how healing and activism can be linked in interventions for refugee children, something that almost no researchers have done to date. Additionally, reflection on the public aspects of the Suitcase Project intervention will be useful in the context of advocacy by vulnerable people themselves. For example, looking closely at the challenges and successes of the exhibitions of the children's art work and the process of book publishing will add to the small body of literature that has begun to explore how marginalised people can 'speak' into a context of power and the resultant challenges of these processes (Lykes, 2010).

The concept of praxis is central to the development of the research questions. Praxis is used here in a Freirian sense (Taylor, 1993). Praxis for Freire means that "word and action, action and reflection, theory and practice are all facets of the same idea" (Taylor, 1993, p. 132) Praxis is not merely action (what Freire calls activism) it also involves creativity, other-seeking and dialogue (Smith, 1999). The following table outlines the research questions and describes in summary what the focus of each question will be.

What was the praxis of the Suitcase Project?	Make explicit how the practice embodied particular theories of childhood, agency, resilience and meaning-making.
What tropes of trauma emerged from the process?	Look at what tropes of trauma were created in the art-making process Look at what characterises the narratives that emerged. What do these tropes of trauma say about how we should intervene in the lives of migrant children made vulnerable by war?
Can the Suitcase Project praxis add to our understanding of possible intervention processes for migrant and	Explore if the project contributes to the theory around alternative, more complex and more contextual understandings of

other vulnerable children?	trauma caused by war and migration. Use this to further develop a theory to inform practical work with migrant children who have experienced the trauma of war.
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4.2 Literature review and conceptual issues

4.2.1 Reflecting on a frame

This study is a reflection on work that was undertaken for the Suitcase Project.

Accordingly, it was not based explicitly on a theoretical body of literature, though I was, of course, influenced by theory that had long informed my practice. In framing this literature review I have, therefore, had to think a lot about what prompted me to start the Suitcase Project.

My own professional history explains the different agendas that influenced the way the project developed. My initial training was as an educator with a strong interest in child development. I have also been strongly influenced by Bronfenbrenner's idea (1979) of the different ecosystems in which children live and grow. This work focuses on the individual but acknowledges the very powerful influence of the micro (family, peers, community) and macro systems (government institutions, cultural mores, media) in which young people grow up. I also have a strong interest in the concept of resilience, in particular, the work of Werner & Smith (1989) and Rutter (1985) which show how interventions need to work at the level of all of the systems in which a child grows if they are to build resilience.

About midway through my professional career I moved from teaching into doing contract research work for NGOs. My work at that stage was based very firmly on the anthropological (as opposed to the psychological) approach of child-researchers such as Boyden & Ennew (1997). For ten years before working with the migrant children in Hillbrow I had used an ethnographic-style research approach with young people all over eastern and southern Africa looking at issues such as orphanhood, labour, child rights, poverty, violence and migration. The focus of most of the work was on capturing a contextualised voice of children about a particular issue in order to inform the development of policy and programmes run by NGOs. The term 'contextualised' is used here in the sense described by Woodhead (1998) when he discusses how children sometimes struggle to articulate ideas about a particular topic of interest to

the researcher. But if the research is “a process by which children are empowered to construct a representation of their social world” (p. 22) and the topic of interest is placed within this child-constructed context children can tell us many things we did not know.

A few years prior to working with the children in Hillbrow I worked alongside a clinical psychologist who used a combination of narrative (White & Epston, 1990; Freeman, Epston, Lobovits 1997) and psychodynamic (see Schön, Gower & Kotze 2010 for a summary of the approach used) approaches to working with traumatised children in the Katlehong area outside Johannesburg.

I brought all of these parts of my history into the development of the Suitcase Project. Part of the impetus behind the project was the fact that I perceived a need for psychosocial support for the children and specifically the need to build the individual protective factors that are part of personal resilience. I chose to work in a way that was congruent with the narrative approach I had internalised while working alongside the psychologist. Through this work I had (along with the psychologist I worked with) developed a measure of scepticism about a narrow psychodynamic approach, which sometimes pathologises and decontextualises the individual and thus contradicts my long-held holistic understanding of the child from my education background.

I was, therefore, driven by an explicit psychosocial agenda informed by the mainstream theory of trauma. However, I also approached the work like an ethnographer. I was fascinated by the lives of the children, the places they came from, the way they survived, the world of Hillbrow and how they negotiated the context in which they lived. These two threads came together for me when I spent time examining the data generated by the children during the Suitcase Project period.

During a discussion with my supervisor in early 2014 about the early chapters of the thesis she made the point that “the thesis is really about trauma from a psychological point of view.” I was surprised by this comment as I had begun to see the work as much less about ‘trauma’ from a psychological perspective where trauma is often seen as “... injury” (Lester, 2013 p. 755) and more in the sense of meaning-making as the

anthropologist, Finnström (2008) uses it when describing his work in war-affected Northern Uganda.

The focus of this book is on people's existential uncertainties, intellectual worries, political frustrations and religious queries in a situation of armed conflict and great social unrest, or **how people orient and seek meaning as they engage the world and live their humanity**. (p. 28 my emphasis)

The word meaningful as I want to use it, when applied to people's experience of the world, simply indicates that a phenomenon is situational and can be made comprehensible and comparable with other phenomena, and that people who live together articulate and mediate experiences and stories among one another in a patterning and systematic manner (Århem 1994: 19-24). (p. 7)

I asked my supervisor what it was in the writing that gave her this idea and she said, "The introduction". Then it made sense. I had written the introduction in 2005 and, without editing it at that stage, had placed it at the beginning of my thesis as a description of the project to orientate the reader. In 2005 the language I used came from the psychological; it had an 'individual trauma' and therefore a 'healing' focus. I realised that what I had said then no longer completely applied. By the time I was writing the thesis in 2014 I had spent much time analysing the children's stories and artwork. I realised that what I had from the children was not a story of healing, or even of trauma. I realised that the data I had was much more ethnographic than psychological. This statement by Zarowsky, (2004) in her ethnography of Somali refugees in Ethiopia resonated for me, "... ethnographers of inequality and trauma should **start with the ... narratives our respondents offer**, (emphasis added) and engage the very logic and structure of violence" (p. 204).

As I engaged with the actual narratives I realised that the stories and artwork from the children were not really about trauma or healing, though some did tell stories of traumatic events. The stories and artwork were about the "logic and structure of the violence" they had experienced and were experiencing, they were their attempts to make meaning, to make (in Finnström's sense) their "situation comprehensible" to "articulate and mediate experiences and stories among one another in a patterning and

systematic way” (p. 7). They were attempts to “engage the logic and structure of violence” (Zarowsky, 2004. p. 204) in their past and present lives.

So, while it was the psychological view of trauma that influenced the project, as the data emerged I realised that I needed to frame the research within a psychological **and** anthropological understanding of trauma. This is why I have chosen to frame my reflection on the Suitcase Project within the literature of psychological support to war-affected child migrants **and** in the literature on responses to violence within the discipline of anthropology

4.2.2 Interventions to support refugee children

The need for intervention at a psychological level is an integral part of the discourse of international institutions that are mandated to protect children. For example, UNICEF sees psychological support, especially in emergency situations, as a child’s right (UNICEF, 2003). The UNHCR Guidelines on Protection and Care of Refugee Children (UNHCR, 1994) include a section on the need to provide for the emotional and psychological wellbeing of refugee children. Machel’s (1996) UN report on the promotion and protection of the rights of children affected by armed conflict points out the urgent need to cater to the psychological and social needs of children in post-conflict situations.

In the regional context the situation is little different. A meeting of southern and eastern African organisations working with migrant children (Save the Children, 2009) makes a familiar point.

Psychosocial support for ‘children on the move’ is vital in helping children overcome often very traumatic experiences which can be compounded by the alienation of living and trying to survive in a country which is often hostile towards migrants. (p. 11)

What is striking when one looks at the literature around psychological intervention for war-affected children is the fact that the call for intervention far outweighs the examples of actual intervention. The regional seminar meeting mentioned above (Save the Children, 2009) highlights that there is “a lack of expertise in the area of

psychosocial support for vulnerable children” (p. 11). What is more, the interventions that do exist are often informed by a particular view of trauma that leads to what Kalksma-Van Lith (2007) in her review of psychological interventions for war-affected children calls a “curative approach” (p. 4). This approach draws very much on the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) model of trauma. Van Lith points out, though, that there are other possible approaches, for example what she calls a “developmental approach” (p. 4), which is informed much more by a broader psychosocial focus that includes the child’s family and environment. In spite of the growing influence (in part a result of the influence of the HIV and AIDS sector) of psychosocial approaches that are rooted in a broader and more contextual understanding of trauma the “curative approach” seems to persist in the context of war-affected children. As Boyden (2003) points out,

Undoubtedly war is one of the most destructive of environmental forces known to humankind and no child should have to undergo such an experience. Certainly some young people are overwhelmed emotionally and psychologically by exposure to highly stressful situations and events: such children definitely should be given full support and assistance whenever possible. Given the highly pernicious nature of armed conflict, it may seem self-evident that the dominant research focus on the psychopathological impacts on children is the most appropriate. But there are many difficulties with orthodox research in this field.... Aid interventions with children in war zones have been particularly influenced by psychiatric and psychological research and therapeutic work conducted in Europe during and in the aftermath of the Second World War and more recently by investigations undertaken in the United States with veterans of the Vietnam War. (p. 5)

Young (1995) traces the history of this particular view of trauma as far back as the 1860s and to attempts to define the psychological impact of war on soldiers in World War 1. But its influence on interventions for war-affected people worldwide is due to the adoption of the concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 1980 by the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) that classifies mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Young points out that underpinning the assumed universality of PTSD is a very particular set of

historical circumstances arising from the US response to the Vietnam war and a move away from the earlier psychoanalytic meanings of trauma rooted in hysteria.

Palmary (2005) describes one of the consequences of the widespread adoption of the concept of PTSD as a focus on “relieving symptoms through talking” (p. 16). She takes this idea further saying that,

Thus, notions of trauma ... imagine that people can change with insight into themselves and their personality - through exploring cognitions and emotions.
(Palmary, 2005, p. 204 and 205)

Summerfield (1999) points out that the ‘common sense’ understanding of most prominent humanitarian aid organisations is an acceptance of the need to help traumatised citizens and, as he points out, millions of dollars are spent on these programmes. The impact of this view has gone beyond the individual psychological level to

...individuals, organizations, and international institutions appropriate and strategically deploy aspects of the category of “trauma” to achieve certain ends (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; James, 2010; Robben & Suarez-Orozco, 2000) ... “trauma” has been earnestly wrested from the realm of individual psychology and figured as a political and economic concern (e.g., Adams, van Hattum, & English, 2009). (Lester, 2013, p. 754)

Summerfield, along with others (Hamber, 2009; Pupuvac, 2004) critique this unquestioning adoption of what they see as essentially a Western understanding of trauma. “The label carries with it Western ideas of hapless victimhood, and of exquisite and enduring individual mental injury” (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1994, p. 438).

The critique also points out how the approach adopted by most humanitarian aid organisations assumes a single unusual traumatic event. But as Kistner (2007) in her work with refugees in Johannesburg points out, most refugees live within what she calls “landscapes of suffering” that is, long-term disruption, conflict, deprivation and

difficulty. Though Herman's (1992) work has allowed for the acceptance of continuous trauma the critique suggests that this falls short because it is related to an unusual set of long-term traumatic events rather than to the trauma of the everyday. What we need are long-term communal strategies based on an understanding of trauma rooted in historical and cultural approaches to pain and grief inherent in local cultures (Eagle, 2005; Englund, 1998) and that take into account the ongoing, everyday trauma of deep poverty and discrimination.

Similarly, the narrative therapist Michael White (Carr, 1998) criticises the application of psychiatric diagnoses to clients and of seeing them only in terms of these diagnostic labels. White says that this process regulates or rules the body and soul and becomes what Foucault (1988) would call a totalising (or controlling) technique. White calls for therapeutic interventions that allow the client power and ultimately, control over their own lives.

In the HIV and AIDS field researchers and practitioners have begun to develop interventions that move beyond the "curative approach" (Kalksma-Van Lith, 2007, p. 4) to trauma (for example see Morgan, 2007; REPSSI, 2007; Solomon, 2007). There are also interventions in this sector that include a "developmental approach" (Kalksma-Van Lith, 2007 p. 4) that takes into account the many systems in which a child grows up. For example see Richter, Foster and Sherr (2006) who in a publication that is seen as seminal in the HIV and AIDS sector call for a broad approach to psychosocial support that includes the family and community.

There are examples of a holistic approach in work with refugee children (for example, Chase, 2000; Kohli, 2006; Kollantia, 2010; Melville, 2003; Sliep 2009) but few of these interventions provide us with an insight into an alternative view of trauma rooted in the actual narratives of young people who have escaped the trauma of war and now seek to live with the effect of migration. There is a need to document and reflect on interventions such as the Suitcase Project which attempt a contextualised approach to trauma.

4.2.3 The need for a broader understanding of trauma

Miller and Rasmussen (2010) wrote a review of recent research examining the relative impacts of war-related violence and daily stressors on emotional wellbeing of refugee populations. They point out that there is a growing body of evidence that stress related to being an exile, “such as social isolation, unemployment and discrimination” (p. 9) predict psychiatric symptoms as much as the exposure to war that caused them to migrate.

This may mean that agencies need to provide practical as well as emotional support. Palmary (2005) and Boyden (2003) discuss how since the early eighties there is evidence that some interventions for migrant children have taken into account the fact that poverty is often the reason for people’s distress. Boyden (2003) describes how some agencies

... have moved away from psychosocial interventions at an individual level and run programs, especially in post-conflict settings, that focus on social reconstruction, social reconciliation and healing. Working with families and communities in an effort to restore social structures and a sense of normality, they highlight the social ecologies of childhood as opposed to individual pathology. (p. 7)

This means that it is necessary to combine work in the realm of the individual micro systems of Bronfenbrenner (1979) with work in the macro systems on issues of justice. For example, we need to work within the realm of what Farmer (2003) calls institutionalised violence. Hamber (2009) has developed this work further by emphasising the need for interventions that focus, not only on individual coping, but on broader transformation of society and peace-building. In other words, interventions that seek to impact on the *context* of violence.

Lester (2013) traces the link between anthropology and trauma, pointing out that anthropologists have long paid special attention to events that push people to the very edges of their own existence, to the

... unmaking and remaking of worlds. Pushed to the very precipice of physical

and/or psychological annihilation, the bonds that tether a person to the everyday world become stretched, distorted, and even torn; sometimes irreparably so. Such a state of ontological alienation is profoundly distressing... By the mid-1990s, anthropological engagements with such edge-of-existence experiences had turned away from questions of psychological process and towards an examination of the social life of the category of such experiences; “trauma” as a cultural construct became marked as a distinct object of study (Young, 1995). (Lester, 2013 p. 753)

Lester also points out that after war people

... endure, and sometimes even transcend. People find ways to go on living—not just by resolving deep psychological conflicts or by reorganizing their experience to meet existing categories, but through ongoing, iterative, continuous processes of meaning-making that emerge in relationship with others, across a variety of levels and contexts, and through time. (p. 754)

What is useful about this way of seeing trauma is that it removes the focus from the pathological to the everyday experience of creating resilience and recovery. In this way it focuses on the idea of agency. This is directly linked to one of the central concerns in the work of the Suitcase Project; to see the children as agents who have developed their own strategies for coping with difficult experiences and the opportunity to allow them to explore these strategies through their art-making and storytelling.

Kohli & Mather (2003) point to another issue that they say should inform work with unaccompanied minors who have experienced trauma.

These children often experience a series of fractures in their past, present and future lives that need to be healed. At the point of arrival, their sense of being in charge of their lives is seriously jeopardized. The challenge for welfare professionals in these situations is to help the separated child find ... a sense of direction and a safe road to travel along in their journey of belonging, in a way that allows them to take charge of their *past, present and future*

experiences [emphasis added]. In reference to promoting psychosocial well-being, Howe et al. (1999) confirm that: [t]he complex interplay between the past and the present, the psychological inside and the social outside, is the dance that practitioners have to understand if they are to make sense of what is going on and intervene appropriately and effectively (Howe et al. 1999, p. 4). (p. 203)

The challenge is to find a process that allows for past and present to be reconciled in some way. It seems from looking at the narratives and artwork in Chapter 5 that the use of art and storytelling around the art provided one way of doing this. A boy of sixteen described how the artwork allowed him to reflect on his feelings of fear and grief and express them.

For me it is interesting doing all these things. Memories of life, the workshop is about life stories. It is sometimes hard, our expressing when we draw. When we draw, we don't just draw, we draw how we felt at the time. We express our feelings in the pictures. (Boy, 16, Burundi)

Englund (1998), highlights the need to move towards non-discursive methods of managing traumatic experiences and Tolfree (1996), explores how non-discursive tools such as music, drama and the visual arts make what he calls effective “tools” (p. 113) for encouraging migrant children to build on their own and other people's resources towards healing.

Making art gave the children a non-threatening, non-discursive tool for exploring their past experiences. The art teacher describes the thinking behind the artwork in the Suitcase Project.

I wanted to create an environment in which the child participants could determine their own creative outcome, using their own initiative to the maximum. I wanted to provide a kind of creative free space, to encourage a spontaneous, extremely individual response from each child. I decided to offer the children such a wide range of art-making options that they could “lose themselves” in the process. At an important point – where I felt creativity

worked at its optimum – the children would no longer feel self-conscious, and would dialogue in close relation to the materials at hand, absorbed in the free-flowing dynamic of their own ideas (Diane Weltering, notes for draft of *The Suitcase Stories*).

Mottram's (2007) discussion of Evans's Group Painting approach gives us some understanding of what may have been happening for the children in the artwork process. Mottram describes painting as valuable because of "the physical, sensual and ideological risks involved in the process of searching for newness and discovery through painting." (p. 55) She quotes Evans (1983)

... I see painting as a kind of passage of feeling into meaning, involving a kind of encounter with the physical reality of paint, space, time and the achievement of form, a kind of experiment, construction hypothesis that attempts to contain, define and distance the rush of sensations and emotions that are our experience ... it works at purposefully not knowing in order to know (Evans, p. 2). (Mottram, p. 53)

In Mottram's application of Evans's approach the painting process allowed adults in an inner city psychotherapy group to "know" their loss. In Chapter 5 we can see evidence that this was how art worked for the children in the Suitcase Project. White (2005) talks about how important it is to "not be timid in opening space for people to speak of what they have not had the opportunity to speak of, to put words to what has been unmentionable." (p. 20). He also emphasises how important it is to do this in a way that enables people to "wrest their lives from the prospective, longer-term consequences of this trauma" (p. 20). It seems that this was what the artwork partly allowed the children to do. They could explore what they chose to of the unmentionable without being asked to talk about it unless they wanted to.

4.2.4 Child agency

Many of the calls for a new way of thinking about trauma and children emphasise the need to focus on child agency. This focus on agency is part of what James and Prout (1990) call an "emergent paradigm for the study of childhood" (p. 2). One of the characteristics of this new way of thinking is that "... children must be seen as

actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live” (p. 2).

Boyden (2003) explores how, even in times of violence, children are not helpless victims but contribute to their own and to their families’ coping. Reading further in the area of child agency it is clear that this recognition of children as social agents has found its way into work on migrant children. A recent review of literature on interventions with migrant children affected by war (Chan et al. 2009) calls for a shift in the focus from PTSD to an approach that acknowledges the ability of children to find their own solutions in response to trauma.

Tollfree explored this idea as early as 1996. In his collection of case studies he describes a project that uses an alternative model for giving psychosocial support to refugees.

The whole approach is based on the belief that all refugees are deeply affected by their experiences, but by avoiding labelling people as “traumatised” or as “having problems”, the [project] is able to work in a way that builds on people’s strengths rather than weakness. No attempt is made to “solve” problems or to suggest action which they can take. Rather the aim is to provide a special form of interaction and the “tools” with which people themselves can discover and build on their own and each other’s personal resources. (p. 113)

This resonates with the way the Suitcase Project was developed. What I looked for when I realised that the children needed support to cope with their past and present was a set of ‘tools’ that could allow them to discover their inner resources. The tool I came upon was art-making (but it could have been any other similar expressive tool). The project developed a “special form of interaction” over time that included the rituals of greeting, working together, eating lunch together, talking and storytelling. What this study sets out to do is to record and reflect on a particular intervention (with a set of tools and interactions) that worked from the starting point of young people’s agency rather than their pathology.

4.2.5 The everyday as a way of resisting violence and trauma

In the rationale, Section 4.1 of this thesis, I discussed Walker's (2010) work with men and women living within ongoing violence in eastern Sri Lanka. What Walker illustrates is how grief, pain and trauma are resisted through the normalcy of small daily tasks and actions. Through the planting of trees, fishing, cooking and sewing, men and women resist and create small safe spaces as they continue with their lives. In her work we see people weaving trauma together with a quiet resistance through the act of everyday rituals. This section explores some of the literature around the idea of the everyday in anthropology.

Walker (2013) suggests that Bourdieu's (1977) notion of 'habitus', in which, he suggests, 'certain things become unthinkable-extraordinary, whilst others become desirable and normal'." (p. 86) is one way of understanding the everyday. As I will explore later in Theme 1 much of what the children in the Suitcase Project had experienced was 'unthinkable-extraordinary' and one way they sought to cope with it was by focusing on the desirable and normal, the "habitus", in the past and present.

This idea of coping with the unthinkable is reflected elsewhere in the literature. An example of this is Scheper-Hughes's work (1996; 2008) in Brazilian informal settlements and South African townships. She illustrates how people continue with everyday life in spite of difficult living conditions and violence. Scheper-Hughes's work focuses on resilience; the ability to cope in spite of adversity. Walker (2010) sees this resilience as "based upon negotiation, creativity and endurance. It can be seen both as heroic and ordinary" (p. 151).

The idea of creating endurance every day resonates with De Certeau's (1984) concept of "tactic" (p. xix). A tactic¹ is a creative response to the overwhelming of the weak by the strong, "whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order" (p. xix). This resonates very much in the context of children affected by war and especially unaccompanied children. Boyden (2003)

¹ Terms such as this one and others such as White's (2003) terms "thick stories" and "thin stories" (p. 2) have entered the lexicon of this field beyond the original sources. So, after acknowledging the first use I will use them as general terms within the rest of the thesis.

points out that, “the most resilient children in conflict zones are those who actively and creatively engage with their situation and adopt constructive approaches to the management of risk (and even) staying alive” (p. 7). This emphasis on resilience has relevance to my research because if we see children not as mere victims but also as resilient this influences what we do for their recovery after war. So, how we perceive ‘the child’ is important.

4.2.6 Children

It is important to look at why and how I use the word ‘children’ in this study, especially as the group ranged in age from six to 20 and at that age they could be termed adolescents or young people. My use of the word ‘children’ is deliberate and considered and influenced by the work of Burman (1994 and 2008) who has written about the need to deconstruct our conceptions of ‘child’ and ‘childhood’.

In her paper on the use of images of children in emergency and aid situations Burman highlights the fact that “Within northern industrialised societies, childhood is regarded as a period of dependency: lacking maturity, children are seen as in need of nurturance and protection, in need of supportive family relationships and (especially when those are considered inadequate) caring institutions” (p. 239). And though this view of the child is largely accepted unquestioningly it is in fact a historical construction. In the 1994 article she shows how “The romantic model of the child is a profoundly modern and western construction, emerging in the nineteenth century” (p. 239). She shows how the “innocent child” is important for our definition of adulthood at a psychological level within the modern western urban narrative of loss and alienation. Children signify truth, nature, spontaneity, innocence, and dependence - our past. “Children who are poor, sick, disabled, suffering, or from the South ... do not conform to this idealised model of childhood, [they] sit uneasily within [the] psychic economy”(p. 240) so we have to do something to “help” them which in turn makes them passive.

In her 2008 exploration of the idea of ‘the child’ Burman describes how “the emotionality surrounding children and childhood ... [often] instill[s] states of guilt, sentimentality, titillation, pity, horror or outrage” (p. 82). This sentence has resonance for me because it was just this response that I saw so often in audiences to whom I

spoke about the Suitcase Project² (something I did quite often when the book was shortlisted for the Sunday Times Non-Fiction Award). Audiences always responded with pity to the stories I read from the book, for example, one interviewer asked me “Is there hope for these children?” The children were reduced in the images the public had of them to passive victims. I found these interactions deeply uncomfortable as I knew the children as strong and active people who had managed to survive enormous odds to make a life for themselves in an incredibly hostile world. Though I always countered the “pity picture” with one I knew was closer to the truth I could see how deeply embedded the victim discourse was and felt that my alternative picture was seldom “heard”.

Another issue that confronted me in these public interactions was represented by the question, “What can be done for these children to help them?” Here again, Burman’s (2008) words resonate.

Outside the allocated spaces of childhood within Western industrialised life, children inhabit shadier places where they are regarded as not belonging. Here they appear as matters of management and policy – children in care, children in need, children subject to child protection legislation, children on behalf of whom we intervene to ‘restore’ the conditions for the kind of childhoods we approve. (p. 82)

Given this context it would be better not to refer to the members of the Suitcase Project as children; perhaps calling them ‘young people’ would change the way they are perceived. But there is a second thread to Burman’s argument that is important, which for me, justifies the use of the word ‘children’ as an activist statement. Burman (1994) points out that historically there were also pragmatic reasons behind the creation of the trope of ‘the innocent child in need of protection’. During the nineteenth century there was a need to “control the active resistance and organisation of an economically independent (albeit exploited) group of young working people through the creation of a malleable, educable population (Hendrick, 1990; Hoyles,

² The book the children and I wrote together was one of five titles shortlisted for the award in 2006. The children were not involved in the publicity around the award as the project had terminated and they had expressed the desire to not do any public work as they did not want to be “seen as refugees any more”.

1989)” (Burman, p. 239). Alongside the “innocent child” is the “uncontrollable child”, the one who does not defer to the boundary between childhood and adulthood. “Key areas which threaten to blur this heavily invested boundary include children’s ‘knowledge’ (especially sexual knowledge) and activity (especially political, economic and violent activity)” (Burman, 1994, p. 241).

It is the idea that children are actively involved in “political activity” (p. 24) that resonates for me. Katz (2004) describes how

Childhood and its material social practices are shot through with the effects of social political and environmental change, while making it clear that children are social actors in the process. Their work and play not only intersect with and are altered by these processes, but they have the capacity to further or frustrate them as well. (p. x)

So, children have the capacity to frustrate and exploit political and social processes. Dawes (1994), in his work on children’s responses to the violence of apartheid South Africa, describes how the socio-political context shapes a child’s response to adversity.

Children do not just react to violence as ‘natural’ entities, but as social creatures – as individuals with a personal history and as members of groups with a social history. This element of social history is important in framing the individual’s experience of adversity. (p. 191)

This exploitation of the context and the influence of social history on behaviour is what I saw in the children in the Suitcase Project. The “social history” (Dawes, 1994, p. 191) of the children in the Suitcase Project was the ‘refugee experience’. Many of them had spent time in a refugee camp, most had experience of being ‘beneficiaries’ of service NGOs. They were attuned to the power of a story about escape from persecution and war, they understood what was needed for resettlement by UNHCR to another country; they were attuned to the power of the ‘refugee narrative’. Burman gives examples of children who show the kind of active agency that Katz and Dawes describe as “children who work, children who have sex, children whose work is

having sex or children who steal, bully or even murder” (p. 82). I would add to this, children who have had to survive in an aid-defined ‘emergency’ situation for some time. Boyden (2003) describes how migrant children often exploit a situation for their own purpose.

So, as an advocacy point, I consciously choose to call the group who participated in the Suitcase Project ‘children’ and in this way appropriate the alternative view of the child as someone who is an active participant in their own lives. The use of the term ‘children’ throughout this work acknowledges the resourcefulness with which they created survival strategies for themselves and often used these to subvert the system that sought to control them. The use of the label ‘child’ should remind us that the voices we hear in this work are the voices of people with agency who knew very clearly from the social contexts they had grown up in (for example, refugee camps run by local and international aid organisations) how to choose a particular persona or narrative.

Finally, it is important to point out that the action children take can often create problems for them, largely because the notion of the innocent child is so deeply embedded in how we believe children should be. “If the price of innocence is passivity, then the cost of resourcefully dealing with conditions of distress and deprivation is to be pathologised” (Burman, 1994, p. 244). There are examples in Chapter 5 of this thesis of how resourceful responses to adversity were seen as dysfunctional by service providers or worked against the children over time.

4.2.7 Voice

This brings us to the discussion of ‘voice’. James (2007) highlights how much recent work in the childhood studies field talks about “listening to the voices of children” (p. 261). She makes the point that there is a need to think beyond the rhetoric if we are to truly understand more about children’s life worlds and to look closely at what we have learned from anthropology about representation.

We need to guard against a crude form of what Clifford Geertz has called “ethnographic ventriloquism; the claim to speak not just about another form of life but to speak from within it” (1988:145) ... we must also challenge the new

“text positivism” and “dispersed authorship” that seem to assume, necessarily, that research done with or by children – research including what children say – is an authentic (and hence unproblematic) representation of children’s voices. (James, 2007, p. 263)

In writing up research and inserting quotes from children James points out that it is important that we acknowledge our editorial role. “It is adults who retain control over which children’s voices are given prominence and over which parts of what children have to say are to be presented” (p. 265). There also is a need to acknowledge that

... the voices that appear in our texts do not necessarily speak about “children” in general or “the child” in abstraction... What is important is to acknowledge the cultural context of their production. The voices of children that we include in our texts must, therefore, be acknowledged in their particularity and the generalizations we draw from them must continue to be carefully crafted. Indeed they must be recognised as crafted; their “authenticity” must be interrogated, not assumed. (James, 2007, p. 265)

Komulainen (2007), using the insights of Bakhtin’s dialogical theory, takes this discussion of voice further by looking at the fact that voice is social and co-constructed and not linear (2007). Komulainen calls on the researcher to look at “our own assumptions about children, our particular use of language, the institutional contexts in which we operate and the overall ideological and discursive climates which prevail” (p. 152). Spyrou (2011) calls for a recognition of “the messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality and multi-layered nature of meaning in [children’s] ‘stories’” (Spyrou, p. 162). What this calls for is reflexivity as a researcher that begins with informing ourselves about the contexts that inform children’s voices.

To fully appreciate the social and cultural significance of children’s voices, researchers need to become familiar with the discourses that inform children’s voices. Only then can they account for children’s particular rendering of the ideological, namely, their own perspectives.

At the same time, researchers need to become familiar with the discourses that inform their own analyses and interpretations of children's experiences (Mitchell, 2009: 93). This discursive approach to understanding children's voices connects what happens at the level of individuals and the actual context of interaction between the child and the researcher with the larger discursive levels where representations exist and from which both children and researchers draw to make sense of, and create meaning, during their encounter. (Spyrou, 2011, p. 160)

With all of this in mind I would not assume to make the claim that this work speaks for refugee children because the voices presented here are the voices of children with agency, knowledge, a social context and a need to act on their situation that informs what they say and how they say it, just as it does with adult migrants (or in fact any person). I have tried throughout the research to reflect the context in which the stories were given, to be reflexive about the choices I made when quoting the children and to try and represent as much as I can the multi-layered nature of the artwork and the words of the children.

As Spyrou (2011) points out, what helps in this process is time, time to make sure that we as researchers understand the lives and contexts of the children we work with. I listened to and communicated with the children in the Suitcase Project for a period of almost five years. I heard stories repeated many times and as the children came to trust me more and I became more attuned to them, I began to sense the underlying narrative, rather than the story they thought best to present. I hope that in "exploring children's small voices, ... with care [it will allow this work to] ... speak to [the] large issues" of migrant children in general (James, 2007, p. 267).

This links to the issues of advocacy and "speaking for others" that I had to face when the book that the children and I wrote together, *The Suitcase Stories* was published. Though I discuss later how public work like the publishing of a book can be used as an advocacy tool to allow the vulnerable and marginalised "to have a voice" I am still unsure of the role the actual publishing of the book played in the lives of the children. How much of the book was a "shooting back" in the sense of PhotoVoice (see Chapter 4 where this approach is discussed in more detail) and how much was it a

personal representation of the child refugee? The work of Lykes (2010) with Mayan communities affected by war in Guatemala has resonance for me here. Lykes describes how a PhotoVoice process resulted in both psychosocial healing and the production of a book that was used to make heard the up-to-then-silenced stories of the women and children she worked with. Lykes describes how her and other's role as 'outsider' researcher had sometimes silenced particular aspects of the stories in the final publication. She points out some of the "... previously unacknowledged complexities of PhotoVoice and shooting-back approaches with particular attention to how polyvocality and power interact, creating shifting texts that both silence and 'give voice'".

She suggests that though the book produced allowed a particular story of human rights abuse to emerge, in the selection of texts and images the outside researchers at the same time "submerged or erased individual human desire, ethnic and religious diversity, and group conflict" (p. 239) that were also part of the story as the women told it. Lykes points out how important it has been for her to "problematise her performances as 'outsider' – that is, as human rights activist scholar – and interrogate her positionality and voice as 'missionary', 'monitor' and 'sister-in-solidarity'" (p. 238).

When I read this paper I wondered how much the book reinforced a stereotypical refugee identity in the children but also in the general public reader. Did the stories of extreme violence merely add to the 'traumatisation' of refugee identity? I am also aware that because the children had asked not to be involved in any public work around the book, this placed the emphasis on me. As I represented the book and the children in public fora I was aware of the 'missionary' identity that emerged around me. I countered this as much as I could by talking about the children's stories but I am unclear now successful I was as the focus on a single person made for good media.

I recall especially my sense of unease at being 'the voice' of the children in the public fora in which I spoke when the book was shortlisted for the Alan Paton Literary Award. The work I have done subsequently on this thesis has helped me to understand the need for constant reflexivity around how we as facilitators of 'voice' represent those whose voices we record. There are a number of issues I have reflected on. The

first is raised by the title of the Razack (2007) article mentioned earlier “Stealing the Pain of Others”. Those of us who choose to publish work like this are often accused of ‘using’ the voices of others for our own ends. I have to be honest and say that having the book shortlisted for a prestigious award was a career highlight for me; it gave me credibility and publicity (useful for someone who works as a freelance consultant). I was to some extent “stealing the pain of others”. This was one reason why I chose to place myself in the book, to tell my story of interaction with the children over the time of the project; it felt important to tell the story of their impact on me, they too had agency. This also gave a sense of the context in which the stories were told; they were not merely disembodied stories of pain.

But, I also used the position of public power that the award publicity gave me with intent. I made very clear choices about what I ‘voiced’. I refused to pander to requests for distressing stories and I chose to present the children in a particular light as heroes rather than victims. I chose to challenge the stereotypes I was constantly presented with by journalists and book reviewers. For example, the press release put out by the publisher when the book was shortlisted talked about the art approach as a way of “treating” refugee children – I had this changed and explained why. A journalist asked me, if “there was any hope for these children” – I emphasised their resilience. Other journalists conflated a child who had migrated with “street children” – I gave details about the children’s lives and spoke against stereotypes of children living on the streets too. I also used the opportunity to make important policy advocacy points about the need for schools to be open to migrant children, for Home Affairs to focus on processing documents for unaccompanied children, for the South African Police to stop detaining migrant children.

The third issue I have reflected on is that which could be summed up in the term “disaster voyeurism”. As P began to tell me his story of surviving the Rwandan genocide, I had a thought that will I am sure be familiar to many journalists and researchers, “This is an amazing story that I have on tape!” I knew that it would have an impact in a book. So, alongside the pain of listening to a boy I had come to love describe how he had seen his mother killed, the writer in me was thinking how to present the story. Perhaps the important thing is to acknowledge this kind of impulse and not allow it to dominate. I did not press for details, I allowed P to keep the power

of the story in his hands, I allowed him to see a transcript before publishing, he asked for some details to be removed and together we removed them, I tried as best I could to allow him to control his ‘voice’.

4.3 Methodology

The project worked with a core group of twenty children over a five-year period. Discussions about the artwork were held almost every week over this time, resulting in a large body of recorded data. This was transcribed and then analysed (see 4.3.3 and 4.).

Though the Suitcase Project was conceived as a support process, during its lifetime it produced a collection of material that I have now used as data for this thesis. The data that was gathered from the Suitcase Project includes:

- i) The art the children produced;
- ii) Transcripts of the storytelling - stories the children told about their artwork and, in doing so, their life experiences, including the narratives of why and how they left their countries of origin;
- iii) Transcripts of discussions held with the children about the different processes that formed the project;
- iv) My field notes and reflections.

Each of these data sources is discussed in turn in this section.

4.3.1 The art the children produced

In this chapter on methodology the visual images the children produced during the project are treated as **a source of data**. In later chapters (5 and 6) I will look at the process of the art-making as **a tool for intervention** with war-affected children.

I have drawn on a number of different theoretical frames to explain why and how visual images produced during an art process can be a useful and powerful source of data about experience, especially in the case of children and those made emotionally vulnerable by traumatic experiences.

Each of the theoretical frames is discussed in turn below

4.3.1.1. Looking at images conceptually

This theoretical frame relates to the concept of the image. Of course what constitutes an image is complex, for example, we can see the world around us in a concrete sense but we also see images with our eyes closed or in dreams (Weber, 2008). The images used in this research are concrete (the art the children made) but, clearly, they represent more than what we see. For this reason the theory around image and sense-making is examined below.

Weber describes how scholars, mostly semioticians, have written much on what Weber calls “the slippery question of how images mean” (2008, p. 42). What is relevant for this work is the fact that images have an external and an internal reality. Barthes (1981), one of these scholars of semiotics, helps us understand this idea further by saying that all images have a meaning beyond the denotative or literal. Images have connotative meanings created by the cultural and historical context in which they were made and in which we see them. Weber (2008) describes how this understanding has influenced thinking about how we see images.

Even in a post-postmodern era, there is a growing tendency to speak of images as part of both external and internal “realities” reflecting the relationship of image to the dialectics of human perception and sense-making, helping frame the concept more as a dynamic product of our interaction with the world than as an immutable and independent object in the world. (p. 43)

The images made by the children are thus seen in this research as a reflection, not only of what the children saw, but of an inner reality. They are also a reflection of emotion; how the children felt about the image they made.

Barthes, writes about the image in *Camera Lucida* (1981) in a way that resonates with how I see the images produced by the children in the Suitcase Project. In the context of a treatise on how he looks at photographs as a product of context and how he is drawn to notice the period details such as clothes (a process he calls *studium*) he writes about finding a photograph that moves him beyond *studium*. In his grief after

his mother's death he sorts through photographs of her, looking for one that contains her "being" (p. 66). He finds a photograph of her as a child in a winter garden standing with her brother. When he finds the photograph he is deeply moved. "For once, photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance" (p. 70). This is what he says about the photograph:

I cannot reproduce The Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the "ordinary" ... at most it would interest your studium: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it for you, no wound. (Barthes, 1981, p. 73)

This discovery that the image can carry deep emotion is significant in the context of this research. Though, we were working with made images and not photographs, many of the images produced by the children in The Suitcase Project were objects of remembrance that carried wounds just as Barthe's photograph of his mother did. What is relevant here is that it is partly the extent to which the children could articulate the remembrance or the wound contained in their images that allowed them to speak to someone else (see the discussion below on photo elicitation where the image becomes a discursive object). However, the remembrance and the wounds are also felt in the privacy of the child's thoughts, perhaps even hidden deep below the surface and not articulated to the self. The images are thus not merely data to be analysed but objects of remembrance that reach much deeper below the surface than I as a researcher should dare to go in this work. I will discuss the impact on the children of acknowledging the 'sacred' nature of the images in Chapter 6.

4.3.1.2 The art therapy frame

Looking at child-generated artwork from within the framework of art therapy is also useful. In his history of the link between psychotherapy and the arts Haen (2009) quotes neuroscientist Daniel Siegel (2006) on the role that the arts can play in taking reflection below the surface.

In a psychotherapeutic setting, focusing primarily on word-based thinking and narratives can keep therapy at a surface level. ... An overemphasis on logical, linguistic, linear, and literal thinking may tilt the balance of our minds away

from the important sensori-motor, holistic, autobiographical, stress-reducing, image-based self-regulatory functions of our non-verbal neural modes of processing. Linking these two very different but important ways of knowing is the essence of creating balance in our lives and in our understanding of complex human experiences such as trauma. (p. xiv)

Though Siegel is talking about the use of the arts in the therapeutic space his comment is also relevant for the researcher who seeks to have data about the “complex human experience of trauma” that goes beyond the “surface level” (p. xiv). This is what Geertz (1973b), from an anthropological research point of view, would call “thick” (p. xiv) data; it includes what is behind what is being observed by the anthropologist. This term is a useful one as it suggests rich data that can be ‘mined’ for meaning either by the person who produces it or the listener/onlooker.

Buk (2009) writing in the journal *Arts in Psychotherapy* describes a similar process but points to another reason why making art is useful.

... the physical act of making art involves the synthesis of the sensorimotor and perceptual realms, it allows for a more direct expression of the traumatic memories, while simultaneously promoting the artist’s autonomous engagement and sense of control (Johnson, 1987). ... Therefore, on both physiological and psychological levels, the bodily and life-affirming activities of the artist making art can remediate the feelings of helplessness, passivity, and annihilation experienced during the trauma. (p. 62)

This quote points to an ethical reason for using art in research; making art can reduce feelings of helplessness and give a sense of control. I will discuss this in an intervention context in Chapter 6 but what is useful in this chapter on methodology is the fact that making art is a way of containing the traumatic experience while it is being discussed or described. Johnson (1987) describes this distancing in his seminal article on the worth of art therapy in working with those who have experienced war-related violence.

What the creative arts therapies offer is a concrete and impersonal transitional

space of the artwork, music, roleplay, or poetry that is more safe than the abstract and personal one of the transference. The need to disown and deny the affects and memories of the trauma, and to remain in control of them, are more effectively accomplished when these images arise on paper, in a dance, or in playing music. In this way, the patient can play out at arm's length the gamut of feeling and impulse, and be helped by the creative arts therapist to modulate the directness and intensity of expression... Instead of the discussion of a feeling, one has a discussion of a picture of a feeling, a less threatening situation for the patient because the picture is concrete and external to the self (p. 11).

It is clear that using art as a process for research can create a measure of emotional distance between the research participant and the traumatic experience while data is being collected. Of course, this does not mean that other measures do not also have to be put in place to ensure the emotional wellbeing of research participants, it just points out that using art-making as a research process can be more 'care full' than simple interviewing.

I wanted to create an environment in which the child participants could determine their own creative outcome, using their own initiative to the maximum. I wanted to provide a kind of creative free space, to encourage a spontaneous, extremely individual response from each child. I decided to offer the children such a wide range of art-making options that they could "lose themselves" in the process. At an important point – where I felt creativity worked at its optimum – the children would no longer feel self-conscious, and would dialogue in close relation to the materials at hand, absorbed in the free-flowing dynamic of their own ideas. (Diane Welpering, pers.comm.)

4.3.1.3 The visual methods frame

This third theoretical frame is, unlike the art therapy frame discussed above, directly related to research method. It is represented by a research methodology known variously as, photo voice, photo elicitation and visual storytelling.

Visual research as method is rooted in the work of Collier (1967) and Collier and Collier (1986 – an updated version of the 1967 text). In the 1986 classic text, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* the authors looked at the photograph as a research tool within the frame of ethnography – as a tool for “recording the public landscape as well as creating a cultural inventory of private spaces” (Stanczak, 2007 p. 10). For the Colliers³ the use of the images and their analysis are seen empirically as detailed data for the researcher to analyse largely through looking at the patterns that emerge as the visual data is systematically reviewed (Stanczak, 2007). Pink (2007), also looking at the visual in the context of ethnography, takes this approach into a different methodological space by encouraging a reflexive approach to the visual image that takes into account a constructivist view. For Pink, analysis of a visual image should focus “not only on the content of images, but on the meanings that different individuals give to those images in different contexts” (p. 123). Harper (1998; 2002) agrees with the importance of the reflexive approach. For him, “the meaning of the images resides most significantly in the ways that participants interpret those images, rather than as some inherent property of the images themselves” (Stanczak, 2007, p. 11). Stanczak describes the work of Collier and Collier (1986) where the image is “a cultural inventory of private spaces” (Stanczak, 2007, p. 10). This is very much how the images the children produced are analysed in this research. But so too is the reflexive tradition of Pink (2007 and Harper (2002). The images are also seen as evidence of the internal worlds of the children.

Harper’s (1998; 2002) approach has come to be called ‘photo elicitation’. Photo elicitation is essentially the inclusion of photographs into an interview protocol. These photographs can be generated and/or chosen by the researcher or taken by the participants themselves - this is often called “autodriven” photo elicitation. This approach was a particularly strong influence on the way the data in this study was generated.

³ Collier wrote a paper in 1957 where he described using photos as part of an interview and encouraged the participants to talk about it. Harper quotes Collier describing how the use of images created more emotional depth. “Collier noted that photo interviewing involved: “...a more subtle function of graphic imagery. This was its compelling effect upon the informant, its ability to prod latent memory, to stimulate and release emotional statements about the informant’s life...” (1957:858).” (Harper, 2002 p. 14)

I believe photo elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews. It is partly due to how remembering is enlarged by photographs and partly due to the particular quality of the photograph itself. Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone; an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs [cf. Barthes photograph of his mother] alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk. (Clark, 1999 p. 22 and 23)

Collier and Collier (1986) and Harper (2002) work largely in a researcher-driven way but more recently photo elicitation has become a common method for participatory researchers. Wang's (1999) Photovoice method is the prime example of this. Photovoice is a participatory research approach that uses photographs taken by the research participants, who then discuss the photos and use them to give 'voice' to their perspectives and lives through exhibitions and other public fora. Wang, Cash and Power (2000) describe the different theoretical ideas that inform the research approach. The first is Paulo Freire's (1970) work on developing a critical consciousness by problematising reality, analysing it and developing solutions for change. The second theoretical root is in feminist theory, which "... suggests that power accrues to those who have voice, set language, make history, and participate in decisions (Smith, 1987). Feminist theory is relevant to photo-voice in that participants may use this approach to enhance their public presence" (Wang, Cash and Power, 2000, p. 82).

The third root of the approach discussed by Wang, Cash and Power (2000) is the documentary photography developed by Ewald (1985) and Hubbard (1991). It was Hubbard who coined the phrase "shooting back" to refer to the use of photographs in the context of disempowerment and marginalised communities. Spence (1995) used a similar idea in referring to "activist photographers". All of these approaches "use photography as a personal voice" (Wang, Cash and Power, 2000 p. 82).

This idea of photography as a voice, as a way for marginalised people to speak truth to power is also embedded in the Suitcase Project. From the beginning the children

themselves asked to “tell other people about our lives”. Because of this the artwork was used in exhibitions. See Chapter 5 for a description of this and Chapter 6 for what this meant for the children and how it contributed to their making meaning of experience. Mitchell (2011) is another theorist who has helped us understand how photographs and other images can become tools for participatory research and for advocacy. Her use of visual images in research ranges across photography, video, drawing and individual, group and community participatory research. What is useful for the research on the Suitcase Project is her reference to ‘production texts’. She refers to the fact that visual research produces an

... immediate visual text [or primary text as John Fiske, 1991, terms it] – the drawing, photo image, collage, photo-story, video, documentary/video narrative, or album, and that can include captions and more extensive curatorial statements or interpretive writings (or discussion in the case of photoelicitation) that reflect what the participants have to say about the visual texts. Each of these examples can also include what Fiske (1991) terms ‘production texts’ – or how participants engaged in the process talk about their work. Production texts are often elicited during follow-up interviews. (p. 5)

The Suitcase Project produced visual (the artwork the children produced) and word-based primary text (from the recorded discussion about the artwork). It also produced production text (from interviews during and after the art-making process) very much as Mitchell describes it above. Harper in his 2002 paper on the history of the use of visual elicitation in anthropology and sociology points out that most elicitation studies use photographs but that there is no reason why the research approach cannot be used with “... virtually any visual image” (p. 13). This is relevant for this discussion of the Suitcase Project because the visual medium used was mostly child-generated artwork that included drawing, printing, painting and collage. Drawing is perhaps the most common visual medium apart from photography that is discussed in the literature.

Drawing is seen as particularly useful in work with children. Driessnack (2006) suggests that the use of drawing in research is not only a product of the wider awareness of photo elicitation but also mirrors a move in the psychoanalytic field away from using drawings as a source of data only for the “the researcher’s or

clinician's interpretation" (p. 1415) towards the inclusion of "... the child's explanation of what the drawing means" (p. 1415). Driessnack (2006) also points out that a systematic review of the literature and a subsequent meta-analysis shows that "drawing facilitates children's abilities to talk, particularly about those events or constructs they might otherwise find difficult to describe" (p. 1415).

Thomson (2008) in her book titled, *Doing visual research with children* suggests that the use of visual approaches in research with children is particularly useful because its focus on the non-verbal allows "children and young people who have difficulty with words an alternative means of expression" (p. 11). Boyden and Ennew (1997) emphasise this point when they discuss how important it is to use methods of research that are suited to the child's age and stage of development because this allows for a research process "... in which children's ideas and perceptions can be expressed in their own terms without being blocked or misrepresented by the ways adults think and talk" (p. 37). This means researchers with children need to use "techniques that are less dependant on words" (p. 37).

Aldridge (2012) in her work with children caring for ill adults describes how visual research is particularly useful for work with *vulnerable* children because the images "provide insight into unseen or hard-to-reach locations and hidden experience" (p. 50). Her work resonates with this study as child carers are often as hidden from view as child migrants. For Aldridge visual methods can help vulnerable children to question the prevailing assumption that children are passive victims to circumstances; as they work with the visual images that show their reality they begin to question the identity they are given by adults and adult institutions and begin to develop a sense of agency. This was very much what happened in the Suitcase Project (see Chapter 6).

4.3.1.4 Arts-based research frame

Sullivan (2006) traces the emergence of art(s)-based research in the mid-1990s to two roots. The first is the work of Elliott Eisner whose methods "draw on traditions of art criticism and rely on the power of the evocative word-image to capture the complex reality of educational life" (p. 23). Shaun McNiff (1998), another theorist in the field, defines art-based research as a method of enquiry "which uses the elements of the creative arts therapy experience, including the making of art by the researcher, as a

way of understanding the significance of what we do in our practice” (p. 13). Sullivan goes on to point out that in the work of both Eisner and McNiff “problems and issues are investigated using strategies of enquiry that are grounded in the arts, yet take their methodological cue from the social sciences” (p. 56). Leavy (2009) reiterates this point about the essential social science methodological link when she says

Visual and other arts-based methods make [the iterative process at the core of qualitative research] explicit – allowing qualitative researchers to do better what they already do arts-based practices draw out the meaning-making process and push it to the forefront ... the arts simply provide qualitative researchers a broader palette of investigative and communication tools with which to garner and relay a range of social meanings (p. 10, 11 and 12).

Leavy points out that arts-based tools can be used “during all phases of research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (p. 2). The Suitcase Project fits into this description of arts-based research. Art was used at a data collection stage and in some ways also at the representation stage through the published book, *The Suitcase Stories*. But there is another sense in which this study draws on arts-based theory. Sullivan (2006) and Leavy (2009) show that the work of Eisner and others who follow his method in the field of educational enquiry are rooted very much in the social science paradigm. Sullivan points out that this focus sells art short; we lose the benefit of using the aesthetic paradigm if we use art only as a tool of social science. In his 2006 paper he argues that

... art practice is a profound form of human engagement that offers important ways to inquire into issues and ideas of personal, social and cultural importance. This practice is creative and critical; features complex forms of imagination and intellect; and makes use of processes and procedures that draw from many traditions of inquiry. [The researcher should] incorporate the theoretical, structural, interpretive and critical traditions found in the arts. ... For some arts-based researchers, however, there is a tendency to rely too much on the instrumental capacity of the arts to be drafted into service ... Such a move diminishes the creative and critical capability of the arts for there is much more that art practice can do (p. 32 and 33).

The research on the Suitcase Project moved beyond the use of the arts as a data collection tool into the realm of aesthetics. The work of Johnson (2009) and Sutton and De Backer (2009) resonate in this regard. Johnson argues for the need to use the concepts central to the creative arts at the centre of healing processes in the context of trauma. He describes the work of Sutton and De Backer (2009), musicians who explore the concepts central to their art of music in relation to trauma; they explore the silences central to musical expression in relation to trauma within the context of the therapeutic relationship pointing out that “... we should investigate with greater depth the nuances of our own aesthetic media to seek out the imprint of trauma on sound and silence, gesture and stillness, color and the blank canvas” (p. 119). Johnson calls this placing of concepts central to their art at the centre of their work with victims of trauma an “aesthetic paradigm”. The Suitcase Project worked from within an aesthetic paradigm. One of the reasons for this was because an artist (art teacher) worked with the children. Leavy (2009) highlights why this is important.

The issue of aesthetics is central to the production of arts-based texts as well as our evaluation of them. Although in the best case art provokes, inspires, captivates, and reveals, certainly not all art can meet these standards. Throw novices into the mix who create art for their scholarly research and even less of what is produced is likely to meet the aesthetic ideals developed in the fine arts (p. 17).

She suggests that collaboration is the key to “strengthening the aesthetic dimensions of research” (p. 18). Scholars need to work with “professionals outside of their disciplines in order to maximize the aesthetic qualities and authenticity of the work [because] the more effective the artistic aspects are, the more likely the research is to affect audiences in their intended ways” (p. 18). In the context of this research, the professional I worked with was an artist and art teacher, Diane Weltering. As the description of her approach to the art on page 15 shows Diane worked very clearly in an aesthetic paradigm.

4.3.2 Transcripts of the storytelling

As Chapter 3 described, much of the time in the Suitcase Project was spent telling

stories. Note that the way the term ‘storytelling’ was used within the project is different from the more common use of the term. Usually ‘a story’ is defined as something that has a beginning, middle and end. For example, Kelly (2005) defines the kind of storytelling used in healing and recovery projects in Northern Ireland as “... anything that is told or recounted, normally in the form of a causally linked set of events or happenings, whether true or fictitious“ (p. 12). Very few of the stories told by the children in the Suitcase Project storytelling sessions were an account of causally linked events or happenings. This was probably because the artwork was built around the idea of a ‘window’. When we first introduced the idea of the artwork to the children we used the idea of ‘making a set of windows into your life for other people to look through’. Because of this we often referred to the pieces of artwork as ‘windows into your life’. What we were asking the children to tell us was the story of what was ‘inside’ a single drawing, print, collage or painting; telling what ‘this window shows about my life’. We did not ask them to recount their life story, or even ‘the story of when you had to run away’ or ‘the story of what happened on your first day at school in South Africa’ or ‘the story of how my mother became sick’. We asked them to tell us about a single image, ‘a window’.

Another thing that influenced the nature of the narratives gathered from the Suitcase Project was the informal process. *Betty Tells a Story*, a film of a narrative interaction (described by Mishler, 2004) is typical of the kind of narrative collected during a research situation where a participant is requested to tell a story of an event or situation; this is a formal storytelling. The storytelling in the Suitcase Project was far less formal – it was more like ‘a conversation under a tree with friends’ and this is probably another reason why the narratives that emerged and that are transcribed are more fragmented just like a conversation between friends often is. In Chapter 6 I explore further the significance of the fragmentary nature of the narratives but here I wish to look at the idea of the storytelling as communal. The storytelling in the project was often a communal activity. Plummer (1995) talks about how storytelling is always communal, he describes how “stories gather people around them“ (p. 174). Storytelling is a relational activity that gathers others to listen and empathise. It is a collaborative practice. The storytelling that took place in the Suitcase Project usually took place in groups and was usually dialogic in nature. For Bakhtin (1981, 1984) it is

through dialogue with others that we create new identities and make meaning of ourselves within our context.

The idea lives not in one person's isolated individual consciousness - if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of others. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 87 and 88)

This discussion amongst the children in the Suitcase Project illustrates this dialogic process.

Etienne: This person I drew he is holding people in his arms – he is holding us together. He symbolises my grandpa, my mother's father. He worked hard to become the person he is now. He worked in this place for long and he built a big house, he had twelve children and many grandchildren. He built this big house and during the holidays we all went there. We used to be there together, kids, grown up people, we used to talk and sleep around twelve - just keep playing around, it was light outside. That was a real good life when I think about it. All the family got separated because there was a war and they chased my grandfather away. If I have people who are around me who love me and that I love then I am happy.

Jean: Can I ask a question? Like if you are not sure what to do and we have no home or people to ask. How can you find people to believe in, that you can ask?

CJ: I think you can ask peer counsellors at school.

Jean: But what if you don't want people to know about your question. You need someone to trust.

Etienne: I think friends. Like all of you [he refers to the boys in the group].

Jean: But you sometimes need older people. Who can you ask if you have no family?

Silence.

CJ: You need to look for older people to trust - like the pastor or an older friend.

Etienne: My guardian. (Boys, Burundi, Rwanda and DRC)

In this quote we see the boys exploring family in the emotional zone of proximal development (Bradbury and Miller, 2010; see discussion on page 160 of this thesis) that Etienne, through his discussion of his artwork, had opened up for them. The dialogue helped them to explore and even to come to terms with the identity they now had as young people who had no extended family. The dialogue allowed them to explore alternative families, such as the support they could give each other. Tolfree (1996) talks about special interactions being important in the process of healing for migrant children.

The whole approach is based on the belief that all refugees are deeply affected by their experiences, but by avoiding labelling people as “traumatised” or as “having problems”, the [project] is able to work in a way that builds on people’s strengths rather than weakness. No attempt is made to “solve” problems or to suggest action which they can take. Rather the aim is to provide a special form of interaction and the “tools” with which people themselves can discover and build on their own and each other’s personal resources. (p. 113)

The most important ‘special form of interaction’ in the Suitcase Project was between the children themselves. Each week we discussed who was missing and why this may be so. The group was encouraged to make contact with the person during the week and let them know that we missed them. The children identified this as one of the strengths of the group.

The art classes are not just for coming here and doing art. We are also coming here and getting to know each other. I never used to know CJ so much, but now I know him and he is like a brother to me and I see him on the street and I feel good. We were next door neighbours once but we didn’t know each other because the way Hillbrow is everyone minds there own business. Now we are like brothers. (Boy, 15, Burundi)

The children who participated in the Suitcase Project have continued to support each other and many of them now share accommodation with each other and support each other with money for food and rent as well as giving emotional support. So the dialogical nature of the storytelling built community within the group but it also allowed for the development of a sense of agency in the children.

We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence defining our identity . . . always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things that our significant others want to see in us. (Taylor, 1995, p. 230)

Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) emphasise how important it is to do more than listen to children's voices if we are to bring about "change" in the way they see themselves and their role in the world.

We have suggested that a participatory approach that seeks to facilitate the recognition of children entails much more than 'listening to their voices', but, instead, points to the potential of a dialogic approach. Such an approach to participation is based in relationships, that is, oriented towards children's self-understanding and individual agency, as well as to the self-understanding of the adults involved. We have posited that it is only in engaging in such an approach that 'change' grounded in respect is possible. (p. 349)

It is worth mentioning at this point the role that the tape recorder played in the storytelling. We discussed using the recorder when the group decided they wanted to make a book. One of the agreements was that the children could choose to turn the recorder off if they wanted to. This seldom happened. When the group was asked to reflect on this they said the following.

Researcher: What about the recorder? Didn't it worry you?

No, I just forgot it.

I liked that you thought our story was important.

Yeah, that we had something important to say. Like you were really taking us seriously. No one listens to children usually.

I have noticed in Hillbrow, people are all about making money – everyone for themselves. If you come with your art drawing and show someone and say, “How is this?” they will look at it for two seconds and say “Ja, whatever,” and get on with what they want to do. But you really look and ask about it.
(Various children)

It is like I need other people to hear my story.

Yes, we made these suitcases for some of the people out there. There are rich people out there who live large. They don’t know how poor people, like refugees, live – they don’t know. They got to know. (Various children)

It is important to mention also that the storytelling approach followed within the Suitcase Project was informed by the narrative therapy approach of White (1997; 2005). The children were encouraged to tell and re-tell their stories through making multiple images through artwork. As they did this, their stories became more complex, less “problem-saturated” (White & Epston 1990, p. 14) and more inclusive of skills and knowledge. This process is described in detail in Chapter 5 and 6. Though I did not intend to use the recordings for academic research (my aim was to collect recordings that could be used in a book for popular consumption) this telling and re-telling narrative approach resulted in many hours of recordings. I have, therefore, ‘thick’ data in the sense that it is used in the anthropological literature (Geertz, 1973d; Tongs, 1993). It is data rich with stories and information about the children’s experience of war, flight, journeying, grief and loss and the complexity of settling in a new context. The stories provide myriad examples of child migrant’s tropes of trauma, the metaphors they use to describe it. As such, it is a unique source of data that can help us deepen the theory of trauma by giving us insight into how young survivors of war explain what they have experienced and its impact on them.

4.3.3 Transcripts of discussions about the project

At particular points in the project I engaged with the children about the project itself. This was usually done in small groups similar to a focus group. This was done mostly to help me monitor the children’s emotional state and to assess the approach I was using. Over the life of the project we held three such discussion sessions; at the end of 2002, after the second exhibition of the suitcases in 2003 and at the end of the project

in 2005. The older children were understandably more reflective but even the younger ones had useful feedback for us. The quote below illustrates the nature of the data collected from these discussions.

The art classes are not just for coming here and doing art. We are also coming here and getting to know each other. I never used to know J so much, but now I know him and he is like a brother to me, and I see him on the street and I feel good. We were next-door neighbours once but we didn't know each other, because the way Hillbrow is, everyone minds their own business. Now we are like brothers. (Boy, 16, South African)

It is cool here. We can sit in the sun, and we feel safe here. There is no place in Hillbrow to 'chill' [sit quietly] in the sun. The park is not safe, but here we are safe. (Girl, 14, DRC)

The discussions were transcribed verbatim. They provide insight into how the children experienced the artwork, the storytelling, the facilitators, the few retreats we ran and also give some insight into how they saw the Suitcase Project in the context of the rest of their lives. They also provide some insight into how the project impacted on their lives.

4.3.4 Reflective field notes

During the time of the project from 2001 to 2005 I wrote planning notes before some of the meetings with the children. I also wrote reflective notes after some of the sessions. These notes were an attempt to “transform[s] portions of my lived experience into field notes” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2007, p. 352). My main aim for recording portions of my “lived experience” within the Suitcase Project was a reflective one. The notes were “descriptive accounts of people, scenes and dialogue, as well as personal experiences and reactions” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw p. 352). They did not include theorising and interpretation but are “... organised around ‘striking stories’ intended not to tell the readers what to think of an experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end and thus draw them immediately into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold.” (p. 357). In addition, the notes I made included my own “feelings, reactions to the experience, and

reflections about the personal meaning and significance to the observer of what has occurred” (Patton, 1990, p. 241).

The notes I made were most often written after the Saturday session but sometimes they were written the following week. I did not make field notes throughout all five years of the project but did make notes during the intensive artwork and book-making phase from May 2003 to June 2005. The notes described what activity we had done that Saturday, how the children responded, some of the practical issues they had raised with me or stories they had told me informally apart from the storytelling session. They did not contain the actual stories the children had told as these were recorded. This extract from the field notes illustrates how they were structured.

Field notes: 24. 5. 2002

Diane arrived a bit late so we sat talking on the steps before. We talked mostly about my trip to Sweden. I had a handful of Swedish Kroner with me and I ended up playing a rather silly game that they took very seriously, almost as a ritual – even the older boys. I would take a coin out of my pocket and say, “Do you want a special coin?” and wait for them to say, “Yes.” Then I said, “Here is a special, lucky coin for you, Paul.” I had enough coins to give everyone one. They tucked them away as if they had been given a gift.

Diane taught them how to do black line work around the wax resist they had done. There was a ‘scrap’ [fight] over the aprons as we don’t have enough – the older boys ended up with them and little K! I must get more. Paul and CJ and Jean and Philip came to sit with me and tell me about a drawing. Philip has almost finished his case so he began. He has this old battered briefcase with a lock that has a number code. He has not allowed anyone to know the code – he says it is his secret! When we sat down to talk about what he had made, he made a great show of turning away from us and unlocking the suitcase, to much banter from the other boys. I wonder what the significance is of being able to lock it and decide who sees it – maybe it is one thing in his life he can control – he can’t control much – not even how much he gets to eat! He described what he had drawn with such a softness – he is really like a poet even though he has this tough exterior – he looks just like a *tsotsi*

[criminal] in fact! We did not have time for the other boys to tell stories as I had to go a bit early.

I included the personal and emotional in my field notes and have in places in this thesis quoted such reflections because I think that "... by focusing attention on emotions as an aspect of life worthy of attention in their own right, evocative field notes may provide rich accounts of the processual nature and full complexities of experience" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, p. 361).

4.3.5 Analysis of data

I adopted a content analysis approach, which involves "identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, 1990, p. 381). Essentially, the analysis was inductive, allowing a set of themes to emerge from the data. I treated the visual and textual data in much the same way asking, "What are the themes or patterns I can see here?" The analysis was further broken down into two steps. Initially I looked for "indigenous concepts" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). These are concepts that come from within, from the essence of the data. Secondly I looked for themes or patterns that come from my own understanding of social science theory (what Patton calls "sensitizing concepts"). For example, I looked for evidence of child agency and resilience. Once I had the key concepts I classified them using both an "emic" approach (typologies that were indigenous to the children) and my own analyst-derived typologies. Then I cross-classified the different dimensions to generate new insights.

While working inductively the analyst is looking for emergent patterns in the data. These patterns can be presented as dimensions, classification schemes, themes, and categories. Once some dimensions have been constructed, either using participant-generated constructions or [researcher]-generated constructions, it is sometimes useful to cross-classify different dimensions to generate new insights about how the data can be organized and to look for patterns that may not have been immediately obvious in the initial, inductive analysis. (Patton, 1990, p. 411)

Patton calls this process “logical analysis”; a process of organisation and description into themes. Once I had organised the data into a set of draft themes I applied an “experience-centred approach” (Squire, 2008) by

... develop[ing] and test[ing] theories that give a predictive explanation of the stories, moving back and forth between the interviews themselves and generalizations about them in a classic ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Squire, 2008, p. 50).

The analysis, therefore, went beyond simple content analysis to look at “progression of themes ... their transformation and resolution” (Squire, 2008, p. 50). In addition, the analysis assumed that narratives are the “means of human sense-making” (p. 43). With this in mind I looked in particular at how the children attempted to make sense of their present identities in the context of their past and present circumstances (Kohli & Mather, 2003) and the trauma they had experienced.

Given the fact that the underlying aim of the project was personal transformation in some way one of the challenges of the analysis of the data was to take care not to make “... sometimes controversial ... social, psychological and ... quasi-clinical value judgements about stories” (Squire 2008, p. 46). In order to avoid this trap I tried to keep in mind “... what Mishler describes as the third focus of narrative research, its context – beginning with the research situation’s interpersonal context, but taking in broader social and cultural contexts too” (Squire, 2008, p. 44). As I developed the themes I kept in mind the theoretical frame of anthropologists such as Scheper-Hughes (2008), Zarowsky (2004), Lester (2013) and Walker (2010). I analysed the stories I had collected as examples of articulating and mediating experiences so they can become patterned and understood. I kept in mind the children’s “existential uncertainties, intellectual worries, political frustrations and religious queries in a situation of armed conflict and great social unrest [and practical precarity]... how [the children] orient[ed themselves] and [sought] meaning as they engaged the world and [tried to] live their humanity. (Finnström, 2008, p. 28)

4.3.6 Reflecting on the data analysis

While writing this section of the thesis on analysis I recalled the phrase “an ethic of restraint” used by Parsons (2012 p. 13) in his work with young Zimbabwean children who were ill and dying from AIDS.

... in the presence of wholesale death and suffering, it is incumbent on us to approach the material ... with an ethic of restraint ... I use the phrase to imply that scholars and activists might find a respectful yet fulsome witness.

Analysis may be both unseemly and premature under the circumstances.

Through the notion of restraint I specifically mean that we need to stop short of burdening lives and deaths with an immediate recourse to theoretical analysis and policy formulation. We need to be quiet and still, and to find ... an appropriate pause prior to interpretation. (p. 13)

Scheper-Hughes’s (1992) work with mothers who have lost children explores a similar idea to Parson’s “fulsome witness”.

The act of witnessing is what lends our work its moral (at times its almost theological) character. So-called participant observation has a way of drawing the ethnographer into spaces of human life where she or he might really prefer not to go at all and once there doesn’t know how to go about getting out except through writing, which draws others there as well, making them party to the act of witnessing. (p. 7)

I think that “witnessing” in the way that Scheper-Hughes and Parsons suggest is possible if we read the children’s words as they spoke them. This is one reason I have included in this thesis many quotes and the actual artwork from the children as an act of acknowledgement, of witnessing. But, I remain unsure of how to achieve the “appropriate pause” and of how to “witness” at the stage of writing and analysis. I do know that at the fieldwork stage when the children told me their stories I was a listener and not a researcher. Apart from clarifying a few facts, I never asked probing questions. Very often the children were talking from the edge-of-existence and I knew that my role was to witness and not intervene. When it came to writing this thesis and I encountered their stories again I felt this same sense of the story as ‘sacred’ and that

I had no right to use it. I felt uncomfortable adopting the role of analyst and interpreter. This tension is a paradox and I am not certain that I have resolved it adequately.

Another issue related to data analysis is reflecting on how the passage of time has affected my view of the work. Monaco (2010) in her work on the power of autoethnography refers to “mediated memory” and makes the point that “Self-reflexivity demands that we reflect on past events that informed our subjectivities. It means also looking back critically at the ‘past’ of the ethnographic or qualitative research encounter” (p. 104).

The work that I did with the children in the Suitcase Project was done almost ten years ago. It is important, therefore, to ask how the passage of time might have affected what I write now. In order to write this thesis I read and re-read my field notes and listened to the many hours of recordings I had collected. This refreshed my memory of many details and made these experiences very present for me. Nevertheless no matter how clear and accurate the recall, memory is always mediated by time. The reflections I make now are mediated by the experiences I have had since I worked with the children and by what I know has become of them.

One area in which I know my perspective has changed is that I was much more aware as I wrote this thesis of the ways in which the children’s lives were ‘damaged’ by the trauma they had been through; I know how difficult it has been for them to overcome the trauma. I think I placed more emphasis on the “edge-of-existence experiences” (see page 79) than I would had I written this thesis ten years ago. I relate much more now to Hamber’s (2009) concept of healing being “good enough” (see page 165) than I would have then, when I would have been hopeful that the children would be ‘healed’.

I am also aware that the passage of time has brought new insights particularly into the way I now view the children’s artwork. When I originally worked with the children my focus was very much on the stories they told; the artwork was a means to an end. But when I revisited the artwork to write this thesis I ‘saw’ it as if for the first time. I started noticing the details and the hidden narratives in the artwork, especially the

importance of recreating the everyday of lost lives through creating new everyday living spaces – I hadn't noticed that before. Time had added value to the work. There was another important way in which time added value. Transcribing, editing and structuring the children's stories into the book we eventually published as *The Suitcase Stories* was an emotionally draining process. The book includes a description of my interaction with the children and some measure of reflection on how I felt while working with them, but it contains almost no theoretical analysis. As I think back to my emotional state when I finished the book I think that I would have been unable to undertake a critical reflection of the work at that time. It has taken almost ten years for me to be able to untangle myself from my emotional ties with the children and write what I hope is a measured and thoughtful reflection on the work.

I think one of the main reasons for the emotional intensity at the time was my sense of powerlessness to 'solve' the problems the children faced (both physical and psychological). This is well described by Geertz (1968) who refers to "the imbalance between the ability to uncover problems and the power to solve them, and the inherent moral tension between the investigator and his subject" (p. 155). This tension had been somewhat resolved by the time I wrote the thesis because the children had all 'moved on' from my life. The distance of time allowed me to step back and 'think' about our work together, though I still felt heartsore that I was unable to fix the world for them.

4.4 A note about language

Almost all of the children who were part of the Suitcase Project had a working grasp of English when we began to meet in 2001. This was largely because English, as the language spoken at school, was essential to them so they had learned it early on in their arrival in South Africa. Swahili and French were also common languages spoken across the geographical boundaries of their countries of origin. Interestingly, many of the older boys also spoke isiZulu as they needed this to make friends at school and to survive on the streets of Hillbrow.

Because of their ability to speak English we did not use an interpreter in any of our discussions. There were some children who spoke little English when the group began. Jean, for example, had only recently arrived from Rwanda and he spoke only

French and Kinyarwanda. The necessity to learn English for his survival in South Africa was emphasised by him when he took a photograph in an early activity we did with disposable cameras.

I took this photo of the TV in my flat. I like my TV... It teaches me English, especially the cartoons, which I like and makes me understand South Africa.
(Boy, 15, Rwanda)

When Jean participated in a discussion one (or often two) of the other children translated what he said for me. This joint translation was also quite common amongst the Ethiopian children who had varying English language facility. Often two or three children would have a discussion so that they could tell me most accurately what their friend was saying.

Palmary (2011) reflects on the role of the interpreter in her work with Rwandan women asylum seekers in South Africa describing how she valued the discursive interpretation method that evolved because of her use of an informal interpreter (as opposed to formally trained interpreter who tries to remain 'invisible' in the discussion). The informal interpreter often stopped to clarify a point with the participant, to explain a contextual issue to the researcher, or to work with the participant to translate an idea accurately. This allowed Palmary access to the meaning-making process and often uncovered nuanced insights she might have missed in a situation where the translation was invisible.

This is very much how I felt about the translation discussions we had in the Suitcase Project. These discussions often allowed the child telling the story to say something in another way, to rephrase and often to go deeper. The discussion also often elicited a story from another member of the group. In other words, the translation process itself opened up spaces to tell stories.

Of course this informal translation process also had shortcomings. The main issue for the children was their need to protect their confidentiality. They did not tell any stories they did not want their friends to know. For example, Jean did not tell any of the details of what had happened to him when he left Rwanda. He came to me and

asked to tell the story to me alone (note that he wanted the tape recorder on) only when he had the ability to tell me the story in English.

The extent to which the details of Jean's the story were constrained by language ability became obvious when I analysed the transcripts of recordings. Jean's early stories were told in simple, child-like phrases with little or no emotional content because that was all he was able to express in English. It is clear that as his English improved he could add more detail and begin to reflect on inner meanings and thoughts. I often wonder how much "thick" data (Geertz, 1973d) was lost because of the lack of an interpreter. This was important when analysing the narratives. I was careful not to read too much into the form of the language. For example, short, simple sentences can be a sign of deep emotion but in this case it could also be a product of limited vocabulary. In other words, it was important that I analysed what the children told me in the context of my knowledge of their language facility at the time they told me the story.

4.5 Ethics

This research has been approved by the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethical Committee: Non-medical: H14/11/28.

4.5.1 Ethical approaches applied during the intervention

The Suitcase Project data was collected as part of a project that was instituted as an intervention rather than as research. One of the main issues is, therefore, the ethical use of existing data. Before discussing the issues related to this it is important to point out that a number of internationally accepted guidelines for research work with children (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Schenk and Williamson, 2005) were built into the way the project was structured. These guidelines cover all of the usual issues such as confidentiality, informed consent, beneficence, risk, referral, and choice to participate. For example, the young people initiated the collection of the stories by asking for the publication of a book to make South Africans aware of their lives. One of the principles behind the approach was that the children themselves directed it. The choice to participate was a central characteristic of the way the project was structured; the children could choose to do the artwork, choose if they wanted to tell stories

linked to the artwork and so on. The principle of ongoing consent was applied throughout the project.

An environment needs to be created in which children feel safe to say ‘I don’t want to talk about that’ or ‘if I draw pictures of that it gives me dreams, so I am not going to draw.’ Children are informed of their right to withdraw or to stay silent at any time in the research process. (Clacherty and Donald, 2007 p.152)

In addition, a referral system was in place during the project process. Children who needed extra support were referred to a clinical psychologist. Much time was spent discussing the issue of anonymity when the time came to publish the book. The children all requested that their stories remain anonymous in the book. Names and all identifying characteristics were changed.

4.5.2 Using an existing data source

This research has made use of my recorded reflections on the process of the Suitcase Project and transcripts of discussions collected to create a book. The material was not collected for the purpose of writing a thesis. It is important, therefore, to look at the ethics of using pre-existing data. Understandably, the University of the Witwatersrand Ethics Committee had some concerns about my using data that was collected in the past for another purpose, pointing out that “the participants at the time did not know that their work would be used in this way” (University of the Witwatersrand, 2014). One of the reasons they agreed to my use of the data was that “the original research was completed with the utmost ethical integrity” (ibid.). Another reason the committee mentioned was that the children gave permission for their artwork and quotes to be used in the published book. The committee stipulated that if the participants were not contacted about the use of the data in the thesis that “all information used, especially photographs, that was not published in the book needed to be completely anonymised” (ibid.). I followed this recommendation.

I still have contact with some of the young people who participated in the project and I could have explained to them how I proposed to use the transcripts and asked for their consent. I made the decision not to do this. One reason for this is that the young

people have moved away from the Suitcase Project and begun to identify themselves beyond the identity of refugee. A process of reengagement may have affected their sense of independence. Additionally, and more importantly, it may have created the expectation that the close relationship I had with them during the time of the project would be reinstated. I could not fulfil this expectation and this was one of the main reasons for not engaging the project participants about this research.

I found Grinyer's (2009) work helpful as I reflected on this decision. In her discussion about using a data set gathered previously from young cancer patients outlines some of the ethical issues related to secondary use. These include the re-traumatisation of research participants when consent is sought for secondary use. She also mentions that another contextual issue is the wish of research participants that information is disseminated as widely as possible. In the context of the Suitcase Project, most of the children saw the project as a vehicle for helping others to find out about their lives.

We made these suitcases for some of the people out there. There are rich people out there who live large – they don't know how poor people, like refugees, live. They don't know - they got to know. Open up these suitcases, look inside and find out what refugees' lives are like. (Boy, 14, Angola)

Given this, one could assume that the children would be open to the use the transcripts recorded during the Suitcase Project in this thesis. Finally, as Grinyer points out,

Codes of ethics [are] not intended to serve as regulation, policy, or absolute prescriptions for research ethics practices. Rather, the goal is to assist investigators ... in identifying key ethical crossroads and in developing culturally sensitive decision-making strategies that reflect the values and merit ... trust. (Fisher, 2002, p. 1024) ... Thus, when ethical judgments have to be exercised in secondary analysis, it is of fundamental importance to be 'ethically aware' and make decisions that are located in the context of the research and the wishes of our participants. (p. 4)

The two sections above explore the more conventional ethical issues. What follows is a discussion of some ethical issues that I have reflected on during the writing of this thesis.

4.5.3 Othering and objectifying

This issue is best illustrated with the following reflection from my field notes made during the project.

Field notes: 26. 1. 2004

[Early on in the Suitcase Project the UNHCR gave some funding to record the project activities. This entailed writing up a report.] I printed the report to give to Diane [the art teacher I was working with]. I had put a photograph of P's suitcase on the cover. The copy was sitting on the passenger seat in my car as the children loaded the suitcases into the car on Saturday. P saw his suitcase in the photograph on the cover and asked me what the document was with some indignation in his voice. My immediate feeling was of guilt and I struggled to find the words to describe what the document was in a way that did not offend or label. In trying to analyse the discomfort I have realised that it was related to objectifying and labelling the children. The formal report had turned the children into something that one looks at and writes about – objects with the label refugee and I did not want P to see himself this way.

In fact, one of the aims of the project was to help the children find identities alternative to that of 'victim' or 'refugee' so it was important to me that the children were not labelled and objectified. I have subsequently read Razack's (2007) article entitled 'Stealing the pain of others' about the Canadian public's response to the Rwandan genocide where she describes how

... our witnessing of Rwandans' pain has mostly served to dehumanize them further, and in the process, to reinstall us as morally superior in relation to them. (p. 376)

This resonated with my experience as I felt I had 'stolen the pain of others' by writing about it in the UNHCR report that P had seen. This issue became a continual

challenge as the book was published and as the project became well known. In media interviews I was often asked about the children and their stories and I felt uncomfortable with this largely because I had to talk about them as ‘the other’, as objects of interest, rather than as young people who had become my friends. In addition, media interviews often focussed on the painful and the traumatic in the children’s stories rather than on the resilience and the heroism. I have explored this issue further in Chapter 5.

4.5.4 Ownership

Thinking about it now I also realise that P’s response to finding his suitcase on a formal report made me acutely aware of the issue of ownership. I had not explained to the children that I was writing a report and what its purpose was. This was why I was extremely careful once we began to work on the book to make sure that the children were involved from the beginning. The idea of the book came from them. I explained the purpose of the recordings, how they were transcribed, I showed them copies of the transcripts, discussed how they wanted their stories represented, we looked at the design of the book together and discussed the photos we would use. They chose their own pseudonyms for their stories. We talked about who would give interviews about the book when it was published. I knew that they had to have ownership, and I knew that ownership would come through being part of the process.

4.5.5 Intervening in children’s lives

Over time the process of the Suitcase Project began to create a relationship between the children and me that my sense of professional ethics made me increasingly uneasy about. I was becoming a kind outsider who could be a provider of needed things. Past experience gave most of the children an acute sense of how to use such a relationship – this kind of relationship (as with other migrant children) was an important survival strategy for them (Boyden, 2003) but I worried about reinforcing this survival strategy. This has continued to be an ethical dilemma for me as I have continued my relationship with many of the children and young people beyond the Suitcase Project.

One of the strategies for dealing with this issue has been to refer the children, most of whom are now young adults, to a formal psychosocial and support service. The clinical psychologist and I developed a strategy that allowed me to refer the young

people for counselling and for practical help such as support for emergency health or other needs but to continue my friendship and supportive relationship with them. This allows for a professional and institutionalised response to everyday practical needs rather than them using what has become a friendship as a source of provision. But this is not an ideal situation as the service offered by the local service NGO is severely stretched and has had to focus on the needs of newly arriving migrants rather than the long term intractable issues faced by migrants who have been in South Africa for some time.

CHAPTER 5. CHILDREN'S TROPES OF TRAUMA AND MEANING-MAKING

This chapter presents an analysis of the children's artwork, the transcripts of the storytelling about the artwork and the focus group discussions I held with them about the project. The analysis is presented under two main themes and a number of sub-themes.

Theme 1: Tropes of trauma

- “Edge-of-existence experiences”
- How these experiences have “untethered” us
- Living on the edge

Theme 2: Tropes of meaning-making

- What we have lost
- What we have found
- Who are we really and where do we belong?

5.1 Theme 1: Tropes of trauma

This theme is informed by a quote discussed in Section 4.2 of this thesis. In this quote Lester (2013) describes trauma as

... events that push people to the very edges of their own existence, ... Such *edge-of-existence experiences* [my emphasis] hinge on what Scarry (1985) calls the unmaking ... of worlds [where people] are pushed to the very precipice of physical and/or psychological annihilation, *the bonds that tether a person to the everyday world become stretched, distorted, and even torn* [my emphasis]; sometimes irreparably so. Such a state of ontological alienation is profoundly distressing. (p. 753)

The first two sub-themes focus on the two phrases highlighted in the above quote. The third sub-theme is linked to the fact that, for the children, trauma is linked, not only to a war experience in the past, but also to the trauma of their everyday lives in the present. Miller and Rasmussen (2010), in a review of recent research that examined the relative impacts of war-related violence and daily stressors on emotional

wellbeing of refugee populations, point to the fact that there is a growing body of evidence that

... post-migration or exile-related stressors such as social isolation, unemployment and discrimination consistently predict levels of psychiatric symptomatology as well as, or better than, pre-migration exposure to organized violence (Steel, Silove, Bird, McGorry, & Mohan, 1999; for a meta-analysis examining pre- and post-migration stressors see Porter & Haslam, 2005). (Miller and Ramussen, 2010, p. 9)

5.1.1 “Edge-of-existence experiences”

Almost all of the children represented an edge-of-existence experience in their artwork and storytelling at some point. Some represented these, often horrific, experiences early on in the group process; others took some time before they told these distressing stories. Some chose to share their story in some detail while others merely drew a single picture or wrote a few words to describe their experience. Some talked about the experience, others did not. This variety is important, as I will discuss later in Chapter 6.

Many people would assume that a research study on refugees would focus mostly on traumatic experiences that had taken place in a war situation in a country of origin. Contrary to this common sense assumption, some of the most traumatic experiences the children described took place in their ‘present’ lives in South Africa. Many of these are also edge-of-existence experiences that “unmade the children’s worlds” (Lester, 2013, p. 753), therefore they are included in this sub-theme.

Jean’s story of a pre-genocide attack on his family and his experience of the genocide in Rwanda is an example of how close to the edge of both physical and psychological annihilation many of the children were pushed. What is significant in the context of this thesis that looks at alternative approaches to trauma intervention for refugee children is **how** Jean (and the other children) came to recount these particular stories. The following account is from my field notes.

Field notes: 2. 2002

Jean has taken a suitcase - he painted the outside yellow and has drawn a large black heart in the centre and nothing else. He is not making any other art. He spends his mornings wandering around the room chatting to the other children. They all love him as he makes jokes and has a big toothy grin. Sometimes **they** draw him a picture to put inside his suitcase. I think they worry that he has nothing in it. Diane and I just leave him to wander around. We don't put any pressure on him to make art.

Field notes: 5. 2002

This morning Jean drew a small painting with thick layers of paint.



After making the painting he asked to talk with me alone about it. We sat together on the bench under the tree while he spoke. He asked me to leave the tape recorder on. We stayed there for almost an hour and a half as he talked without stopping, with few silences or diversions. He spoke with little emotion in a matter-of-fact tone. He held the painting as he spoke but did not refer to it.

The following extracts from the transcript of Jean's story were chosen as they illustrate the extent to which the experiences he recounted pushed him to his physical and psychological limits.

I do remember one time. My uncle was at home, and me and my mum and sisters. I remember that day. My mom cooked a rabbit. It was about 7 o'clock. We were sitting in the lounge, talking and sitting, making some fun. I was so

young. And my sisters – I am from a family of seven children, I’m fifth. Mama was teaching us some stuff, games – how to carry your friend on the back, how to jump over each other. So we’re having a nice, great time. There was my mom and my two uncles, and all of us, and other visitors. Then these men came and wanted to take everything from our house. We knew they had come to rob, because my dad was a big businessman and they did not like him, and they wanted to kill him. They told us that they wanted my dad. Luckily my dad had just left. They said, “If your father is not here, then we want everything in the house.” My uncle was a soldier and he said no. So they began to fight. Can you imagine us with our hands fighting the machete? I ran inside screaming. They said, “Why you screaming?” They took my shirt, they want to cut me in half. Then my uncle he took his hand, on top of me. They chopped his hand in the middle. When I remember that, I get so sick. They wanted to cut my face in half. My uncle saved my life. I don’t know how I was going to look if they should cut off my face. They wanted to kill me – chop two times – and that was very frightening. I still remember it. I still see it. We called the police. Then we heard the police and the people ran away. All the house was full of blood ...

But in the war, my mum was killed. We were living in Rwanda by this time, in 1994. I was ten ... We took organised transport. It was in the war. People were getting killed with knives. All of them. The cars were a lot on the way to Burundi. My mom says, “Drop the car, let’s just walk, because we can’t make it in the car.” We walked. And then there was shooting. In front it was me and my mom. My sisters were lost by now, just me and my mum and little brother. Then they shoot her in her intestines. I just stayed with her, with my brother. Many people were walking past. That’s it. It is a sad story. I get on with my life. If I think, it’s too much. I haven’t told no one this story. People don’t know this. They don’t deserve it ... That is part of life but it is too much, it is too much. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

White (2005), the narrative therapist talks, in the context of dealing with traumatic experiences about how important it is to “not be timid in opening space for people to

speak of what they have not had the opportunity to speak of, to put words to what has been unmentionable” (p. 20). From what Jean says above, this story has felt unmentionable to him. It is also interesting to note his point that, “People don’t know this. They don’t deserve it.” Though Jean spoke to me alone he was very clear that he wanted the story to be recorded. When it came time to write the book he asked that his story be told in the book. This suggests that something about the way that I and Diane and the other children had interacted with him made him feel that we “deserved” to hear his story. Some ideas of what may have helped him feel this way are discussed in Chapter 6.

Jenny had two edge-of-existence stories to tell. The first experience took place in Burundi during the war, the second in Johannesburg. Again the description of how she made the artwork is relevant and comes from my field notes. She too, had not made much art, though she did draw a picture of a book she had owned as a child (see Theme 3 below). After describing the importance of this book she said the following.

My Mom died in the village. I was in the city. I was there for school. I went with my aunt to the village and the house was not there. Nothing was there. Not even the bones. All burned ... (Girl, 15, Burundi)

She had chosen a suitcase but had put nothing inside or outside. One Saturday morning at the end of the meeting she drew me aside and asked me to bring a “ve-e-e-ry big piece of paper. I have a very big story to do next week”. I did as she asked and, using magazine cut-outs, she made the following artwork. She worked silently and intently on it, sitting apart from the others.



Text written on artwork

I was so happy with my family when I live in Burundi. I was 6 year old. In 1992 my mother she die when I was 6 year old. She die on 9.29.1992.

And I go to Zaire on 10.30. 1992. Life was so bad they (there). Sad.

In Burundi October 10. 24 1993 is the day when the war start and we run again and we came back in Burundi and we run to Tanzania in 1995.02.24. in Tanzania we suffer a lot 1996-1997.30.11 I plan go to South Africa.

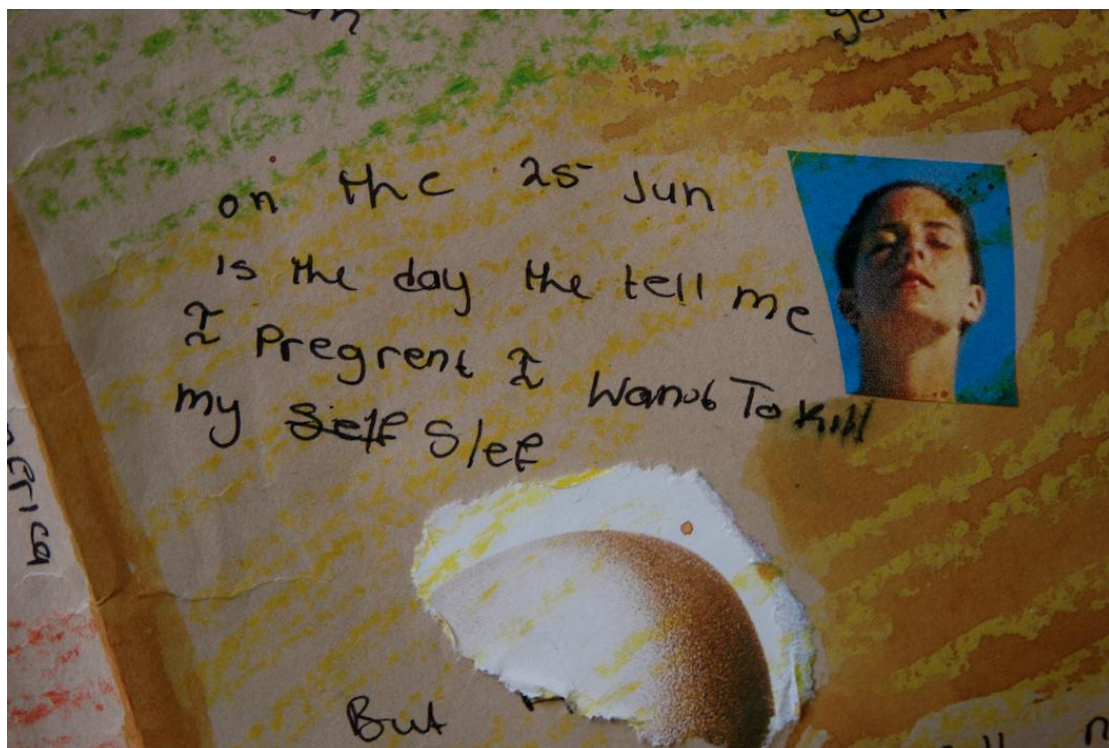
I end in South Africa in 1998-01-5. We stay in South Africa. We suffer a lot we stay on the street for three weeks.

And God help me so much. We find J's mom. She help us. She very nice. She very ? mother. She decided to take us and stay with us. And she take us to school. When I 12 and my sister is 8 years old.

On 2000 8 March is day when I rap (raped) 3.00. it was bad. I so angry. I did talk my mom. If I can see the guy (s) who rape me I can kill them. I make sure they dead. It was my first time to sleep with boy. There was three of them.. I did open a case.
 On 25 June is the day they tell me I pregnant. I want to kill myself.
 But thanks to G and L for help me out with my baby.
 And I still need the help.
 In South Africa I so happy I have a family but I was miss my mom and dad so much. The all thing I need is my baby future to be good.
 This is my memories of my rap(e).
 The boy who rap(e) me
 The boy who rap(e) me
 The boy who rap(e) me.
 The day when I was rap(e) I was like this.

She never spoke about what she had made, though she did recount the story of the rape later, she just gave me the artwork saying she wanted it to go into the book we were making.

Jenny's use of magazine cut-outs is important, as this gave her a sense of control over what were horrific experiences still fresh in her mind. The accurate dating of each event evidences how fresh they were. Magazine pictures are more removed from the self than paint or crayon. Jenny could represent the men who raped her as cut-outs, she could express her emotions through using photographs of women. She even chose to represent her pregnancy after the rape in a cut out.



Buk's (2009) work quoted in Chapter 4.2 is relevant here.

... the physical act of making art involves the synthesis of the sensorimotor and perceptual realms, it allows for a more direct expression of the traumatic memories, while simultaneously promoting the artist's autonomous engagement and sense of control (Johnson, 1987) ... Therefore, on both physiological and psychological levels, the bodily and life-affirming activities of the artist making art can remediate the feelings of helplessness, passivity, and annihilation experienced during the trauma. (p. 62)

Jenny could describe her traumatic experiences and maintain the control she needed to stop her complete "annihilation" (Buk, p. 62) psychologically. Our respect for her wish not to talk about the events is also significant in relation to her sense of control. This same young woman had told me early on in the meetings of the project about earlier counselling experiences that

...didn't help me. She [the psychologist] just wanted me to cry about it. I got bored so I did, and then she [the psychologist] felt better.

This scepticism about talking was echoed by many of the children in the group. At one point during the life of the project the children attended a weekend retreat with counsellors from a local trauma support organisation⁴. This is what they said about the experience.

When we told them something, they forced their way to ask about things we didn't want to say. (Girl, 14, DRC)

This one time I felt sad, and this woman was pressurising me to talk, talk, talk, and I felt pressurised. (Boy, 16, Burundi)

They had found this counselling approach traumatic but they did not see the act of making art as threatening. The quote below, also made by one of the children,

⁴ The counselors were very experienced in work with traumatised children and used sound counseling approaches but the children 'felt' pressurised to talk, nevertheless.

resonates with Buk's point about art creating a "bodily and life-affirming mode" of expression.

For me it is, like, interesting doing all these things. I used to enjoy doing things like this. Memories of life, the workshop is about life stories. It is sometimes hard, our expression when we draw. When we draw, we don't just draw, we draw how we feel at the time. We express our feelings in the pictures. (Boy, 15, DRC)

And the quotes below suggest that the children valued being given the choice about how and when (and even if) they chose to speak about their traumatic experiences.

When we talk about our mothers had passed away, it makes us sad. We need the time to be right to talk about those things. There are certain stories to be told and some not to be told. (Boy, 15, DRC)

You work fine, because the secret you do is call us one by one, and that makes it easier. Some problems that some of us have, we don't want anyone to know. Also, you let us decide and choose to talk. (Girl, 12, DRC)

It is good to give a person time, and sometimes when you remember things bad, it is good to give a person chance before talking. (Boy, 16, Burundi)

The power of our acceptance of silence in the Suitcase Project is explored in Chapter 6 but it is worth noting here that a hesitance to speak is common amongst war-affected children. Kohli (2006) notes in his article about refugee children in the UK that "unaccompanied minors (often) maintain silence about their past lives, or remain economical with the truth about their flight" (Kohli, 2006, p. 708).

Kohli explores the many reasons for the silence, which include the fear of talking about unmanageable experiences, that

... war silences children, and that the silence is a way of dealing with deep disturbance ... that this silence allows healing to take place over time... that it

allows them a psychological space to reflect on their experiences, and make some sense of them, before using their emotional energy to move on in their new worlds. (p.709)

Silence is also often a practical necessity as

Children who have left their homelands—for whatever reason—have to wear silence or economy of truth as a protective carapace in order to arrive relatively safely... (and there is often too the need) to try and squeeze their stories into the narrow channels acceptable to asylum givers in their chosen country of refuge. (p. 710)

Pierre was also silent at first, probably because his experience had “unmade his world” (Lester, 2013, p. 753). The following extract from *The Suitcase Stories* (Clacherty, the Suitcase Storytellers & Welvering, 2006) is based on my field notes about Pierre.

The group had been meeting for about two years when Pierre started to hang around. To begin with, he came in for twenty minutes, drew some pictures – usually with pencil or pencil crayon – and then disappeared, seldom staying for lunch. He obviously had artistic talent, but the drawings were disturbing – usually tortured faces. Diane praised his drawing, bringing him special high-quality crayons one week and special drawing paper the next. At first we were not even sure if he was a refugee, but after a few weeks he told us he was from the DRC and lived with his uncle. One Saturday he brought his younger sister. She was 11 years old.

We began working on body maps, and, to our delight, Pierre stayed long enough to let one of the other children draw around his body. Then he took the paper outside and worked alone under the tree. When he had finished, I asked if I could see what he had done. He had produced a shocking image of a corpse-like body covered in blood, but there was one image that stood out. He had cut out a photo of the face of a woman, and written “missing” across it. I asked if he wanted to tell me about what he had drawn, and he agreed. At first

he struggled to say anything, until I asked about the face and word “missing”.
(p. 147 and 148)

What follows is the artwork and the story Pierre told.



This is on my resurrection. This is my future and present and ... My mother passed away last year, and what I saw was quite scary. I am not sure, because I was at school, and the next thing I came home and she was dead. This is her – she is missing. My dad is overseas; he is from DRC. He is married to someone else. It is a sad picture.

All along my mother carried me like this, like she was carrying me on her back, until she passed away last year when I was in Grade 8. I have no idea what she died of. I came home one day and she was dead. And this is how my life changed from good to bad. (Boy, 14, DRC)

The fourth story I have chosen to illustrate this theme of edge-of-existence experiences is that of Isabelle, one of three sisters who, when they joined the group, were eight, nine and ten years old, respectively. When they joined the group they

lived with a guardian, and we were unsure about the whereabouts of their parents in the DRC. One Saturday Isabelle drew a lion in her journal. I asked her if she wanted me to write a story about it. This is what she asked me to write.

This is a lion getting out of the jungle and coming to the city. He is a big lion. He is coming to the city to eat people. He is like my uncle, bad. Trying to kill people and jealous of people. He will harm them and take their things. He wants things to be his. (Girl, 9, DRC)



Later, Isabelle's sister, Esther told me the story of their uncle.

In Congo, my dad wanted all of us to come to South Africa. My dad was a lawyer, and then the presidents changed. And when the new one came they chased all the people who worked for him, and the new president put his people in. So we had nothing, and my dad thought we should come here. My dad's cousin was here in South Africa, so my dad said he could send us first, and send him money so we could stay with him. They were friends since childhood. So my dad sent us with another man to Lubumbashi, to Zambia, and then to Namibia, and from Namibia we came here.

So we ended up living with my dad's cousin, who we called our uncle. But it was very bad there. The uncle and his wife ended up saying we were witches

and things. I told him I couldn't be a witch because I was little. We didn't go to school for two years. If his wife saw a cockroach they said it was my mother ... It was very bad. Then they sent us to his brother, to the same flats as the [local religious organisation] shelter. The brother used to hit us and didn't like us to go out, not even onto the balcony. One day he locked us out of the flat and Maria saw us. She asked questions and took us to [the local religious organisation] and told them about us. It was 2001.

Our parents did not know – they thought we were by our uncle's house. And when they phoned our uncle lied and said we were in school. And afterwards, my dad sent someone to see if we were okay. Someone at their church in DRC had gifts – she felt something was wrong. This pastor came to look for us and found us with Maria. Maria told them everything, and they told my mother and father, and they were crying.

Now we are still living with Maria and her family. If it wasn't for her, maybe we would be dead. Living at Maria's, it is difficult sometimes, sometime she doesn't have enough money to feed us all – we are a lot. But she tries, and now we are going to school. (Girl, 10, DRC)

Isabelle could not articulate the horror of life with her uncle when she and her sisters were called witches and cockroaches, when they were locked into a small apartment and beaten, but she could draw a huge, greedy lion – a metaphor for her uncle.

Mottram (2007) suggests that making an artwork like the one that Isabelle made could

... define and distance the rush of sensations and emotions that are our experience ... it works at purposefully not knowing in order to know. (Evans, cited in Mottram 2007 p. 2)

I think that this is very much how the drawing of the lion worked. It helped Isabelle to define what had happened in a way that allowed her to face it but also to control the horror.

There are many other stories of edge-of-existence experiences, the South African police raided the apartment where the children lived and arrested Antonio (15), placed

him in a cell with 50 grown men and then took him to the Lindela Detention Centre where “I was going crazy, I was losing weight. I was there for two weeks. It was such a mess.” CJ recalls exactly the day the war started in Burundi. “The time the war started, it was Friday at three o’ clock. I still remember the day. It was Friday at three o’ clock, it was drizzling.” Ada remembers how afraid she was when crossing the border from Mozambique into Swaziland, pretending she was a local, but so afraid that someone would speak to her in the local language. Gene recalls having to hide under a bus seat while they crossed the border and the bus being searched, Antoinette (8) remembers how she and her sister (11) crossed the Zimbabwean border on foot in the dark through the bush with just one man as their guide.

As the artwork used here illustrates, these stories were told in different forms, some chose to draw, others to paint, some made large artworks, some very small, some just talked about their stories while others chose only to draw. What is significant here is that the children were given the space to choose how they would represent their trauma. What we have are multiple tropes of trauma, some unexpected, for example, a greedy lion, magazine cut-outs, the face of a boy surrounded by muddy paint and others more expected, for example, grey paint with a bloody mark, a dead body.

What is important is that each child found a way to make the “unmentionable” (White 2005, p. 20) concrete in a way they could cope with. Some needed more distance from the “rush of sensation and emotion” (Mottram, 2007, p. 2) that their traumatic memories evoked, while others could cope with detailed descriptions. The power of an approach that allows the child to choose how to represent their trauma, if at all, is discussed further in Chapter 6. What is clear is that each child was seeking to make sense of what had happened. They try to find a “logic and structure [for] the violence” (Zarowsky, 2004, p. 204). This is most obvious in Jenny’s artwork and her use of a distinct chronology evidenced by actual dates and times. It is also evident in Pierre’s trying to explain the impact of his mother’s death on him, in Isabelle’s use of a metaphor and Jean’s unemotional chronology of events.

There is also evidence in the tropes of trauma employed by the children of

... important aspects of human experience [that] escape narrative and cannot be storied [d] into sense. (Squire, 2008, p. 44)

This is why Isabelle does not tell what happened while she lives with her uncle but merely draws a greedy lion; her experience is unrepresentable (Frosh, 2002) except as a metaphor from a fairy tale. Even the form of the drawing is fairy tale-like.

Pierre cannot say how he felt about his mother's death (his mother is simply "missing") but his art allows for an extremely vivid representation of this significant silence (Sutton and De Backer, 2009). The single image that Pierre cuts from a magazine to represent his dead mother is very similar to the photo of his mother that Barthes (1981) describes in *Camera Lucida*. Both represent the "wound" of their grief.

The paint, the magazine cut-out, the chalk pastel are all called into service by the children because they cannot find words for experiences that are "unmentionable" (White, 2005, p. 20), experiences that have pushed them to edge of their existence. This is explored further in Chapter 6 in the section on Metaphor.

5.1.2 How these experiences have "untethered" us

This sub-theme is built around the idea that when a person experiences the kind of horror that the children described in their artwork and stories "the bonds that tether [them] to the everyday world become stretched, distorted, and even torn" (Lester, 2013, p. 753).

This untethering is perhaps most clearly seen in the metaphor that Antonio used to describe his life as a refugee in South Africa. The metaphor came from the suitcase he chose to work on. After doing nothing on the suitcase for a few weeks he called me and said, "I don't know what I should do on this suitcase. There is nothing in my life, nothing to say." I suggested he think about why he had chosen that particular suitcase. He went off and made a simple print that he carefully glued on the suitcase where the handle had been.



This is what he said about it.

This sign here on my suitcase, “My life is like a suitcase with no handle,” it tells more about the guy in the picture [see image below]. The person on the suitcase, his life is not balanced, it is not straight. There are a lot of things going on around the person in my picture. There is blood and dark colours and yellow. There are good things and bad things going on around him – most of it is bad. He is always falling and then needing to get up again. Like me. (Boy, Angola 14)



Many of the children described their lives as not balanced. Jean, whose story was described earlier, describes his untethered present life thus.

I'm not doing good. I'm not sure what is my problem, I'm not sure what is going on. When I was first learning from primary to grade 6, I was very, very clever. I didn't get under 70%. I think something's going wrong with me. That's why I don't want to think about it (the traumatic events). I try get far away from it. I don't get it. I don't know why I get low marks in the school. I know I'm a new English speaker but that's not my problem. I just want to succeed every moment I'm doing it (learning) but I'm not concentrating. I'm trying to do everything I can. I do every step at school. I try to do it clearly but I don't get enough marks.

It was difficult with the suitcase. I don't have no happy moments. What can I do to control it? I'm trying to take everything away. I want to keep me separate. I also have to have sad moment. That is part of life but that is too much, that is too much. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

What Jean describes here is how his traumatic experiences have affected his ability to learn at school in spite of how hard he tries to concentrate. He also talks about how he found it hard to make the artwork to go into his suitcase, how he needs to keep the events that happened to him separate from himself. Jean Claude, another young man who had experienced the genocide and joined the group for a few months before moving away echoes much of what Jean describes. He too has to keep the memories separate, the suitcase closed.

I have bad memories inside my head – a lot. The way it is, to talk about them reminds me of things, a lot of things. It's not good. It's too painful. But nothing we can do. Just try to forget it. I just keep the suitcase closed. If anyone wants to see it, open it up, then close it up, put it away. To cry? When you are going to stop? Me, myself. What I saw, during genocide, person was dying in front of you every day. About three months. In front of you. People dying. Your friends, relatives. If you want to cry, when are you going to stop? (Boy, 18, Rwanda)

Another image that also speaks of life being unbalanced is the photo Jenny asked her sister to take of her in her school uniform.

This is me in my school uniform. When I had the baby I had to leave school but I do wish to go back some day. (Girl, 15, Burundi)

There is much of Barthe's object of "remembrance" (p. 70) for me in this image. Jenny's rape and the subsequent pregnancy disordered the natural order – a 15-year-old should be in school.

Antonio expanded on why he felt his life was "not balanced", how far out of kilter it had become. Firstly, it was the xenophobia he experienced as a refugee that made him feel untethered. Then it was his recent experience of being arrested and placed in a cell with adults. These experiences are explored in more detail in the sub-theme below. But most of all his sense of being unbalanced came from being alone, as this quote illustrates.

It was me and Jean and CJ and their whole family [in the apartment rented by the local religious organisation]. I was dependent on myself though. They just gave me the room with CJ and Jean, no food. The way I survived, I actually just knew people who would help me out with money or something and sometimes get myself a pair of shoes, so I just survived on my own. I knew this lady at the Catholic Church. There was David my ex school principal when I was in junior school and I was having lunch every Saturday at Art. I sometimes didn't have money for food. At times I would go next door to Brian's family. Their mom is really not very friendly, but sometimes I was so hungry I used to hang around at supper time, being polite and all, and she used to feel sorry for me and invite me in and dish up for me. But I was on my own, I was on my own. It builds some sort of character I think.

I never felt sad at all, but I was also thinking of my mum, my mother. She was always on my mind. I was thinking of the way my mum took care of us, loved us and spoiled us. She loved us very much, she loved us. Although she is not around anymore, she will always be my mum.

She went to Angola, but rumours said she is dead, so I really don't know. She went back and didn't return. She left me and my sister here with my Gran. She never came back. This was 1996, and she left for good.

I wasn't actually feeling sad in the [informal shelter run by the local religious organisation] . I was a survivor – life is what you make of it. It was cool in a way in the flat, and in a way not. I was feeling I am on my own, and I came home whenever I wanted and ate whatever I wanted, you know. I was feeling a bit independent like that. The disadvantages were that nobody would support me and that I was really suffering. There was this time – there were days – when I went to bed without anything to eat. I didn't feel bad that the other kids in the flat had food and did not share with me. I had a no-care attitude, and this is what I have survived on. (Boy, 14, Angola)

What I want to draw out from this quote is how alone Antonio is. “Being alone” is part of the reason for the unbalanced nature of their lives. This reference to being alone was a common theme

If you are not sure what to do and you don't have family who can you ask for advices, do you think it is good to make your own decisions? Does a person need somebody who has experience, or are your friends enough? Can you believe in them and trust them? (Boy, 16, Rwanda)

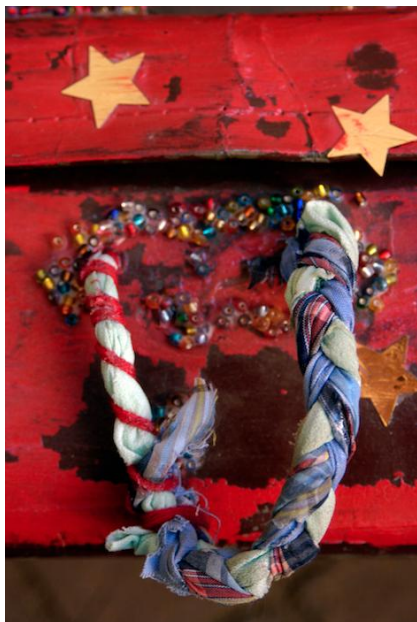
I don't have someone to talk to. The only people I talk to are some people in the (Suitcase) group; otherwise I don't have someone to talk to. If I want to talk to people, I have to wait for Saturday or talk to my brother, and sometimes he doesn't take me serious. I don't blame him – he is a child himself. Last time I was nearly raped by the guy who was offering me a job, and I told my brother, but he didn't take me serious at all. I don't have someone to talk to, and no one is willing to listen, and they don't see even when my life is in danger. (Girl, 16, DRC)

Part of the unbalance is that they are young people alone. Adolescents should be growing up with the support of a family, but these young people are alone. They are literally untethered. Kohli & Mather (2003) describe how this untethering is particularly hard for unaccompanied children (such as the children in the Suitcase Group) escaping the trauma of war. “By becoming fragments from distant explosions, unaccompanied minors may silently carry heavy and complex experiences into their

new territories, and not know what to do or who to safely turn to in order to feel untangled” (p. 204).

It is also clear from the things the children say that the untethering caused by the memory of trauma and by the literal untethering of being alone has a psychological impact on them. But what stands out when looking at how they describe their experiences is that they do not describe the way they are as “... injury” (Lester, 2013 p. 755), or as a state of “hapless victimhood” (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1994, p. 483) as some trauma discourse would have it. They are rather trying to make sense out what Finnström (2008) calls “existential uncertainties ... [to] orient [themselves] and seek meaning as they engage the world and live their humanity (p. 28)”. They are trying to “articulate and mediate experiences and stories among one another in a patterning and systematic manner” (Finnström, 2008, p. 7). And, if we return to Antonio’s account (on page 93) we see something else. His life is “like a suitcase with no handle”, it is untethered but he does have a strategy for survival. His account has ambivalence. He has developed a survival strategy (“I make myself polite”) but he mourns his mum and the care she gave him. He says he can survive (and he mostly does) but he wishes he did not have to because it is painful. We see his frailty but also his resilience (Scheper -Hughes, 2008).

Jenny’s artwork also suggests her resilience. Like Antonio, she too chose a suitcase without a handle, but she constructed one.



This carefully constructed and attached handle represents the child who could run away from an abusive foster mother and take her little sister on a journey from Tanzania to South Africa. After escaping war in Burundi, Jenny was living in a refugee camp with a foster mother.

[That] stubborn lady ... did not know how to take care of children. That lady, she does not want us to go to school, that lady made me to wash her children's clothes, that lady made me to clean the house, everything by myself. And then she was having a daughter who was bigger than me, eish, she did nothing. Then I think, let me keep myself strong, like how my aunty says. One day I have to run away, because she beat me up for nothing. I slept on the street for three days, and this other lady found me and took me back. When she take me back, that [stubborn] lady beated me again. She did not even want me to go to church. She would say, "That is not the church for your father or mother." This is the day when I realised that my mother is not going to come back. My mother, she is gone forever. I asked God, "Why did you take my mum away from me?" And it was like, what can I do next? Now I am eleven years old, what can I do next? Let me do some action here that I will never forget in my life.

Then every time I was serious, until that stepmother gets shocked and thinks, "There must be something she is planning." She asks me, and I say no, nothing. She says, "A small child like that, your mind is thinking forward. What are you planning?" I just keep quiet.

That day when all of them went out, I told Francoise [Jenny's sister], "You don't have to go anywhere, you have to stay here with me, because I have a plan." And then Francoise was stubborn and wanted to go with them. "What kind of plan do you have? Leave me alone." And I say. "I am leaving, and asking you to come too. I am not going to leave you alone because I made a promise."

And we stay behind when they go – there we sit. I went to her room, I take the money and I take the taxi until Dar es Salaam. The day when I stole the money I was so afraid. I was asking myself, "God is going to punish my mother? God

is going to punish me?” And I stop... Then, “Agh, let me take it. I must go!”

And I just take the money and I go...

I think maybe they have been looking for us for long because of that money (she laughs) and they never find us... (she laughs again). (Girl, 15, Burundi)

Jenny and her eight-year-old sister then made a journey on buses and taxis to South Africa asking for help from adults along the way. This is a picture of the “extraordinary ingenuity” to which Boyden (2003) refers.

Even Jean’s horrific account of surviving the genocide holds the trope of resilience. This is how he described what he did after his mother was killed.

I said, “Okay, if this is happening, I’m going back to Rwanda to tell my dad.”

So I took my brother and I walked back the other way. All the people were coming this way and we were walking the other way. I was so young. All I could think was to go and report this to my dad. It was in war. He couldn’t do nothing, it was very far from home, but I was walking to tell him.

On my way back I meet with this uncle. He said, “What are you doing? All the people walk one way, you’re the only one person going back. All the people are going out of there, what’s your problem?” I said my mom is dead. He said, “Okay, don’t worry [to go back].” He put my brother on his back and we went [forward] across the border [into DRC]. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

He acknowledged this resilience during an activity at a weekend retreat with a local NGO where we lit candles to remember people we had lost. Jean lit a candle for himself,

This candle is for the boy who was me, the ten-year-old boy. The boy who survived, who walked and walked and survived, even though he was ten years old and did not know what was happening around him. This candle is for the ten-year-old me. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

He repeated this reference to walking when we made large collages about the journeys we had made by pasting many, many magazine cut-outs of shoes on to his map.

They remind me that I walked. I walked and walked and walked. I was a small boy but I walked. They remind me that I was a survivor, that things were very bad and I was only ten years old, but I walked and walked. And I survived.
The shoes remind me of surviving. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

Jenny also acknowledged that within the untethering of her life story there was also a layer of resilience. She did this literally by layering tissue paper over her drawings of her rape and drawing pictures of the people who had helped her through the experience.

So alongside the trope of the unbalanced life, the untethered life is the one of survival. This was a trope repeated by many of the children in their artwork.



But, as the next sub-theme illustrates, it was not only in relation to the extreme edge-of-existence trauma that the children had to survive but survival was also necessary in

the context of a “landscape of trauma” (Kistner, 2007) that pushed them to the edge everyday.

5.1.3 Living on the edge

This third sub-theme is linked to the fact that trauma was part of the children’s everyday lives in the present. Though the suitcase above is full of hope, especially in the slogan “We are proudly South African (SA)” what South Africa gave the children (in fact) was a life where “... day-to-day existence [was] profoundly insecure ... [everyday life was] uncertain, hazardous and unpredictable” (Palmary, Hamber & Nùñez 2015, p. 169).

I have called this sub-theme ‘Living on the edge’ as this idea of living on the margins of settled society is encapsulated in the children’s descriptions of their lives. ‘Living on the edge’ carries the idea of uncertainty and unpredictability and has resonance with the idea of edge-of-existence experiences. ‘Living on the edge’ may not have pushed the children to their psychological and physical limits (as the horrific experiences described in 5.1.1 did) but the experiences described here did represent significant trauma especially as it was an unrelenting part of their everyday lives.

The first characteristic of ‘Living on the edge’ I will discuss is the contrast between the places the children had come from and the place they now lived. Hillbrow was where the children (along with many other new migrants to the city) “land[ed]” (Winkler, 2006, p. 82) when they arrived. The fact that this place was profoundly strange to them is emphasised by this story from one of the Ethiopian boys.

Then I came in a taxi from Swaziland and was dropped at Park Station. Now I was in Johannesburg. I had never seen such a big city. I saw this moving stairs going up [escalator]. I was too scared to go on it. (Boy, 16, Ethiopia)

The strangeness of Hillbrow is symbolised by the many artworks made by the children of the high-rise buildings of Hillbrow.



When talking about the city, they almost always contrasted the dense built environment they encountered with the small villages and towns from which they had come (see sub-theme 5.2.1, ‘What we have lost’).

I drew these buildings because they were the first thing I saw when I came here. I had not seen them before. (Boy, 15, South Africa – internal migrant)

Here I see tall buildings in South Africa. Bujumbura is not such a big city as Johannesburg. (Boy, 15, Burundi)

A long time ago, I used to go to school wearing bare feet. Every time we go to school, no shoes. I entered this country. Now I’m getting shoes. (Girl, 15, Burundi)

At DRC, we had to walk. Here we get a bus, a taxi. (Girl, 14, DRC)

But not only was the city strange, it also had none of the support that they had in the towns and villages they came from. Many of the children arrived knowing no one.

The story below told by the Ethiopian boy who saw an escalator for the first time when he arrived at Park Station in Johannesburg illustrates this.

I did not speak any language except Amharic. I did not know anyone. While I was standing there [at the station] something happened that is amazing. I saw another boy my age and I could see he was from Ethiopia too by the way he looked. I went to him and greeted him and his name was Kile. He took me to some other Ethiopian people in Johannesburg and I stayed there for a few days and then he took me to Home Affairs so I could apply for asylum. (Boy, 16, Ethiopia)

The quote below highlights how the loss of family and community places the children in a marginalised position. In the quote below this boy contrasts the support of extended family and a community who knows him and will give him a place to sleep and something to eat with a city where he is alone and afraid.

I have two pictures here which I have made. The first is from the village when I went to visit my grandfather. My grandfather's children were still there - my father's brothers. People there in the village are cooperative, they take care of you no matter who you are. They welcome you, especially in our culture. The traditional food is sweet potatoes and dried peas. They cook separate, sweet potatoes, they cook in a big pot. Then dry peas also. Then they bring milk and beers and you sit down and enjoy it. In our country, they are nice. It's nice there.

This other picture here is a boy just looking at the big city he has come to. It is Johannesburg. He is sitting on the edge of the city just looking because he is afraid. There is nowhere to sleep here. Not like in the village where his grandfather is. (Boy, 18, Rwanda)

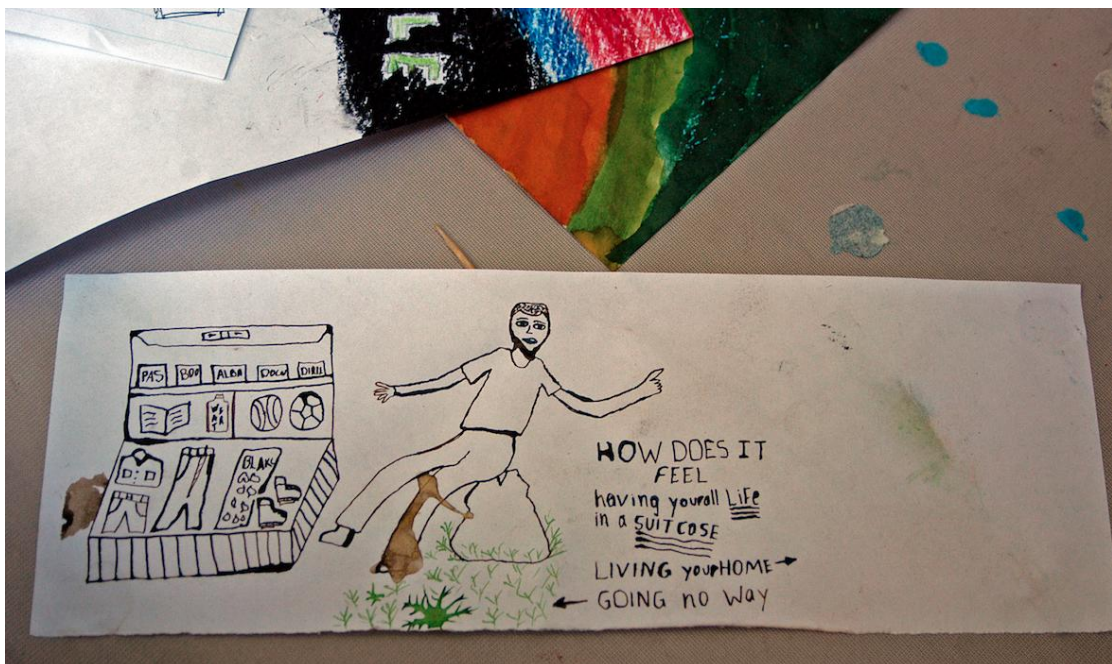
The second aspect of this trope of trauma and the precarity it represents was 'impermanence'. In their artwork and narratives the children often juxtaposed the permanence of their past homes in their countries of origin with the impermanence of their living arrangements in Hillbrow. Many of their rental situations were temporary and most of the children in the group moved at least every six months in the time in

which they were part of the project often because they could not afford to pay rent or because landlord's discovered them sharing rooms. Some moved every two or three months. Here are some examples of artwork and narratives that illustrate this idea.



The painting on the bottom left of this child's suitcase shows "all the houses I have lived in – many, many as we move." (Boy, 10, DRC)

This drawing made by a 14 year old boy from DRC uses the metaphor of the suitcase to describe the constant moving.



The quotes below also describe the moving from place to place and the impact it had on the children.

I live now with those other guys and some of the people from Congo. We are many and they say we are overcrowded and some of the people have to move. One time they came at 12 midnight to check. The caretaker of the flat then they say they only need four people in the flat and we are many more. Maybe Lissie's mother will have to move with Lissie and the baby by the end of the month. Lissie's mother is my friend ... (Girl, 14, DRC)

This used to be our favourite street. We always used to walk in the middle of the street like we owned the street or something. The street where CJ lived in Cornice. We just walked in the middle of the street in spite of the cars and all that stuff. There always used to be this one guy who sold biscuits here in this corner here for 10 cents and we would always if we come hungry from the pool or something we would buy R2 of biscuits and sit in CJ's flat on the balcony and talk about what we going to do for the day. We had a space there. Now they have to move from this place. Where will we get together? I drew this picture of Berea because this was where me, Jean, CJ and Philip met. As you can see Jean is here in my picture alone. Because we don't know where he is going to live. Because it seems like our whole friendship circle is breaking up because one of us is leaving and we don't really know where he is going. I drew this rose here because it is a symbol of sadness because I wanted to give Jean this rose but we have lost contact and I couldn't give him this rose. It reminds me that you never know what you have until you lose it. I think Jean is sad because he doesn't like where he is going. He is a bit worried where he is going, he knows he will never have friends like us. I will miss him so much, his sense of humour - whenever you have a problem you would talk to him and he would joke about it. (Boy, 16, Burundi)

The lack of a permanent home was an ongoing part of the children's lives, a part of the structure of violence (Zarowsky, 2004) that they experienced. The quote immediately above by the 16 year-old from Burundi refers to the closure of the informal shelter in two apartments rented by a local religious organisation. This meant

that the group had to split up. Jean was sent to a local children's shelter, Antonio went to a children's home in a neighbouring city far from Johannesburg. The mother who had partially cared for the children in the [rented apartment] had to find accommodation for her three children and three foster children. The two extracts from my field notes below highlight how stressful this process was for the children.

Field notes: 2. 2003

The deadline for moving from the flat [rented by the local religious organisation] is the end of this month – next week. CJ was not at the group this Saturday. Jean said he had got up very early to look around Hillbrow for a flat for him and his mum and brother and sister and the three others. He was walking around looking for signs of flats to rent. The big issue is a deposit. They just don't have the money for a deposit.

As I packed up my car with the art materials he arrived with his mum. They had come to ask me for the deposit – they had found a flat to rent. CJ's face was tight with tension. His mum started to cry as she said, "I am just so tired, so tired. We have been moving and moving for so long – since CJ was 6. Moving, moving." My heart felt sore.

Field notes: 2. 2003

I have phoned the social worker [from the local religious organisation to try and see what she has organised for Antonio. He has to be out of the flat by Monday. They said she had gone away for the weekend!!! Aaaagh, nothing has been finalised for him. He called me this morning to ask me to come and collect his books – he has a collection of children's encyclopedias that he wants to keep but he knows he cannot leave them in the flat. He has nothing else. I felt so sad that all he owned were these out of date books - how precious they were to him. I called the state social worker again, she said she is still trying to get him into the children's home in Pretoria but it is a problem because he is not South African. I am at a total loss.

Alongside the trauma of insecure homes the children also lived with hunger. They seldom represented this in their artwork or talked about it in the group because of the

stigma attached to not having food, but there were clues to the hunger. One girl took a photo of her sister eating food from a pot. She captioned the photo,

How we survive with food. We don't have enough food for ourselves so sometimes after school we come home and start looking for food in the pots [of other people who live in the same apartment]. (Girl, 11, Burundi)

One boy talked about hunger to me once. Note that part of this quote has been used before in a longer narrative that describes the boy's life.

I sometimes didn't have money for food ... There was this time – there were days – when I went to bed without anything to eat. (Boy, 14, Angola)

I assisted this same boy, when he was nineteen, to see a medical doctor about stomach pains. The diagnosis of a chronic condition was related to periods of hunger as an adolescent. My field notes also highlight the issue of hunger.

Field notes: 3. 2003

I gave L a lift home after the group and as we drove she told me she was worried about P [her younger brother, who was sixteen]. When I asked why she said, 'He is always hungry. There is not enough food for him'. I asked if she had enough. She answered – 'I can manage being hungry, but he gets very angry always. I felt so sad that he was hungry but that she could deny herself ...

We know that severe hunger can add to anxiety and depression symptoms (Weinreb, Wehler, Perloff, Scott, Hosmer, Sagor and Gundersen, 2002) so this particular aspect of 'Living on the edge' undoubtedly contributed to the "exile-related stressors" that Miller & Rasmussen (2010) see as so significant in the post-migration lives of war-affected populations.

Another aspect of everyday trauma was the lack of physical safety. Sirriyeh's (2010) work with young women migrants in the UK recounts how physical safety was a key component of their emotional wellbeing. The children in the Suitcase Project had no

sense of physical safety because of the violent crime that characterised Hillbrow. This crime was a common theme in the artwork on their suitcases and in the stories they told.



If you are walking at night people will come to you, one from the front, others from behind and the sides and they will search you and before you know it your cell-phone, watch etc. is gone. (Boy, 15, Burundi)



This building is next to my building. It's called Mimosas. This is where all the Nigerians used to live before, selling drugs. The police used to come here with their helicopters. They used to kill people there and they closed that building because of Nigerians. But even then they [Nigerians] could still break in and put their drugs in there. (Boy, 14, DRC)

The other time, I was walking alone in the street and there was a group of four boys, and one of them called me and I didn't go. And he came and *klapped* [hit] me on the face, and I fall on the ground, and I didn't want to talk, because if I talk they will realise that I am not a South African and they might do more harm. It is very painful that you don't feel safe at all, all the time. Especially when you see a group of boys coming.

The one held me tight, and the other guy kept saying, "Man, leave her alone." But he carry on holding my hands tight and threaten to hit me, and I didn't do anything wrong. He said to the other, "Don't worry man, she is just *kwerekwere* [foreigner], she doesn't have anything." And the other guy forces him to leave – then he left me.

I am not safe; it doesn't matter whether it is during the day or at night. I walk alone. I am always scared. I don't feel comfortable when a male person greets me because I always think of negative things, like what he wants from me now, and you find that sometimes he was just greeting me. I don't feel safe ever, to be honest with you. (Girl, 16, DRC)

As the quote above illustrates the violence the children experienced was often made worse because they were foreigners. Violent bullying, usually linked to xenophobia, by other children in the street or at school was a common experience. This print illustrates the bullies described in the narrative below.



One time I was going to the park. There were these kids. I did have money, my friend did give me R2 to buy something because it was after school. And

those kids took the money from me. Then I didn't know what to do. I needed that money because I needed something to eat. I said 'Give me my money' and they said 'This is our money. You don't belong to this country and any money that comes from this country belongs to us not you because you are a *kwerekwere*.

At school when I am going to the lines when the bell rings they don't like it when I am standing in the lines so I have to go and stand with my friends... This one boy he says to me, '*kwerekwere, voetsak [go away], bogaboga*, stupid country, you don't belong in this country'. I say to them, 'I don't care whatever you say, this is your country and my country is very nice but I still need to stay here because there is war in my country.' I took the money back. But I don't fight with them. My mother always says, 'you fight back in your mind and don't fight with them' and that's what I do. (Boy, 13, DRC)

What stands out from the accounts about crime and violence is the extent to which they lived with fear every day; the fear of criminals and xenophobic violence and even the police.

This [he is referring to a photograph] is where we're picked up when going to church. Here there is a police station at the bus stop. When we stand here [at the bus stop] the police do not touch us but if you move slightly further, when they see you they arrest you for no reason. I took the picture when they dropped us at night after church once. (Boy, 15, DRC)

But the police...we are scared of these people, so every time you go around the corner you check the coast – if there is any 'blue boys' [police] there in those cars. Once, when we were in the street, there is a police car there and another police car, and everyone is running. So us, when we pass by, they left us to pass, and then we just see a gun and we hear it kkkkk behind us. There were four of us, and they cock the gun like we are thieves, like we kill someone or are thieves. Hey, it was not okay.

They take CJ, like rough. Put him on the car, stuff like that you know, and when we try to say we have papers, they say we should respect them as they are guiding the country. It is humiliating, because when they grab you from the belt, giving you a "wedgy" [holding you up by the belt of your trousers]

and they hold you up, you can't do anything. It makes you feel very bad, like you are nothing. (Boy, 16, DRC)

Like the time I was arrested. They came into the flat where we stay – [the flat rented by the local religious organisation]. They not allowed to do that, hey Glynis? They took us, me and J. J's papers were locked in his mother's room and I had lost mine. They came into the flat and that is against the law isn't it? They came in and this police is asking for R20 (\$US2) and they will let us go, but we did not have R20.

They put us in a cell with 50 people. They were all grown ups and it was very scary. We were treated like criminals they made us stand up against the wall and they banged one man with his head against the wall. I was like praying. They asked J's mom for R1000 for both of us to let us out – R500 for me and R500 for J. (Boy, 14, Angola)

One day the cops stopped and ask me for a paper and I said that I left the paper at home but they did not listen to me and they took me with them in the police car. I said I am student they said they don't want to listen any more word from me again when we entered the police station the manager ask me what are you doing here with such a small boy but the cops said we need money from him if he don't have money he is going with us and I said I really like to give you money but I don't have any money to give you guys. So I stayed in prison for one week three days and at that time I was supposed to write exams of grade nine but I didn't because in was in prison while I was there in prisoner I meet a friend and he help me to call the Jesuit Refugee Service people and then they came to take me out of there.

For me to build a secure future for me and others is by talking to the government and say that they should stop this from happening and give us respect that we deserve not because we are foreigners but that we are human beings and we deserve respect. (Boy, 16, DRC)

I have been arrested by policemen before so there is always something in my mind about them. They slapped and beat me. It's these Condors [make of car

used by the police] who arrest us mostly so if you see them you have to run. This other photo [he points to a photo he has taken] is of the Jeppe [Street] post office. It's no longer a post office. We nearly got arrested here. We had been sent to the shops and when coming back they asked us who we were. I told them I am a grandson of Mugabe and my friend told them he was from Congo and that's when they took us in. As they were moving us from a smaller car to a big van, the policeman who was by the door told us to run back, so we ran away.

Researcher: So the police [man] let you go, why did he do that?

We were young at that time. But not all police men are nice. Especially the coloured ones. They'll slap you, they'll punch you and kick you. (Boy, 17, Zimbabwe)

All of the above narratives are from boys because police seldom stopped the girls. All of the boys over 16 in the group had been arrested at some point during the life of the project, some more than once.

What stands out for me from these accounts is the “resilience *and* frailty” (Scheper-Hughes, 2008, p. 42). Their resilience is evident in the strategies they have for avoiding the police and for reading the racialised context of South Africa; they know where to stand, they speak back to the police (e.g. I am the grandson of Mugabe) and they know which policemen will let them go and who will treat them violently. They also learn how to work the system of bribes. These are good examples of the “tactics” of De Certeau (1984),

... victories of the “weak” over the strong (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunters’ cunning”, manoeuvres, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike. (p. xix)

It is clear that the boys are employing the “extraordinary ingenuity” (Boyden, 2003, p. 17) they had learned as children of conflict. But in spite of this the frailty (Scheper-Hughes, 2008) is there too. Their frailty is seen most in the context of their sense of identity and self worth. What is most hurtful to them is the humiliation of the

“wedgy” (being pulled upwards by their belt until their trousers are tight) and being made to feel as if “you are nothing”. This is related to the theme of identity discussed in the theme below but it is worth highlighting here that it is the powerlessness of their situation that they find most traumatic. There is nothing they can do about their illegal status – they have no power over the bureaucratic system they have found themselves in. This sense of powerlessness is most evident when they talk about the issue of identification and their attempts to get documents. One of the boys made this print and placed it on his suitcase.



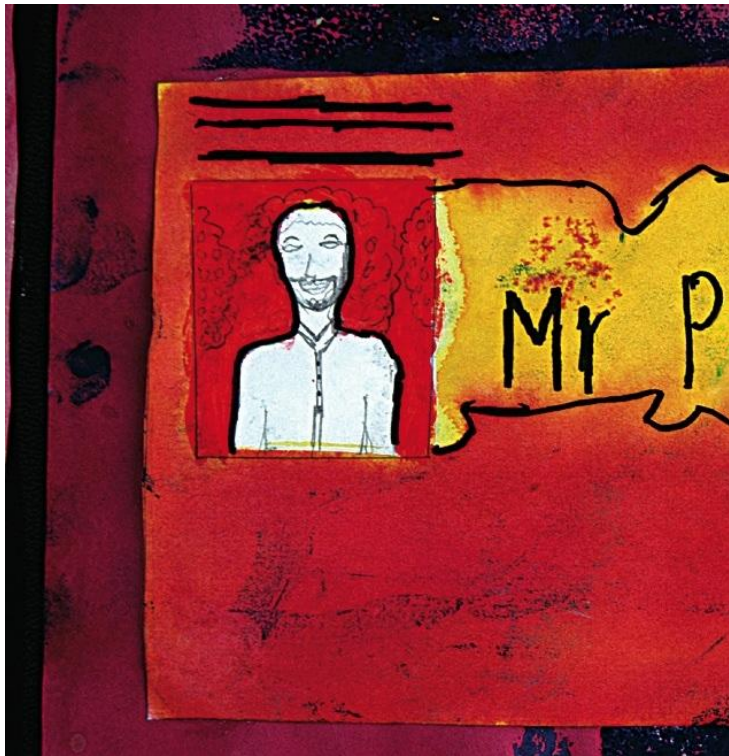
This long picture on my suitcase, it shows Home Affairs. Home Affairs is part of a refugee’s life. You must go every time to get your paper renewed. To find permission is difficult.

The picture it shows how people wait in a long line. Someone is pushing other persons to be first. You are standing in that queue and listening to all the people what they are talking about. They are talking different languages, greeting people from their country who are also in the queue. They talk to their friends from their country in their language [see speech above the figures].

This one here in my picture the security [guard] is swearing at him. Sometime these security [guards] they ask you for money before they will let you get into the building. It is like bribing. They ask you for cold drinks and then if you don’t buy they don’t let you in. The cops are there too and they are rude. They ask for money or they will arrest you. (Boy, 16, Ethiopia)

The sense of powerlessness in the face of bureaucracy is symbolised by the queue. Part of the trope of trauma for these children is their illegal status and the fact that there is little they can do about it. Though Philip did use the art as an opportunity to claim back his individual power and identity by making his own document. The photo

has been cropped to protect his identity but note how he calls himself, 'Mr'. For him, the document represents dignity and recognition as a person.



Then I drew a picture of myself on a document. It is the document I want to have. It is the permit from Home Affairs. It is my refugee status permit. But I do not have it. I have a problem with papers. I cannot renew my papers. I am always going to Home Affairs and every time I go they tell me something different. Once they said they cannot give me papers. Another time they said I must come with my teacher. I am going around without papers. I worry all the time that they will arrest me. (Boy, 15, DRC)

It is clear from the above that the children lived not only with the impact of severely traumatic past experiences but also with the impact of a “landscape of [present] trauma” (Kistner, 2007). They lived, almost permanently in a state of unpredictability. Many of the descriptions in this sub-theme remind me of Zarowsky’s (2004) idea that what war-affected children need if they are to cope is to engage the “logic and structure of the violence” (p. 204) they experience. Many of these accounts work in this way; they are an attempt to describe the ongoing trauma of structural violence

that they experience because they live on the edge of settled society; because of their loss of family and community.

5.2 Theme 2: Tropes of meaning-making

Summerfield (1998) describes how those forced into exile experience “a rupture in the narrative threads running through their lives” (p. 16). Though the metaphor is different this resonates with the idea of being untethered or unbalanced that was discussed above. Much of the rupture is related to the links between the past, the present and the future (Kohli & Mather, 2003). To make their present “situation comprehensible” (Finnström, 2008, p. 7), to make meaning, the exile has to look backward and forward. This theme looks at the tropes of meaning-making that emerged as the children worked on their suitcases and other artworks, as they looked forward and backward, as they tried to understand the “logic and structure of the violence” (Zarowsky, 2004, p. 204) they had experienced and in fact still were experiencing.

The theme on tropes of meaning-making is divided into three sub-themes around the tropes of i) ‘lost’, ii) ‘found’ and iii) ‘identity’. Each of these tropes was employed by the children to make meaning of their experiences.

5.2.1 What we have lost

One way the children began to make meaning out of their lives was by remembering the past. They made one artwork after another about what they had lost when they left their countries of origin. These images were, on the whole, more detailed and colourful and more lovingly depicted than most of the trauma-images described above. Many of the images of things from the past were decorated, with beads and other tactile materials, suggesting celebration.

What stands out about the narrative we look at in this section is how fragmented it is. Some of the data in the theme discussed above was also fragmentary but most of it had a narrative or at least a chronological thread, even if this appeared only in the artwork and was not articulated. Very little of the data gathered under this theme has any narrative thread. It is rather like the “scraps of inchoate memory ... characterized

by dream fragments, elision or innuendo (p. 204)” that Zarowsky, (2004) describes in her work with Somalian refugees.

Apart from one or two children who had lived in the city and drew buildings and soccer fields they had played on, most recalled rural childhoods. Inside their suitcases the children placed trees, rivers, fields, pathways, fish, birds, flowers, villages and gardens that had been part of their childhoods. All of these now lost.





The boys represented trees, paths and rivers most often. The older girls depicted domestic objects and tasks, the younger ones toys and games in their gardens close to home.



The narratives linked to this artwork are often lyrical, filled with nostalgia and a sense of idyll and even peace. The children seem to be very much “at home in the world” (Jackson, 1995). Many of the narratives have the dream-like quality that Zarowsky (2004) refers to (see above). The children described how they had climbed trees, sat in

them to chat with siblings and friends, watched birds fly overhead as they walked to school, walked barefoot on forest paths, eaten fruit from mango trees and played with friends and toys. Most of the childhood memories the children recalled were from when they were very young, certainly under twelve.

When I was young, I liked to go with my mother to the fields. Sometimes when there was too much sun I would go and sit on the cloth in the shade on her Kitenge [patterned cloth worn in east and central Africa] cloth. She was working and I would watch her work. If I did not go with my mother I used to cry to my father “Take me to the river.” I sat at the river with my father until I saw the fish. (Girl, 16, DRC)

This takes me back to rural areas. You can see mountains, trees, birds, different colours. I used to pass by this house to go to school. This is the road I passed by on my way to school. There was no pavement, there was a forest. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

This is me when I was small and this is my roof and my house and my sisters and this is the grass. This is me, and this the avocado tree and the mango tree, the flower, the two birds and the dog. This is the house. This is a tin roof. (Girl, 11, DRC)

This tree on my suitcase I call it the peace tree. It is for peace and love. I also thought about a tree that is at my home. It means a lot to me. It was a very big tree. I used to stand under that tree. It was a mango tree. I would sit there with my sister. It was close to our house and when it was hot we would sit there nearly the whole night and talk under that tree. (Boy, 14, DRC)

Inside my suitcase I have shown a place where we used to walk to when it was hot, it was about five miles from my house. I was about 5 or 6 years old and we used to swim there. (Boy, 14, DRC)

I have a memory inside my suitcase from when I lived in Rwanda. When I was six years, maybe I was younger, I used to climb trees. This is a picture of the

tree I climbed. I liked climbing trees. After school I went home. My sister was there at home. I would put my books down and then climb the tree. It was a long, long, long tree. I climb it, I climb it. I climb it up to the highest level. It is a special tree that grows in my country. It does not grow here. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

Where we used to live it was town houses and streets and trees and you [as children] have your own garden and you have to take care of it. Flowers. You have to plant a tree so when you grow you can say I planted it, that tree. I planted a tree in my grandfather's house where I used to live – I was 8 years old. I remember the day I planted my tree. It was like our grandmother went to town and when they came back they brought a lot of things and they brought seeds from her village she brought it to town and she gave to everyone. I dug the hole about this big and put it inside and cover it with sand and pour some water there. And there was a little tree with fruit that comes when it grows. We take care of it when we come there at weekends or in holidays. You will see it growing and one day you see yourself eating from it. You will eat fruit from that tree and you feel happy about it. It was a guava tree. (Boy, 13, DRC)

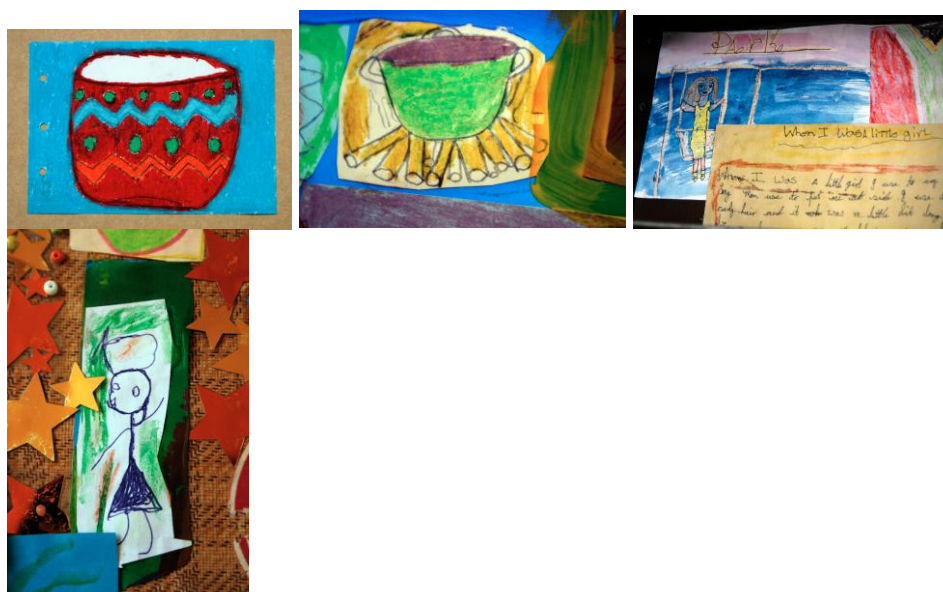
This is when we went to the village to visit our grandfather and this is where he lived. He had a garden and a lemon tree and an avocado tree and there was a nest in the avocado tree and there was also three houses and he had a neighbour who always left his door open so that air can get inside. (Girl, 10, DRC)

What is interesting in these narratives and the artwork is the way the children represent what Rosbrook and Schweitzer (2010) call “geographical-emotional landscapes” (p.166). Rosbrook and Schweitzer's work with refugees from Burma suggests that acknowledging the loss of landscape is important.

The intensity of the emotional connection to landscape revealed by participants in this study may also have some positive implications in terms of psychological functioning ... Searles (1960, as cited in Akhtar, 1999) describes the importance of non-human environments as objects for nostalgic

longing. He suggests that memories of childhood places – such as the mountains, rivers, farms described with such emotion by participants in this study – may become psychological sites of respite and growth, where ‘all the vicissitudes of human interaction can be expressed, experienced and worked through in relative psychic privacy’ (Searles 1960, as cited in Akhtar, 1999). Memories of cherished landscapes may thus become more than important links to a remembered, lost home. They may also constitute a psychological home – a private space of retreat where emotions can be expressed and development can take place. The possibility that positive memories of home can help to create a nurturing psychic space for refugees is also explored by Akhtar (1999) and Volkan (1999). (p. 169)

It is clear that representing the geographical-emotional landscapes of their past allowed the children a “nurturing psychic space” that over time allowed them to feel what Jackson (1995) calls “at home in the world” even though they were no longer within reach of their childhood landscapes. Jackson (1995) tells us that part of what helps people to feel “at home in the world” no matter where they are is the ability to control the everyday objects and the activities the objects represent in their world. This was another pattern that emerged – the emphasis on everyday rituals in the past. The walk to school, the fetching of water, leaving the door open so air can come in, gardening, climbing a tree; these are all everyday rituals that connote normalcy. There are everyday objects and rituals everywhere in the artwork and narratives.



I made this bowl from clay. It is the plastic bowl my mother washed me in. Every morning when I was little, outside the house she washed me. Sometimes the water was too cold. This was in the town Shashemane. I put my name here in Amharic on the basin. (Girl, Ethiopia, 14)

In my house I remember there was a stone for grinding *Tef* flour. A long time ago when they wanted to make *Njira* bread and there were no machines they ground the flour. We had one in our house. (Girl, 14, Ethiopia)

This is a jacket I remember. I had it when I was very small. They bought it for me – the pastor at the church – that is why I like it. I wore it to church. It was back home in DRC. I also got a bible, I read and I learned something. These are girls - they used to be in the choir. We sang a lot of songs, French songs. (Boy, 13, DRC)

This is in the veranda of my house in Congo. This is a plant in a pot. This is my Lisa doll and the birds were flying and singing. This is the mango tree we had. This is my Lisa doll, my mother has her in Congo. (Girl, 8, DRC)

This is my Sunday shoes. (Girl, 17, DRC)

This I just drew my favourite flower because I miss it. It was in my garden in Congo. This is my grandfather's house when I was six years old and my dad and my mum and here is me and they are saying happy birthday. (Girl, 10, DRC)

The *recalling* of these rituals and objects is resonant of what De Certeau (1984) calls the tactics of survival that we employ in a situation where power has been lost. Walker (2010) in her work with men and women coping with violence in Sri Lanka expands on De Certeau's link between a tactic and power by saying that, "Rather than using tactics to manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities, I regard them as working with what is at hand and constantly adjusting to unanticipated events in order to deal with the changing realities of everyday life in a conflict environment" (Walker, 2010, p. 151). Walker is referring to a context of present violence but I think

that the children's recalling of the everyday rituals and objects are also an example of applying a tactic in response to their present context of uncertainty. They are taking an opportunity to remind themselves and any of us who see their work that their lives *were* normal, they do exist beyond the chaos of war and migration and the precarity of the refugee, just as Walker (2010) suggests the residents of a conflict environment do.

The children described these memories about the everyday rituals and objects as “good memories” (Girl, 14, DRC) when we talked about them.

This (doing artwork) reminds of us of our country, and helps us think back to the good things. (Girl, 13, Burundi)

Even though the artwork and stories did remind them of “the good things” what stands out from the narratives is that the children often ended them by wondering what had happened to the tree or house or village or river. This suggests that though they were good memories they were also images of loss. Recalling them was part of the children's attempt to make meaning of their experience. Notice the grasping towards meaning in the quotes below – each child here is trying to make sense of ‘what was lost’ to understand where it may be now.

I wonder who is eating those guavas. Maybe some other day I can go there just to see what is happening. One guy went there and said things are not good there – the houses are empty and it is just like bush growing up. (Boy, 13, DRC)

I used to play soccer and basketball with my friends – their names are here [he points to the list he has pasted inside his suitcase]. We are in the same group. It's a soccer team. Next to the field was a house for a very old mama and she don't like us to play in this field because the ball would always enter in her house. We used to disturb her every day and the ball will enter her yard every five minutes and then she must come out and give us the ball. So when we came here, she used to chase us away. So one day, we did make a plan. Every day at five o' clock we would go to play in the field and she would wait for us. But that day we made a plan and we said everyone must go on the top of the

lemon tree that was next to her house. Now she is expecting us on the field but all of us, we were here in that tree and she did not see us and we took all the lemons – everybody with one lemon. Maybe she will remember me still because I was the naughty one. I had the plan. Maybe she is not there anymore. (Boy, 14 Ethiopia)

I was having a small farm where I used to stay - in my house. This is where I used to play basketball and soccer. I had a basketball and a soccer ball. I think they are still inside our house, because our house is locked. Nobody is allowed to open it since we left it. Maybe I'll find my ball when I'm going back. (Boy, 15, Ethiopia)

In my house I remember there was a stone for grinding *Tef* [a grain grown in Ethiopia] flour. It is still there maybe... I do not know. They have all gone from my house. Maybe no one is in my house and the stone for flour is still there. I do not know... No one will throw it away I do not think because it has memories of long ago. (Girl, 14 Ethiopia)

As well as using the art-making to recall lost everyday rituals and objects the children also used the candle-lighting activity we did at a weekend camp to remember lost places.

I light this candle for a home and a house that was there when I was young and a tree of fruit. I miss it. It was a mango tree. I never forget it. I was young, 4 or 5 years old. The house was nice. All my family lived in this house. I was the last [youngest] one. (Boy, 15, DRC)

Another characteristic of the narratives related to loss of “geographical-emotional landscapes” (Rosbrook and Schweitzer, 2010, p. 169) is that many of them talk about the future in the context of their loss; they want someday to replace what they have lost.

I liked the gathering in this house as a family because we gather and share what we have together in mind soul and in body. But now we cannot share.

But I still can share with others as my friends. I lost the house. I cannot say I'll bring it back the same. I might replace it someday in the future, but it won't be the same as this. One day I can replace it with one bigger than this. (Boy, 15, DRC)

I drew myself funny here but this is me and this is the tree that satisfied me with fruit food. In our yard there was a mango tree. When my dream come true and I finally make it there will be a lot of trees in my house! (Boy, 15, DRC)

Linked to this articulation of a lost past was the way that, through the art, some of the children actually made objects of remembrance that are very similar to the photograph of his mother that Barthes (1981) describes (see Section 4.3.1.); objects that carry a deep “wound” (Barthes, 1981, p. 73) because they are lost.

That tree is a blessing on me. I think about that tree a lot so I put it on my suitcase so I could take it with me wherever I go. (Boy, 14, DRC)

I have made a rose from clay. This rose reminds me of the one I put in my suitcase when we left DRC. I put my clothes inside the suitcase and a rose that I had from my grandfather. My grandfather gave it to me before he died. He had it from my grandmother. When he gave it to me he said keep it, it will remind you of your grandmother. I kept it for a long time but it fell all apart. Now I do not have it. So that is why I made this clay rose to replace it. (Boy, 13, DRC)

These two children are able to articulate that they have created an object of remembrance but many of the children did not talk about the images they had made. This may be because they were as Barthes says images of wounds that were hidden below the surface, for example, this image of a mother.



Aggie, who made this image, describes sitting in the shade on her mother's *kitenge* cloth (the name used in DRC for printed cotton cloth worn by women in east and central Africa) watching her mother. But she does not tell us about her mother. In fact given that her mother died when she was very young it is unlikely that she has a memory of what she looks like. But this carefully drawn and decorated image suggests that she holds her mother "inside" her in the same way that the young Somalian man in Steinberg's (2014) book "says with certainty that on his great journey through childhood and across the African continent he took his mother. He has no memory of her face, nor of the sound of her voice: her place inside him is more ambient than that, more powerful" (p. 5).

Another example of creating an object of remembrance that is also related to family is the Burundian girl who made her own 'photograph' of her family.

I made a picture of my family even though I never had a chance to take a picture of my family. I drew this because I saw my guardian's photo. She had a family photo of her family with her two parents, sisters and brothers. This reminded me that I had my own family, my two parents, my sisters and my brothers. Everyone should also end up like this in a big family. Right now I'm only left with my sister. We've lost all our family. All the others got killed. It's my guardian who is taking care of us. (Girl, 15, Burundi)

Another image that seems to also hold the resonance of an object of remembrance is this one drawn by a 14 year old boy from DRC who described it thus,



This person is holding people in his arms, together [see the small pencil figures around the red circle at the bottom centre of the drawing]. This person symbolises my grandpa, my mother's father. When we went there he used to tell us he grew up living without his mother and parents ... So he built this big house. He had about 12 children so some were getting married, some were studying, he had a lot of grandchildren, so he built this big house telling that all the family had to go there and meet. So we used to go there together. It was a very big place. There was also a big dog. We all went there, kids, grown up people, we used to talk all the time, we used to sleep around 12, just keep playing around. It was light outside. That was a really good life when I think about it. (Boy, 14, DRC)

His sister recalled that house too.

I miss my grandpa's house where we used to go for holidays. We were almost about 60 something grandchildren and parents. We were all children and we used to play. (Girl, 18, DRC)

This memory of a lost grandfather highlights another aspect of the theme. Linked to the attempt to make meaning by recalling everyday objects and rituals of the past ‘normality’ in which they lived, is the recall of people they have lost.

This is a jacket I remember. I had it when I was very small. He bought it for me, the pastor at the church. That is why I like it. (Boy, 14, DRC)

Often these people that have been lost are grandparents.

This is my grandfather’s house in the village. It was a real big house and he loved living in the village and this is his footsteps going to the market. This is the thing that they put peanuts in and they make peanut butter sometimes. I ate vegetables, carrot, cabbage and spinach that he grew in the garden. He is going to the market to get coffee and when he got home he made coffee. It was a Sunday and it was never cold and it was always sunny. He always take lemon and he put it in his tea. I called him grandpa – grand-père. He lived on his own because my grandma died. He died with this big avocado tree while he was cutting it. He died while we still lived in DRC. We never went back after he died. I think he is still here though in my picture. My grandmother was an artist, she used to make carpets and pictures. I remember pictures of my grandfather she drew. Her pictures are in a museum in Belgium. (Girl, 10, DRC)

I remember my grandfather used to plant in the garden. I used to help him work in the gardens. I called him Baba. He was my mother’s father. He was a bit cheeky, he always told us what to do. But he used to like us a lot.

We lived at the restaurant. Every time when I came back from school he would sit me down in the restaurant and give me food. Behind the restaurant, was a small garden. That was where we used to plant the beans, cabbage. He taught me how to plant flowers. I used a hoe.

He showed me how to dig a hole, then put the seeds in, then close the hole, put a little bit more water. Then I came back after a week, put water again, put enough water to last the whole week. He is not still there. He died.

And here in South Africa we have a tree day at school. Each class plants a tree. That is when I remember my grandfather and his hoe and our garden.
(Boy, 12, Burundi)

My grandmother is beautiful, she is not that old. She has long hair, grey hair. She always wears a long dress. She always tells me stories in Amharic, in her language. When I remind myself of her I always laugh to myself because of the way she told those stories. (Girl, 13, Ethiopia)

Parents are also remembered.

We crossed the border at night. It was very dark and I got separated from my mother and sister. I have tried to find them but I do not know where they are. I have tried to trace my mother and sister and send messages back home with people who go there, but I do not know. I will not go back because there is nothing there for me anymore. Where will I stay? How will I live without my mother? (Boy, 16, Ethiopia)

I remember I had a special book. I have drawn this book here. When I was little, my mom used to read for me that book. It looked lovely. The name of the book was the same [as my name]. I lived with my aunty but every time when I was going to my mom, she read for me the book. My Mom died in the village. And when my mom is died, I didn't want anybody to read for me a book ever again. (Girl, 15, Burundi)

My father was in that house in Rwanda. He was teaching me to look after the animals. I had six chickens, four pigeons, five goats. I always wanted a rabbit and I was always asking my father, 'Can I have a duck? I have never tasted a duck, can I keep ducks?' My father he said he was going to get me a duck next time he goes to town. But he never went. We had to run away. Now I cannot find him. I cannot get hold of him. I do not know where he is. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)



Some of the most poignant pieces of artwork were those done by the three young girls who had been separated from their parents when they were sent to South Africa from DRC with a family friend.



I drew a picture of my mom. She's still in Congo with my three brothers. She is not with me. I think about her. She was a nice mum. Sweet. She cared about me, she loved me, she loved my family. She cooked for me, she buys me clothes sometimes - even tells me stories.

I drew my dad. He has a moustache. This is a heart to show all the fathers are loved. (Girl, 10, DRC)



I drew my mum. I think about her, especially on family days. Family days are when it is time to spend time with your family. I think about her hair. Her hair is like mine. She makes a ponytail in her hair (see drawing on it's side at the topf of this photograph), and she puts clips and ribbons. When my sister does that style, I think about my mum. (Girl, 12, DRC)

The idealised style in which their parents are represented on their suitcases says something about loss but also about the fact that the girls did not remember what their parents looked like.

Most of the narratives described above mention the loss of family members and of once being part of a family but now being alone. Other children articulated this loss of family directly. This description of lost family is also part of the attempt to make meaning from or explain their present reality; by articulating the loss they are reminding themselves that it is real.

I lost my house where I used to live as a family and now I am not living as a family now. (Girl, 15, DRC)

I have lost my grandma who I never got a chance to see or even speak to her. This big M [on my picture] is for my mum. She never... I feel grown up now and she was never there. I wanted to speak to somebody, somebody who would understand me like my mum. She is not there I have lost her. It is very

sad. I can't be feeling sorry for myself I feel like there is a gap in my life, there is something missing a family more especially. Things just never went well. It is like we are all separated in a way I need my family but it is like I can't reach them it is painful. (Boy, 14, Angola)

This is the house we lived in, all of the family lived there. Here I am just alone. I am doing my own thing, no one cares for me. I lost my family, most of them I don't where are they. I just manage. I miss our house that we used to stay there as a family. (Girl, 17, DRC)

So, for the children, loss of place, family and home is a central part of their trauma and describing this loss is part of their attempt to make sense of what that loss means to them. Even though this trope of trauma is a trope of loss (of place, people, home, family and belonging) it is shot through with resilience as well as frailty. How you might say, is there evidence here of resilience?

The work of narrative therapist, White (2005), helps us to understand how resilience is evident in the recall of significant people in the children's past lives. What we see here are stories of loss peopled by significant others who cared for and in turn were loved by the children. These are the significant others White (2003) says children need to acknowledge if they are to "thicken" their stories, from the "thin" story of the victim to the multi-layered story of "survivor. White's understanding of this process is summarised below.

- People have thin stories and negative conclusions about their identities. [In this context "I am a refugee or victim"].
- Stories tend to be problem-saturated with a negative view of the future. Stories tend to be lacklustre with a prevailing sense of being trapped and paralysed.
- Life is multi-storied, not single-storied. Also multi-knowledged and multi-skilled. Knowledges and skills are present only in very thin traces in our lives.
- As therapists our task is to make these traces more fully known. Help people become familiar with knowledges through alternative life stories.
- Our task is to help people become primary authors of their lives

- We need to establish appropriate contexts for people to develop thick stories.
(White, 2003, p. 2)

Central to this process of thickening a story is the accessing of what White calls “subordinate stories” (White, 2005, p. 13) hidden in the narrative. These subordinate stories are usually linked to significant others in a child’s history.

As the contribution of these figures becomes more visible, new opportunities are presented for these children to connect/reconnect with their relational/social/ community networks. (White, 2005, p. 13)

In the Suitcase Project the artwork facilitated the exploration of subordinate stories peopled with grandparents, friends singing French songs and kind pastors, all figures that allowed children to “reconnect with their relational, social and community networks” (White 2005, p. 13). For White accessing subordinate storylines helps children move from the thin stories that hold only the negative consequences of trauma to the thick stories that include the “knowledges and skills” (White, 2003, p. 2) they used to cope with the traumatic event/s.

What is interesting about the suitcase art process is that it allowed the children to tell their subordinate stories and to thicken their stories in a concrete and literal way. They painted and stuck and repainted and pulled off drawings, prints, magazine pictures – thickening their stories. Some even placed pieces of their story in envelopes and pockets in their suitcases.

It soon became clear that the children were able to access what they called “the good stories”, but as they added more and more subordinate stories the process of thickening them gave them the foundation for action to proceed with their lives. They began to see that they had agency and power.

The restoration and/or development of this sense of personal agency provides an antidote to the sort of highly disabling conclusions about one’s identity that feature perceptions that one is a passive recipient of life’s forces. Such perceptions are highly influential in the development of conclusions that one is

‘damaged’ and ‘messed up’ on account of what one has been through, and to the development of the pervasive and profoundly immobilising phenomena of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘fragility’. (White, 2005, p. 14)

Finding this agency and power is part of what Finnström (2008) would call “meaning-making”. So, though the children articulate what they have *lost* they are in the process beginning to make sense, to make meaning of an identity that is so much more than just ‘victim of trauma’. This is where we see resilience.

We can also see resilience when we examine loss of home. To explain this it is useful to look at the stream of phenomenological research on the concept of home.

Phenomenologists do not attempt to define the essence of home or circumscribe people’s existence. Instead they focus on practice, on the diverse ways people ‘do’ and feel at home (Gurney, 1997; Jackson 1995; Ingold, 1995) rather than the ways that they *think about* home. ... [As] such [they] explore the dynamic processes and transactions that transform a ‘dwelling unit ... into a home in the context of everyday life. (Mallett, 2004 p. 79)

Jackson’s (1995) work from within this theoretical stream is particularly relevant to the evidence we see here. He describes how

... people work - in reality and through illusion, alone and in concert with others – to shape the course of their own lives [so] ... home is grounded less in a place and more in the activity that occurs in the place. We often feel at home in the world when what we do has some effect and what we say carries some weight. (p. 123 and 148)

For Jackson we are at home in the world when we have a sense of control over our lives.

Mallett (2004) says that “Home is lived in the tension between the given and the chosen, then and now, here and there” (p. 80). I think that this is what the artwork allowed the children to do. It gave them a sense of control over their lives. They were

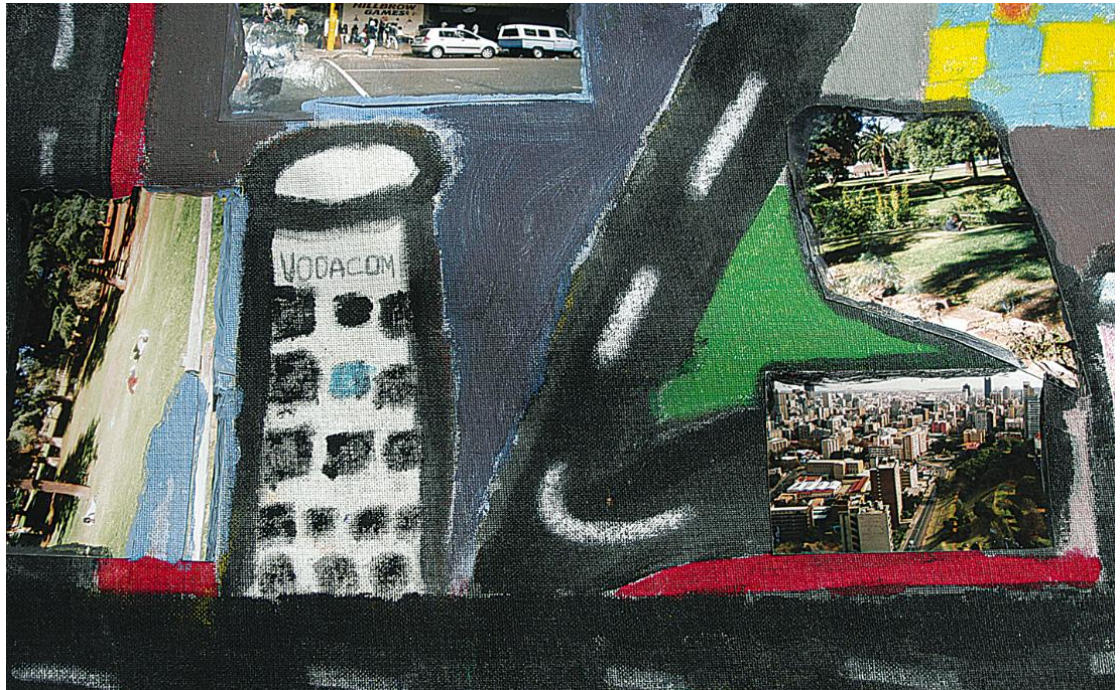
able to physically construct the “then (their childhood homes) and the given” (their small rooms with no security of tenure in Hillbrow). They used the art materials and the storytelling to literally make their homes and the objects and landscapes of their past. They also celebrated the homes they have now. The art-making allowed them to take control so they began to feel at home in the world. This is discussed further in the next theme where we look at what the children “found” in their present, in the “now” and how part of what they found was difficult but some of what they found allowed them to feel “at home in the world” amidst the difficulty.

5.2.2 What we have found

As much as the artwork and stories described what the children had *lost* they also articulated what they had *found* in their new environment. In the sub-theme titled ‘Living on the edge’ (section 5.1.3) I discussed how the tall buildings of Hillbrow were strange to the children and how the degraded environment added to the precarity of their lives. In contrast with this trope of strangeness was the “milk and honey” (Mpe, 2001, p. 41) of the place they had come to. For the children, the tall buildings also represented the prosperity and hope that so many refugees had told them they would find in Johannesburg, for example, one of the drawings of the high-rise buildings had “The Dream” written below it. One of the children described a skipping song she played in a refugee camp in Tanzania,

‘Johannesburg, Johannesburg. I’m going to Johannesburg, one, two three, four,’ it was funny because for us South Africa was Johannesburg. Everyone wanted to come here. (Girl, 15, Burundi)

But the children not only represented the city as the ‘dream’ they also genuinely appreciated this new landscape they had found. When they were given disposable cameras to take photographs that would “tell others about their lives” many of them took photographs from the tops of the tall buildings they had moved to when the informal shelter in the two apartments was closed in 2003. The photos were used to make collages. The images reproduced here (and the accompanying narratives) all show how the children appreciated the beauty of the cityscape they found themselves in.



I took this picture from Jean's flat. I wanted to show those people from Sidney [we had talked about sharing our photographs with people from other cities] that we also have some tall buildings here so I took two pictures of tall buildings. It shows Johannesburg is beautiful. (Boy, 15 DRC)

Another characteristic of these photographs and narratives was the focus on local facilities.



This is a park next to my flat. I took it from my flat which is 25 floors [up]!
It's scary but sometimes it's nice. (Boy, 13, Zimbabwe)

I love the trees here in this place. You can find them in the parks. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

I love where I live because a lot of things are close to me. When I want to go to the park, it's just close. Transport is available nearby - there is a swimming pool nearby so you can just go hang out there. (Boy, 17, Zimbabwe)

The telecommunications tower in the centre of Hillbrow (known locally as the Hillbrow Tower) was another structure of which the children were particularly fond.

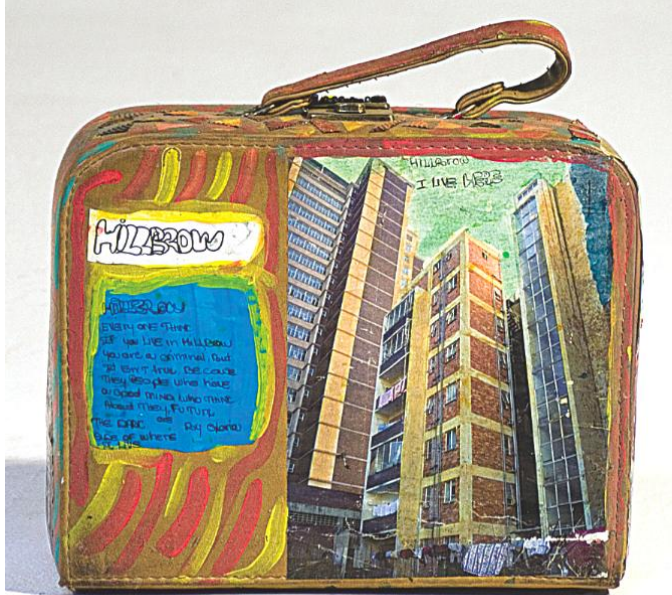


I drew the tower of Hillbrow because it is the pride of Hillbrow, it shows that we're in Hillbrow now. My flat is just close to the tower and in most nights I can see the tower. It's really, really beautiful and I like watching it at night.
(Boy, 16, South Africa)



This is the city [pointing to his drawing] and this is the Hillbrow tower. This symbolises a lot for me because everywhere I go, I see it and I know that's the place I stay. Whenever I come from school sometimes I don't take a bus so I just follow it and reach home. (Boy, 14, DRC)

The quote above shows how this boy feels that Hillbrow is home. The sense of Hillbrow being home is illustrated in this suitcase too.



This young woman chose a magazine photograph of Hillbrow to place on the lid of her suitcase and then wrote,

Everyone thinks that if you live in Hillbrow you are a criminal. But it isn't true. There are people who have a good mind who think about their future, like me. (Girl 17, DRC)

When the project began most of the children were living in a four-storey block of apartments. This apartment block often featured in the images on the outside of their suitcases. It was always referred to with some affection.



I drew Cornice [the name of the apartment block] on my suitcase because that is my home. (Boy, 13, DRC)

This idea of a new home and community is illustrated well in the quote below where one boy describes the photographs he took of the room he rented in one of the high-rise apartments. His friends join in to describe how they spend time in this room together.

This is the entrance to my flat; this is the door, the room, the whole building. We share the flat. We put our money together and pay it together. If you don't pay you are sent away. It is mixed South Africans, some are Venda others Pedi

[South African languages]. There are the students. One is at Wits [University], the younger one is in school, and the little one is in college. This is my room. The bed, some little stuff and posters. This is a view from my room. The view from this side is very nice. This is the road I take to school.

Researcher: Why did you take so many pictures in your room?

I like my room very much. I feel comfortable in it. Sometimes we meet in the room, my friends and I and we cook *pap* [maize porridge] and soup and chat and laugh.

When I'm with this little boy, my friend, we have a lot of discussions and arguments.

We like to go to P's room.

Researcher: Why?

First of all there are no parents there. (Boy 15, DRC and his friends)

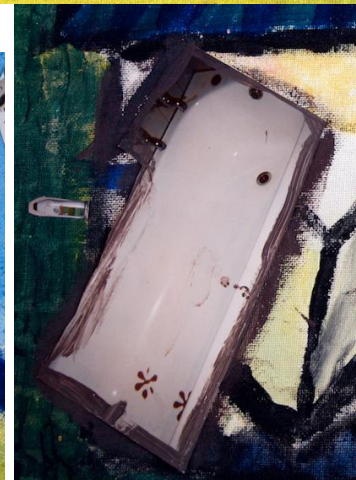
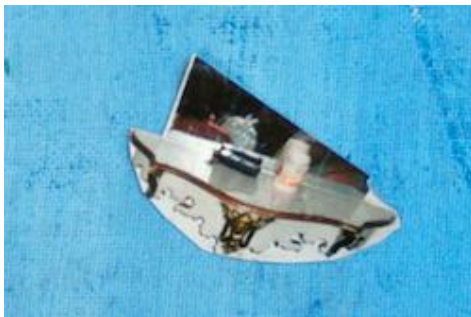
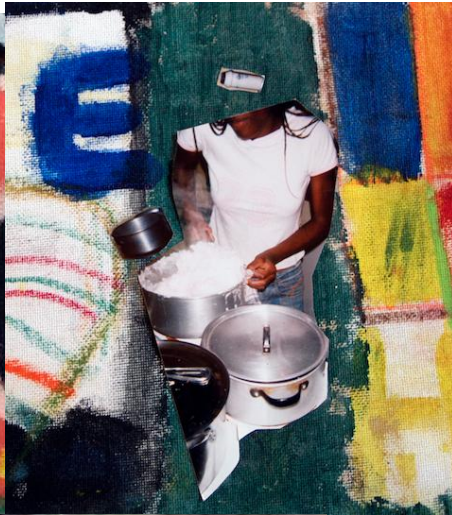
Similar to the pattern that emerged in the previous theme on 'loss' is the emphasis on the everyday rituals and objects that emerged in this theme on what the children 'found' in Hillbrow. Notice how the boy in the quote above describes his bed and his posters, the things he has collected in his room. He also describes the everyday activities of cooking and chatting with friends. This description reminded me of Laura Ring's (2006) study of women in an apartment block in Karachi. Ring explores how, through the everyday rituals of sharing tea with neighbours and borrowing flour, the women created peace in the midst of a context of ethnic violence.

The nature of this sanity or this peace – its forms of authority, narrative properties, sensibilities, and contingencies; the energies we employ to sustain it, and our utter stupefaction at its collapse – deserve the full force of our attention. (p. 182)

For Ring the loss of the everyday rituals creates a form of stupefaction. As I read this I wondered if re-making the everyday objects and rituals from their past in their artwork had allowed the children to move from "stupefaction" towards meaning-making? Perhaps the making of the everyday through the artwork and storytelling had allowed them to recall the "sanity [and] ... peace" (Ring, 2006, p. 182) they had lost. And by acknowledging it as 'lost', by controlling it in this way they began to find the

power to create a nurturing space for themselves in the present. This nurturing space is evident in the objects they show and in the rituals of everyday they describe. It is as if the children have sought out objects and rituals that can create meaning in their often chaotic present lives; this is a tactic for making meaning of chaos (Walker, 2010).





This is the bath in my flat. I like to make sure that each and every person must clean the bath – the boys don't always clean it – so I always make sure it is clean so people see that the bathroom and kitchen is clean. (Girl, 15, DRC)

I like it here in my flat because of the people. There are always people around. Even if you don't have a radio, you can listen to your neighbours. (Boy, 17, Zimbabwe)

Sometimes it is nice in the flat because we sit and talk about things. Like with Lissie's mother so you never get bored. (Girl, 15, DRC)

What stands out about the children's representations of the everyday rituals and objects in their present lives in Hillbrow is how similar they are to their representations of the everyday in the past. There is a sense of trying to recapture what has been 'lost' with the new rituals of everyday that have been 'found'. Kohli & Mather (2003) in their work with unaccompanied children in the UK describe this as

... finding a sense of continuity between the culture of their own country and that of their new one. Being able to mourn aspects of their culture that is now inaccessible (Eisenbruch (1992) refers to a process of cultural bereavement), while continuing to explore their own niche within their host culture. (p. 205)

I think that the act of representing their present homes in the apartment blocks of Hillbrow through the art-making allowed the children to acknowledge and possibly even create a new "nurturing psychic space where emotions can be expressed and development can take place" (p. 169).

Not only did the children 'find' home in Hillbrow, they also found friends. Their artwork includes many, many drawings of friends, placed on to their suitcases. The print below depicts a best friend. It is placed prominently on the lid of a suitcase.



This is showing my friend, this is Mercy. This shows that she is my best friend. I could not live without her near me. (Girl, 13, Burundi)



This is me and my friends, the friends that I have now at the school. That I am in now. Who don't think anything bad about me. Who think of me as any normal person. Don't treat me as a foreigner. That's me and the other one is my friend. His name is Bongani. They are talking about movies, TV, how teenagers usually are. Important to me. It made it easier for me at school. When some of the people at school don't want to talk to me, or they don't understand my French. My friends talk to me and they try to understand me. (Boy, 13, DRC)

So, the children, in spite of their loss, found a sense of home and also caring relationships in Hillbrow. It soon became clear that not only were the children able to access what they called "the good stories" about the past but they also 'found' some of the "good stories" about their present. They began, in White's (2003) term, to thicken their stories and the process of thickening their stories gave them the

foundation for action to proceed with their lives. They began to see, through describing how they had found a home and a community, that they had agency and power.

The restoration and/or development of this sense of personal agency provides an antidote to the sort of highly disabling conclusions about one's identity that feature perceptions that one is a passive recipient of life's forces. Such perceptions are highly influential in the development of conclusions that one is 'damaged' and 'messed up' on account of what one has been through, and to the development of the pervasive and profoundly immobilising phenomena of 'vulnerability' and 'fragility'. (White, 2005, p. 14)

White refers to the making through claiming an identity beyond 'damaged' or 'messed up' or vulnerable. This issue of identity is explored in the next sub-theme.

5.2.3 Tropes of identity

The process of meaning-making must include some thinking about identity. Previous sub-themes in this thesis have looked at some indicators of identity such as the way the children often called themselves, 'survivors'. However, the present sub-theme focuses specifically on identity.

As part of their reflection on their past lives many of the children referred to a very personal identifier, their names. This aspect of their identity was 'lost' and rooted very much in the past.

My name means wing of an angel. When the priest blesses me he always uses the name 'wing of an angel'. (Boy, 18, Ethiopia)

I love my name so much. I am happy to have this name. Both my grandmothers gave me this name. (Girl, 14 Ethiopia)

I do remember the priest who named me ... (Boy, 15, Ethiopia)

My name is B. I love my name so much. I am happy to have this name. Both my grandmothers gave me this name. They are very orthodox. They went to church every night and morning. (Girl, 13, Ethiopia)

My name is from my grandfather. It was his name. (Boy, 14, DRC)

I have my grandmother's name. (Girl, 13, DRC)

In Ethiopia we have two names. We also have the name the priest gives you. Mine is Latimarium. I do remember the priest who named me –he had a long white robe. He never left the church he was always there. Always when I used to take him dinner in the church he would give me the sign of the cross. It was a special church, you always had to get out your shoes when you came to that church. (Boy, 16, Ethiopia)

My name means love. My father told me. I don't know if it's true. We were just sitting in the sitting room, talking about our family names. Sometimes, when we are sitting together like family, just talking about anything, that's when he told me about my name, how it came, how he had chosen the name because my name is my grandfather's name. My surname is my family's name. (Boy, 17, Rwanda)

There were other personal indicators of identity too. One of these was the things they had learned from parents in the past. Jean described how his father had taught him to keep rabbits and chickens so one day he could look after himself.

My father was in that house in Rwanda. He was teaching me to look after the animals. I had six chickens, four pigeons, five goats, five ducks. I have those ducks in my mind. My Dad used to buy ducks for me. He would say, "Jean, this is for you, keep it, it is just yours". He was trying to teach me how when he is not in front of me or beside me how I can run my own life with success. "This duck is yours, treat it well", It was so small and I must look after it until it gets big. He said, "It is yours and you must keep on doing this and you will see the meaning of this some day." I am trying to see the meaning of being

able to look after myself. But not really yet because now I am not able to run my own life yet, I am still looking at people to help me. (Boy, 15, Rwanda)

A young woman from DRC describes how she learned to cook and look after the house from her mother. The quote shows how important this is for her sense of who she is.

We cook for everyone. This is salt, I took a picture of. Most of the times when I cook I always put enough salt in the food – my sister puts too much salt, mine is just right – I like to make things just right.

We cook pap. I learned to cook it like this. My mum and my sister taught me how to cook. (Girl, 14, DRC)

But identity was not a simple issue for these children because alongside their family identifiers they also had an identity as a ‘refugee’. Often this identity was represented fairly neutrally such as in this artwork and narrative where the boy likens a refugee to a replanted tree.



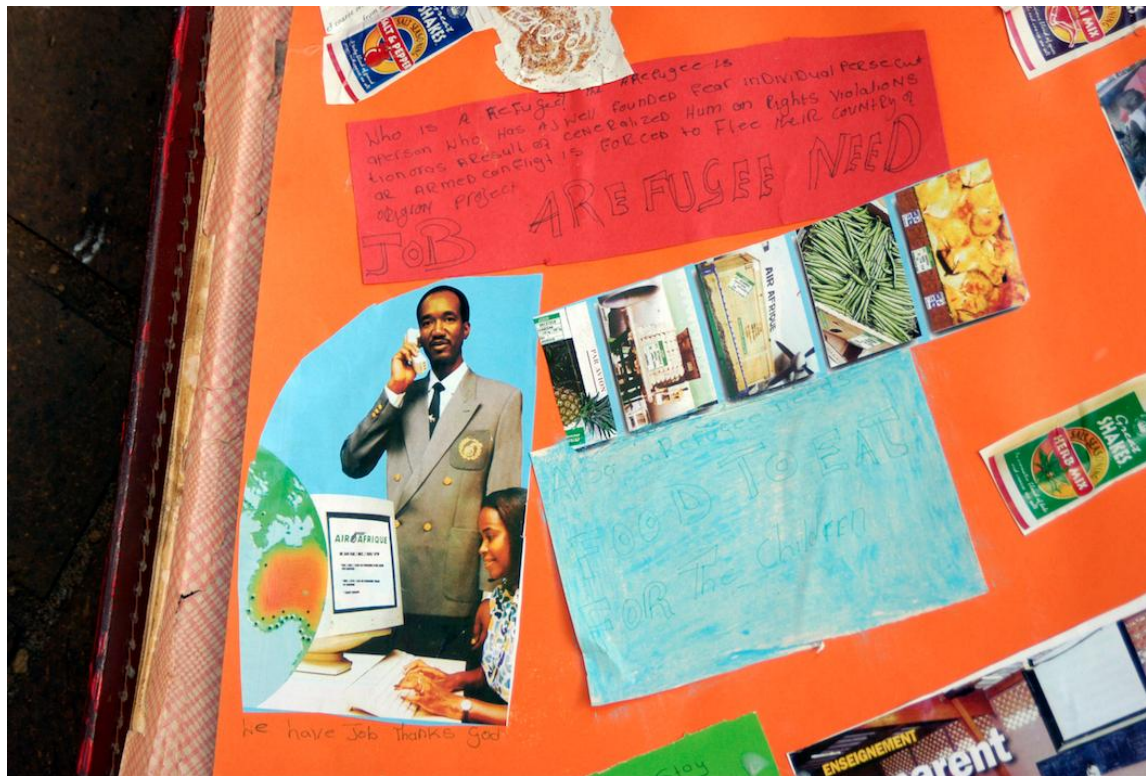
The picture on the outside [of my suitcase] shows how South Africa changed many refugees’ lives. Some of us came here struggling and it changed our life. This picture that says ‘Soul of Africa’ the green part shows how refugees lost their land, the red is how we lost our families. The yellow in the other picture is a bit brighter. It shows how refugees’ lives changed in South Africa. They found people like [the local religious organisation] who helped them and they were able to plant their trees again. The trees are growing together and they have roots in the soil of South Africa now. (Boy, 14, Burundi)

Images of suitcases to represent a refugee were also common.



Some of the children who had experienced refugee camps presented a more biased image of the refugee, as someone who needed help. The collage below is an example of this. There is evidence here of some internalising of the ‘refugee and persecution and war’ narrative.





The extract from my field notes about a young man shows how this adoption of the identity of refugee made relationships difficult and complex. I struggled to relate to one or two of the children as I felt uneasy about the stories they told.

Field notes: 6. 2004

I have never felt so unsure of “the truth” as with Kas. I always tell the children, “I will believe you, whatever you tell me – It is your decision what you tell me” and I don’t have any feeling of unease as the stories are told. But with Kas I am just not sure. First of all he seems to be older than 18. And he told me a convoluted story of escaping on the day he wrote his final exams and how his father was persecuted and had to escape. I am just not sure where the feeling of unease comes from, I feel “played” but his story is no more fantastical than some of the other stories. I can also see that he recognises my personal fascination with Ethiopia – he brought magazine pictures of Lalibela and placed them in his suitcase. There is a real pride in his country but I think he has also ‘read’ me well. I think I will just make a decision to take all he says at face value. But it is a feeling worse than being not told the truth – I

sometimes wonder if I haven't got myself in the middle of a convoluted scam ... Especially when he phoned me and said he had found his father and he was at the airport with him but he was very sick... What does one do with instincts like this? I keep thinking of the Boyden article that says if children are lying one needs to ask "Why?" It is actually a sign of agency, a survival strategy. I am just unsure about what he gains from telling me this "refugee narrative".

Another young man in the group even labelled such narratives as "lying truths" as we talked about them. His family had survived in South Africa through assistance from a local catholic church, a local Lutheran church and later a local Muslim social service organisation. This survival demanded a degree of "playing the game" by his mother. The children had attended a Catholic Church, a Lutheran Church and later adopted a Muslim identity (which it seemed was the original identity of his mother). This sophisticated survival strategy worked for the family but it became clear as he grew older that the use of "lying truths" worked against him. He had been a member of the group from its start as a boy of 12. I have remained in touch with the boy and as a young adult in 2013 he struggled to operate in his adult professional life because he had to tell the truth about who he was and what he could and could not do.

This use of a refugee narrative (a "lying truth") is a common phenomenon. Kohli in his 2006 work on unaccompanied children and their stories to social workers describes

Ayotte's (2000) study of the lives of 218 cases of children seeking asylum in Western Europe ...confirms that sometimes when they are asked about the reasons for seeking sanctuary, they try and squeeze their stories into the narrow channels acceptable to asylum givers in their chosen country of refuge. (p. 710)

But isn't this just a reflection of what Spyrou (2011) calls the complexity of children's voices, "the messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality and multi-layered nature of meaning in 'stories'" (p. 162). Isn't this an example of the kind of active agency that Burman sees as a part of childhood identity and to which Boyden (2003)

refers (see page 32 of this thesis). It may be a sign of resilience but it can also work against the children.

At this point I want to refer back to Burman's work discussed in Chapter 4.2. Burman makes the point that "If the price of innocence is passivity, then the cost of resourcefully dealing with conditions of distress and deprivation is to be pathologised" (Burman, 1994, p. 244). The strategy of being "the victim" or the use of "the victim narrative" was very strongly embedded in some of the children's identity, especially in children who had been in refugee camps. This extract from my field notes shows how this identity can be turned on and off and how it can work against the children's best interests.

Field notes: 2. 2006

I met with Juli today at the principal's office, where (her child) is at school. I could not believe it. She was such a victim, her body language was bent over, she spoke in a halting English so unlike her actual fluency. She kept saying, "But I don't have enough money, I don't have a job, I am a refugee." The young woman I knew was so different. She stood up for herself, she told wicked stories about people who had oppressed her over the years. She had started a small business that she ran with acuity and even cunning. Yet here with the principal she was a victim. K [the psychologist from a local service centre] was also at the meeting. Now I understand why K gets so frustrated with Juli, why she says she does not help herself – why K says she is so "deeply depressed". I don't see her as "deeply depressed". With me she is strong and brave but she is a different person with service providers – she plays the victim refugee.

This pathologising is exactly what Burman describes (1994, p. 244) as the cost of resourcefulness.

What became clear to me over the time of the project is the fact that the children were adept at choosing an identity to suit the situation. This was brought home to me very early on in the project as the field notes below illustrate.

Field notes: 26. 2. 2002

I invited Ann to meet the group. We sat in a circle and introduced ourselves to each other. I said, “I am Glynis and I live in Johannesburg but I am born in Zimbabwe”, as a way to indicate how one would introduce oneself. I had spoken to the friend about the fact that the children came from all over Africa. They said, “I am Meri and I am from Berea, I am Paul and I am from Yeoville, I am Antonio and I am from Berea. No one mentioned their countries of origin. I was amazed. We had spent so much time talking and making artwork about their countries of origin over the last few Saturdays. I puzzled over it and then realised that it could be related to the xenophobia they experienced. Their natural response in the face of a stranger was to “be South African” just in case.

In this situation there was no obvious benefit in being a ‘refugee’ so they reverted to the identity they most commonly used with strangers. They pretended they were South African. This was something they had to do everyday because of the xenophobic violence they experienced. Language was one way to pretend to be South African. Most of the children had been in South Africa for a few years only, some only for months but most spoke English *and* a South African language, isiZulu was the most common as it is the language widely spoken on the streets of Hillbrow and by pupils in the local schools. CJ explained to me why he learned isiZulu so quickly.

They see you are black and then speak to you in Zulu. If you cannot answer them they laugh and say you can only speak English you are not black, you are not African. (Boy, 15, Burundi)

The use of language by police as an indicator of foreignness was also a motivation for learning isiZulu.

The police do ask you in Zulu where you are born and you have to say a place, a village name in KwaZulu-Natal and then they will leave you. (Boy, 17, Zimbabwe)

But it wasn't only the mask of language the children had to wear if they were to survive. It was also their clothes and their body language that had to fit in too. This was related to their survival in Hillbrow specifically.

Then you have also to worry about the *tsotsis* (street criminals). They rob you and take your money, phone, clothes even. The only way for survival here is to look like you are a *tsotsi*. You have to walk like them, dress like them. When you see them following you, you just turn and say, "Same job, same job." Then they leave you. You have to look like one of them to survive. (Boy, 15, DRC)

This constant need to adapt identity added to the experience of 'living on the edge' (see 5.1.3).

Another layer of identity for the children to deal with was their official identity. None of the children had officially sanctioned identity papers..As Chapter 2 explains most of the children had a paper showing asylum seeker status that they had applied for when they first arrived. But few had renewed this for a number of reasons. The law required returning to the office where it was originally processed for renewal. For many of them this meant travelling to Pretoria, a R200 taxi fare away, too much for them. Then if they did get to the Home Affairs office to renew their permit they had to wait in long queues and even then (as Philip describes in his narrative about his own self-created document on page 113) there were often bureaucratic delays.

Some of the children had been helped by NGOs to apply for permanent refugee status but even with the help of an NGO this process could take years. For example, one Angolan boy who had been in the country since he was six years old was helped by a local human rights legal NGO to apply for permanent refugee residence status. After five years of waiting and regular follow up by the organisation he had still not received any documents. His answer to this problem was to buy a false refugee identity document. The war in Angola was over so Angolan refugees were being repatriated from South Africa. This boy, therefore, changed his name to a French name and bought a Congolese identity – another example of a "tactic" (De Certeau, 1984, p. xix).

Their lack of national identity worried the children. This is seen by their often saying that it was not right that they had to deny who they were, South Africans should accept them.

‘Let’s get free’ it says on my suitcase. We are refugees in a foreign country and the thing is we want to be treated the same as South African people are. It makes no difference if we are not born here because we are all African and we are all people. It is saying that refugees should be treated the same. (Boy, 15, Angola)

What became clear as I analysed the material I had collated around the theme of identity was the way the children had sought to make meaning by confirming where they were in the world. This could be a response to the “untethering” they felt after their flight from home or a response to their lack of official identity and their need to hide their own national identity as well as their lack of identity with a family.

But, whatever the reason, almost all of the children used the art-making on their suitcases to affirm where they were in the world (a part of meaning-making, perhaps?)

The world (usually as a globe) was a common image on the suitcases:



Boy (12) DRC



Boy (15) Burundi

Once located in ‘the world’ many of the children then located themselves in Africa by drawing maps of Africa or writing ‘Africa’ on their drawings. Interestingly, the maps

were not related to the journey they had made from their country of origin but, were mostly of Africa as a locator of identity.

This is Africa here on my suitcase. In Africa is my first home, DRC and my new home, South Africa. So I drew Africa. (Boy, 10, DRC)



Having located themselves as children of the world and then Africa, they then located themselves in their country of origin with flags and maps. The importance of the place where they were born is emphasised in this quote.

I, me, myself I was born there in DRC. (Boy, 10, DRC)



This is how the boy who made the suitcase above described what he had made.

Here is a road. It shows my journey and here is flag of my country. I really love my country even though I am not there. Although I am not there I can still remember it. (Boy, 15 DRC)

The Ethiopian children also used language as a marker of identity, often writing in Amharic on their suitcases.



Having identified themselves with their home country they then located themselves in South Africa. South African flags were a very common motif on the suitcases.





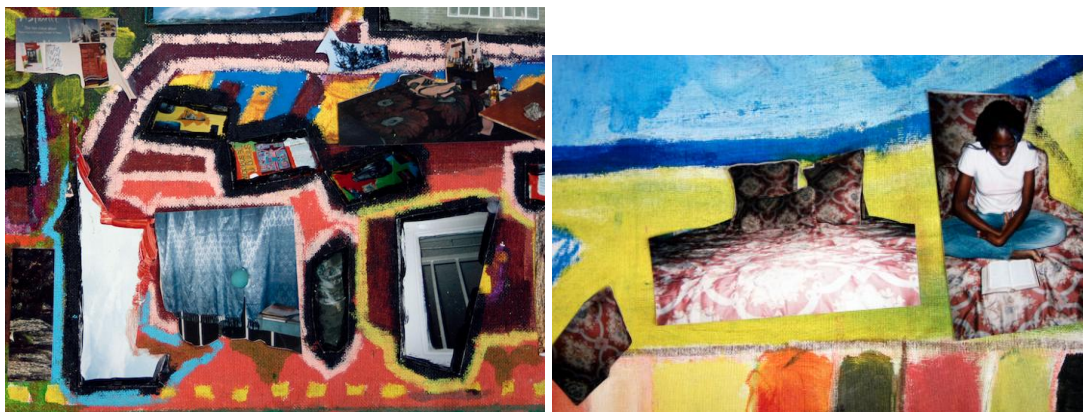
The next space-locator was Hillbrow. I have already discussed the prevalence of iconic images of Hillbrow's high-rise buildings on the suitcases, but what is relevant here are the artworks that showed the particular building where they lived. When we used disposable cameras the entranceways to their apartment blocks and the doors to apartments were a common image. Note that most of these photographs were cut up and incorporated into collages, hence the fragments and paint.



There were also many photographs where they posed in Hillbrow.



Many children also used the rooms they rented as a locator, taking photographs inside their rooms.



This quote illustrates how this boy feels at home in his room in Hillbrow.

I like in my room, I feel comfortable and more clever in my room. Because when I am there, anything I can ask myself I will be able to answer. (Boy, 16, DRC)

The children used the art-making to place themselves in the world. But it was not only the art-making that contributed to meaning-making around identity. The exhibitions and publication of the book played an important role too.

We were celebs. It made me feel like a VIP, because the time we wanted to go into the art exhibition this (security) man chased us away – he thought we are

the street kids. Diane came and said we were the ARTISTS! I liked that. We were the ARTISTS. (Girl, 14, DRC)

What this quote illustrates is how the Suitcase Project allowed the children to adopt new identities; to thicken their stories further.

They also became writers as we made the book, *The Suitcase Stories* together. This point is resonant of White's (2005 and 2003) discussion of the need for war-affected children to thicken their stories beyond that of victim. As, I have discussed earlier the Suitcase Project process was informed by the idea of internal re-authoring expressed in the work of White. Carr (1998) in his discussion of White's therapeutic approach described the link between narrative and identity.

[For White]... narratives are not representations of reflections of identities, lives, and problems. Rather narratives constitute identities, lives, and problems (Bruner, 1986, 1987, 1991). According to this position, the process of therapeutic re-authoring of personal narratives changes lives, problems, and identities because personal narratives are constitutive of identity. (Carr, 1998, p. 486)

What this means is that as the children explored all the different identities they had through the art-making and storytelling they began to thicken their story and "re-author" their personal narratives beyond the identity of "victim" or "refugee" to a more complex identity that included the past and the present and various spatial contexts.

The ideas of Bradbury and Miller in their 2010 paper on how to help young South African's rewrite their identity in the context of a post Apartheid South Africa are useful here. Their work can help to explain how the storytelling and art-making helped the young people in the Suitcase Project create new "thicker" identities. Bradbury and Miller describe a project that helped young people to "articulate new versions of [them]selves ... through multiple modes of the arts as a vehicle for exploring identities" (p. 689). Bradbury and Miller posit that the development of identity is possible through the use of the arts because the arts "... offer the ...

capacity to “escape”, or at least make the discursive constraints of the internalized other elastic or permeable. Language (or discourse) simultaneously regulates us and creates the possibility for novelty, resistance, and interpretation” (p. 692). The arts create a zone of proximal development that allows for new thinking about traditionally-held ideas that shape identity. They talk about the “sense of losing ourselves in a book, a film, a piece of music” (p. 692). I think that the art-making and storytelling played a similar role for the children in the project. The context in which the Suitcase Children had to find a sense of positive identity was a cultural one that denied the agency of children, a political one that labelled them “illegal aliens” and made them queue every three months for papers that called them asylum seekers, and a social context of extreme xenophobia that labelled them *makwerekwere*.

The artwork on and in the suitcases created the distance that allowed them to reflect on their own lives and begin to think about it in new ways as they told their stories to each other and over time to find an identity beyond *makwerekwere*, beyond “refugee”. They began to see themselves as Congolese, as South African, as teenagers, as residents of Hillbrow, as youth leaders, as artists, as people who felt “at home in the world”. In this way the tropes of identity-seeking presented in this sub-theme are too a part of the meaning-making process.

CHAPTER 6: UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND TRAUMA INTERVENTION IN NEW WAYS

The Suitcase Project praxis drew on much of the recent theory around perceptions of children, understandings of trauma and interventions to help children cope with this trauma (see Chapter 4). What then, is the contribution of this work to theory in these fields? What does this work tell us about how we should be developing interventions for migrant children affected by war, loss and exile? The new learning that has emerged can be summed up in seven themes:

- Meaning-making
- Accepting fragments
- Art versus talk
- The use of metaphor
- Space to express agency
- Objects and the everyday
- A community of grief

These themes draw on the description of the project in Chapter 3 and are developed in relation to the theory discussed in Chapter 4. But, most importantly, they are rooted in the children's words and images presented in Chapter 5. I will discuss each of the themes in turn in this final chapter.

6.1 Meaning-making



The literature explored in Chapter 3 shows that children affected by war experience “a rupture in the narrative threads running through their lives” (Summerfield, 1998, p.

16). This rupture is the result of “edge-of-existence-experiences” (Lester, 2013 p. 753) that the Suitcase Project was never afraid to allow the children to face. The project opened space for the children “to speak of what they have not had the opportunity to speak of, to put words [or artwork] to what ha[d] been unmentionable” (White, 2005 p. 20). As the addition in the previous quote shows it was the art-making that gave the unmentionable voice. Looking at it from a neurological perspective, the art allowed the “... the important sensori-motor, holistic, autobiographical, stress-reducing, image-based self-regulatory functions of ... non-verbal neural modes of processing” (Siegel, 2006, p. xiv) to work alongside the logical one that blocked out the trauma. In this way it helped the children towards creating a “balance in [their] lives” (Siegel, 2006, p. xiv).

It is clear from the children’s words and art in Chapter 5 the extent to which a complex collection of events and losses had “untethered” (Lester, 2013, p. 753) them from the ‘ordinary’ trajectory of childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Their lives had become “unbalanced” like Antonio’s suitcase. But what stands out when looking at how they describe their experience in Chapter 5 is that they do not describe how they are as “... injury” (Lester, 2013 p. 755), or being in a state of “hapless victimhood” (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1997, p. 483) in the way some trauma discourse would have it. Lester (2013) points out that after war “People find ways to go on living—not just by resolving deep psychological conflicts or by reorganizing their experience to meet existing categories, but through ongoing, iterative, continuous processes of meaning-making that emerge in relationship with others, across a variety of levels and contexts, and through time (p. 754)”.

What emerges from Chapter 5 is that each child is seeking to make some kind of sense of his or her life, to find a “logic and structure [for] the violence” (Zarowsky, 2004, p. 204) that they experienced. What we see in the narratives from the Suitcase Project is less a description of trauma in the pathological sense but rather an attempt to make sense out of experience. To make sense out of what Finnström (2008) calls “existential uncertainties ... [to] orient [themselves] and seek meaning as they engage the world and live their humanity (p. 28)”. They are trying to “articulate and mediate experiences and stories among one another in a patterning and systematic manner (Arhem 1994: 19-24)” (Finnström, p. 7), trying to create some kind of order through

explanation, to link the past, the present and the future (Kohli & Mather, 2003).

One of the contributions of this work is its focus on ‘making meaning’ rather than ‘healing’ and the potential this shift of focus holds for interventions with vulnerable children. The children do not see themselves as broken, as victims as they are so often seen in ‘healing’ approaches (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1997). They see themselves as ‘out of balance’ and with great resilience and determination they seek to find the balance. They are directing us to interventions informed by a paradigm of meaning-making.

The material in Chapter 5 directs us to the importance of a meaning-making approach to work with children affected by war and it gives an example of how to apply such a paradigm. An intervention that aims for ‘meaning-making’ (a concept rooted in an anthropological understanding of trauma) as opposed to ‘healing’ (which is what most interventions rooted in psychological or psychosocial theory aim for) will be structured in a certain way.

The child would be viewed as active, as resilient. Children’s coping strategies (both socially acceptable and ‘unacceptable’) would be viewed as evidence of power and not pathology. The intervention would be viewed as a step in a life-long journey rather than an intervention with a distinct end-point that can be measured through typical psychosocial evaluation tools. This view of the intervention would free the children from a self-sense of deficit and guilt to an understanding that they are on a life-long journey towards making sense of the extreme experiences they have coped with.

Textured activities made up of many different experiences and media fit into a process of meaning-making because making meaning suggests layers laid down over time (see the discussion below). The many different art processes and myriad materials of the Suitcase Project are but one example of the kinds of tools that work in layers and over time. The same principle could be applied to work in any one of the arts or many different arts together, as long as the process encourages reflection, allows for the layering of memory and experience and takes place over time.

6.2 Accepting fragments



The children show us in Chapter 5 that a fragmentary process of narrative creation is an important part of the meaning-making process. What the children present are fragments of the past, the present and even sometimes the future, all muddled together. There is no attempt on their part to create a single narrative.

I am not suggesting, given that the children presented their lived experience as fragmentary, that there was no need to help them see some kind of narrative thread in their lives. As mentioned above I acknowledge, along with Summerfield (1998) and others that those forced into exile experience “a rupture in the narrative threads running through their lives” (p. 16) and that they need to make their “situation comprehensible” (Finnström, 2008, p. 7). I agree too with Kohli & Mather (2003) that to do this the Suitcase Project children needed to look back to their past and forward to their future. They needed to “thicken their stories” (White 2003, p. 2) so that they could make meaning of an identity that was more than just ‘victim of trauma’. Thus, there was a need for them to create some kind of narrative thread; a ‘handle’ to hold on to the suitcase, there was a need to make sense of their lives. But, by acknowledging the fragmentary nature of their tropes of trauma the Suitcase process allowed them to work in a fragmentary way and to build up the narrative slowly in their own time and in their own way. Even within the project process their narratives

were never seen as complete, the suitcases were always there in the art room even when we had moved on from working with them if the children wanted to add something to them or change them in any way.

What was it in the Suitcase process that allowed the children to express their trauma in their own way, as fragments of grief and loss? One of the things that allowed this was the organising concept used for the work - a 'window into your life'. The 'window' was a key aspect of the process, as it did not require a linear logical narrative to be presented by the children. It recognised the fractured and fragmentary nature of their experiences and allowed these fragments to be used by the children to build their own narratives over time.



The roles that the artist-facilitator (Diane) and the story-recorder (me) played supported the process described above. At no point did we demand that they make sense of what they wanted to say before they said it. They chose what to represent in the artwork and what to say about it. When they chose to tell me about the images they had made I did not ask for logical, linear narratives. I did not even ask for 'truth'; fact and fiction mingled with metaphor and direct accounts. I was happy with windows, with fragments. I never asked, "... and what happened then" (because it wasn't my task to make meaning of it) I just accepted what I was given and gave it weight by recording it.

Another part of the process that allowed for fragments was the fact that they worked on small pieces of paper, slowly adding these to the suitcase to tell their stories. They also used many different kinds of materials to build up their stories on their suitcases. Many of these materials were fragmentary in a literal sense; cut cardboard shapes, mosaic tiles, torn paper, beads and found objects such as bottle tops. This variety was in itself significant for meaning-making because the haphazard collection of materials represented or mirrored the chaos of their past and present lives. By building ‘scrappiness’ into the process we were mirroring their own outer lives and allowing an internal ordering or meaning-making through the external process of making the windows and placing them onto and into suitcases until they formed some kind of coherent whole.

6.3 Art versus talk



The second feature that could be structured into a meaning-making intervention for children relates to art-making. There is acknowledgement amongst those who use the arts as a tool to help people cope with trauma that the process of art-making can mirror an internal process of reflection (for example, Haen, 2009 and Buk, 2009). But often these processes use art as a way into ‘talk’. What we see in the Suitcase Project is an example of how the art itself was an *alternative* to talk.

The Suitcase Project’s focus on ‘not talking’ was a conscious response to the children’s wish not to talk about the things that made them sad, “... this woman was

pressurising me to talk, talk, talk ...” (Boy, 16, Burundi) and “I have bad memories inside my head – a lot. The way it is, to talk about them reminds me of things, a lot of things. It’s not good. It’s too painful ... If you want to cry, when are you going to stop?” (Boy, 18, Rwanda).

Diane describes on page 16 of this thesis how she talked encouragingly about the artwork while “never embellishing their stories for them, never assuming that I knew what was behind the drawing, nor expecting them to enlighten me.” I was also always very clear that the children could choose to talk about their art or not, that they could stop talking even if they began to tell a story. The fact that some of the children never talked about any of their artwork and that many did pieces of artwork that they never talked about is evidence of this approach. The fragmentary nature of the work also meant they could choose to talk about one piece of artwork but not another. And when we did talk it was not to help them heal but to record things for a book.

In the research methodology section of this thesis I look at art-based approaches such as “photo elicitation” (Harper, 1998 and 2002). Though the approach I used in the Suitcase Project is informed by this work I did not use the art to *elicit* information but as a form of communication in itself. The art was the ‘window into their life’. Diane sums up what was unique about the communication in the Suitcase Project when she says, “My main concern was to encourage the children to be confident in their ability to communicate *through their art*” (my emphasis).

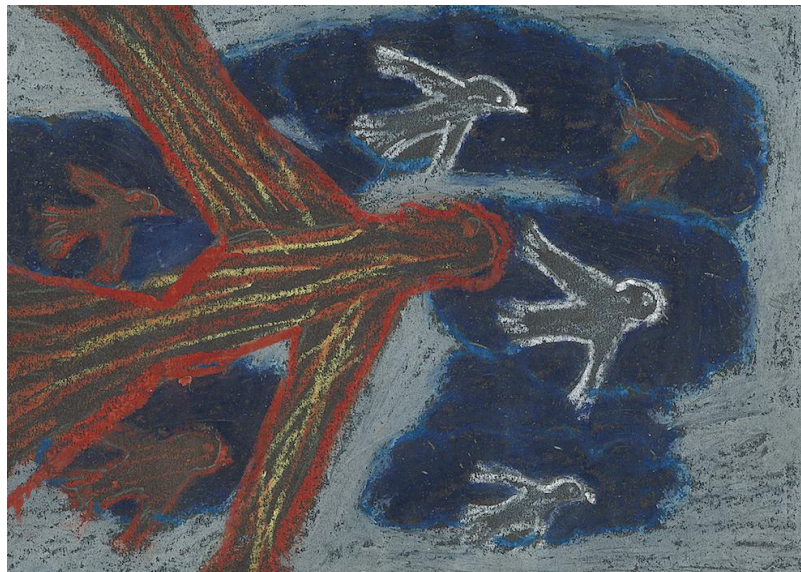
This does not mean that we avoided the need for “opening space for people to speak of what they have not had the opportunity to speak of, to put words to what has been unmentionable” (White, 2005 p. 20). However, it was the art-making, rather than words, that gave the unmentionable voice.

Within the project we also acknowledged and respected the fact that silence was a choice; that some experiences “could not be storie[d] into sense” (Squire, 2008, p. 44). That within the aesthetic paradigm “sound and silence, gesture and stillness, color and the blank canvas” (Sutton & De Bakker, 2009, p. 119) are all acceptable and that we needed to apply an “ethic of restraint” (Parsons, 2012, p. 13) by allowing the children the opportunity to ‘speak’ through their artwork only if they wanted to. This

meant that the process fitted into an aesthetic paradigm where the art is used, not instrumentally, but as an end in itself.

The children did acknowledge that the art they made sometimes included reference to feelings (“when we draw, we don’t just draw, we draw how we feel at the time”) but what was important to them was that the process was not centred around talk, “because some problems that some of us have, we don’t want anyone to know” and “there are certain stories to be told and some not to be told”. Pierre cannot say how he felt about his mother’s death (his mother is simply “missing”) but his art allows for an extremely vivid representation of this significant silence. What we have in the Suitcase Project, therefore, is an intervention for war-affected children rooted in the aesthetic, where the art becomes an end in itself rather than a step towards talk and hence allows for a rich process of meaning-making.

6.4 The power of metaphor



Before I started the Suitcase Project I partly understood that an art-based approach had some power in the context of meaning-making. What I did not anticipate was the extent to which the use of an aesthetic paradigm would encourage the children to produce the range of metaphors that they did. Nor did I realise the important role that metaphor would play in the form of the project.

Chapter 5 is rich with examples of “... important aspects of human experience [that] escape narrative and cannot be storie[d] into sense” (Squire, 2008, p. 44), that are unrepresentable (Frosh, 2002) except as metaphor. One of the reasons why rich metaphors emerged was that metaphor is a central characteristic of the aesthetic, within which the project was framed.

But there is more to the use of metaphor in the work of the project. Ricoeur’s (Furmuzachi, 2003) definition of metaphor, where emotion, cognition and imagination are all complementary, is relevant here. What the Suitcase Project process did was to create a space for the use of the cognitive, the imaginative and the emotional (which Ricoeur suggests are all needed) to create metaphor through art-making. The use of the art process gave the children the opportunity to create rich metaphors that could express what had previously been unrepresentable and unmentionable.



It was not the art-making alone that created the opportunity for metaphor-making. The entire form of the project is built on the concept of metaphor. At the first meeting of the group in our art space we introduced the key metaphor of the old, used suitcase,

which had been on a long journey just like the children had. We then asked them to decorate the suitcases with “windows into their lives”. We made metaphor central and possible and encouraged it in our language and activity.

It is significant that some of the children created or used the existing locking mechanisms on their suitcases to prevent anyone seeing what was inside. The suitcase lock stood for what they chose to keep to themselves but also for the fact that they had control over what was seen or talked about. The locks were a metaphor for their agency. When Antonio said he had no idea what to put on to his suitcase I told him to think about why the case he had chosen had no handle, allowing him to create one of the most powerful metaphors of the whole project, the suitcase without a handle - the unbalanced life. Jenny, on the other hand, as a metaphor of her well-honed coping skills, plaited a handle from scraps of material to create a handle for her suitcase – she did not leave it unbalanced. Trees became metaphors for lost landscapes, lost families and new opportunities of taking root in a new country. Birds represented both flight and the loss of particular natural environments; footsteps became metaphors for lost grandfathers.

The use of metaphor allowed the children to mention the “unmentionable” (White, 2005), to represent the “unrepresentable” (Frosh, 2002). It made it possible for the children to represent the horror of what they had experienced in a way that protected them from the violence. They could show horror through a lion, a black heart, a red splatter or a magazine cutout.

It is commonly acknowledged that using art is an ethical way of helping war-affected children deal with their trauma because it provides emotional distance from the traumatic events. This literature is explored in Chapter 4 in some detail. The literature does not, however, talk specifically about metaphor. This is one of the contributions of this work. It shows how the use of metaphor is partly what gives an art-based approach the power to help children make meaning of traumatic lives and landscapes.

An example of metaphor used in a very different project with women living in a shelter for vulnerable women (Walker & Clacherty, 2015) shows how it is possible to use metaphor in different contexts and art forms. In this work the women told their

life stories through the creation of fantasy ball gowns made from paper and various found objects. The ball gown metaphor allowed the women to escape the extremely hard reality that they found themselves in and gave them the space to reflect on their past, present and future within the comfort of a fantasy metaphor. The power of this metaphor in the meaning-making process is described in the article referenced above. The relevance of this is that it illustrates how the use of metaphor in a process can be applied in different settings for making meaning.

There is more to the role of metaphor in the Suitcase Project. It also played a role in the children's reinventing of their identity in the sense of 'thickening' it White (2005). For Ricoeur "metaphor does not mirror reality but it re-describes it, it makes it more diverse and fuller" (Furmuzachi, 2003, p. 4). White does not refer directly to the use of metaphor in the 'thickening' of identity but it is clear from this project that this is what it allowed the children to do. The children used metaphorical images to represent identities beyond that of victim.

Jackson (1995) makes a direct link between metaphor and meaning-making when he says, "we seek connections between experiences and activities that belong to different places *within* the world, metaphor moving us" (p. 157). For Jackson, meaning is made when connections are made and connections are made through metaphors which "mediate correspondence between parts of the world of experience that are not ordinarily seen as belonging together, such as the human body, the body of a community, and the body of the land" (p. 157). These are exactly the kinds of metaphors the children made. What the Suitcase Project gives us is an example of how such a process can use metaphor to help children make connections and thus make meaning and feel "at home in the world". This understanding is built on the foundation of much previous work on trauma but the deliberate use of metaphor in form and activity is something new that the children have taught us in this work.

6.5 Space to express agency



The idea of building an intervention on child agency is not necessarily innovative, as the exploration of theory in Chapter 4 shows. What is innovative about the Suitcase Project was the fact that the theoretical concept of ‘child agency’ was reflected in the actual process or form of the project. One key aspect of the *form* that reflected child agency was the creation of an ‘open space’ both literally and internally.

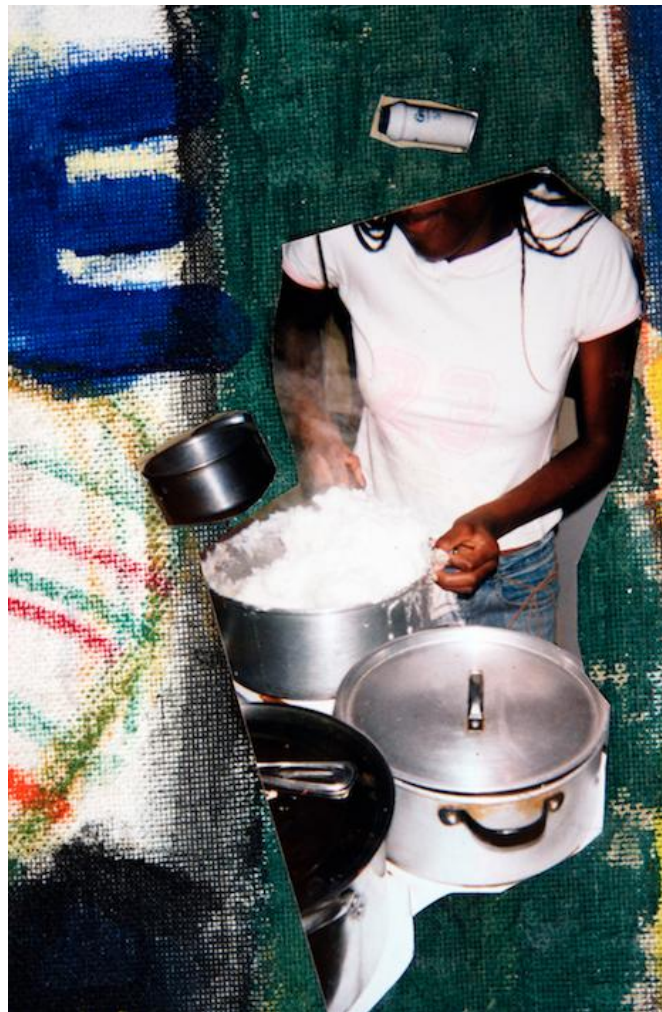
The nature of the literal open space is described in detail in Chapter 3. What is important here is that this open space allowed the children to be in charge of everything they did on a Saturday morning for three or four hours. They had none of this control over their everyday lives and, although they used the considerable resources they had to cope, this demanded constant vigilance, and sometimes all of their considerable internal resources were not enough. On Saturday mornings, though, *they* were in control; *they* could decide what activity they did, when and how.

But the open space did more than give them control; it also allowed them to literally craft their past, their present and their future (Kohli & Mather, 2003). As ‘poor refugees’ or ‘victims’ they were seen as people without a past or future, merely as needy, as victims. Note how this view of refugees was so often expressed in the public stereotype of the refugee when I interacted with the media and general public about the project and the children. But the children used the open space we gave them to show that they were much more than this, they had a past in which they were loved, cared for and nurtured by natural environments and people. They came from communities where they were known and were not strangers. The open space we gave them allowed them to create this ‘past’, literally through the artwork and storytelling. This literal creation of a past worked at an internal level too, it reminded them of who they were. It allowed them to express their role as social agents in previous stable environments.

They also used the artwork to create a ‘present’ for themselves. They did this by placing themselves firmly in the environment of Hillbrow in their photographs. They claimed their everyday environments through representations of the small details of their lives. They expressed their agency by expressing their outrage at the way their rights were violated by officials and local residents of their neighbourhoods. Then, some of them began to claim the agency they were expressing by thinking about their futures. Some of them began to make decisions about schooling, earning money and what was important to them as they grew up. This too was expressed in the open space of the artwork and storytelling, as we see in Chapter 5.

The unique contribution of the Suitcase Project is that it provides an example of how an intervention can be structured to create an open space at a literal and internal level that allows for young people to re-create themselves. It is possible to draw from the Suitcase Project process concrete examples of what is meant by ‘literal and internal open space’ and to insert these characteristics into interventions for children who have experienced trauma.

6.6 Objects and the everyday



Chapter 5 is rich with detailed drawings of, and narratives about, everyday objects and rituals. The extent of this focus on the everyday emerged only when I began to analyse the material for this research. As with the idea of ‘metaphor’ I had not noticed it as the children and I worked together. The richness and extent of the work done by the children on their everyday worlds, both past and present, suggests that it was an important part of the meaning-making process for them.

One of the reasons this focus on the everyday emerged was because of the metaphor of the ‘window into your life’. As discussed earlier, this encouragement of a ‘small view’ was a very important part of the Suitcase Project because it allowed for the recall of fragments of memory and the representation of them in small pieces of

artwork. One of the results of this was the small drawings of household objects and the recall of the role these played in everyday rituals.

The literature explored in Chapters 4 and 5 shows that there has been some work on the importance of the everyday in helping those who have experienced war to make sense of their lives. Walker (2010) shows how the focus on the everyday can be an act of resistance for those in the midst of present conflict. The Suitcase Project work shows that it can also be an act of resistance in the process of recovery from trauma. Recalling the everyday of the past gave the children an opportunity to remind themselves (and any of us who see their work) that their lives were normal, that they existed beyond the chaos of war and migration and the precarity of the refugee. By recalling the “sanity [and] ... peace” (Ring, 2006, p. 182) they had lost, by acknowledging it as ‘lost’, by controlling it in this way, they began to find some meaning.

The focus on the everyday in the present was also an act of resistance and resilience. The similarity between the everyday objects and rituals recalled from the past with the representations of the present everyday stands out. It is as if the children have sought out in their, often chaotic, present lives objects and rituals that they know from past experience can create meaning. Even in the context of precarious living conditions and the injustice of xenophobia and poverty linked to their migrant status the children made homes for themselves in their small rooms. They created meaningful relationships and new rituals of relationship even in the midst of exile from family. The images of this ‘resistance in the present’ on their suitcases reminded them that not only did they survive war but they would also survive the present. Jackson (1995) suggests that we begin to “feel at home in the world” when we feel in control of aspects of it. There was so much the children could not control but they could control their intimate environments: their images and photographs of these rooms were evidence of this.

There is another role that the everyday objects and rituals of the past played for the children. They became objects of remembrance; they became imbued with a symbolic and metaphorical power. Many of the images of everyday objects carry the “deep wounds” of Barthe’s (1970) photo of his mother. This is particularly true of the

images of lost family members but also evident in the images of trees and animals and flowers.



In one sense their treatment of the images is ‘sacred’ in the weight of meaning they attach to them. As the description of the project in Chapter 3 shows (see page 18) we treated their work as precious and important. This reinforced the idea of the sacred. This idea is linked to the discussion above on art versus talk. What happened for the children as they made the images that held deep emotional meaning for them was that they ‘articulated’ the wound through the art and in the privacy of their thoughts. For many of them this was deep below the surface and could not be articulated in words. By giving them the opportunity to represent the everyday, both pragmatic and sacred, the Suitcase process allowed them to articulate both what they had lost and found, a key process in making meaning.

What the Suitcase process gives us is an example of how to create a space for the recall and representation of the everyday. It would be possible to build this focus into work with migrant children in many different art forms and activities. This too is a contribution of this work to our understanding of processes of meaning-making for vulnerable children.



6.7 A community of grief

In Chapter 4 I presented the work of Tolfree (1996) as one of the key influences on the development of the Suitcase Project process. It is clear from the previous discussion in this chapter how Tolfree's view of the child refugee as being able to participate in their own recovery is embedded in the project. However, Tolfree also talks of the importance of relationships. He describes the need for "a special form of interaction ... with which people themselves can discover and build on their own and *each other's personal resources* (p. 113, my emphasis)". The dialogic nature of the storytelling, the simple meal we ate together, the asking after the children who were missing, the sense of identity created by the public work of the project all contributed to the creation of a community of support amongst the children that has extended beyond the life of the project, to the present in many instances.

Many other programmes encourage the development of group identity and also work to create a network of support within an intervention, but the picture that emerges from the children's stories and artwork in Chapter 5 suggests something deeper. What the artwork and narratives present us with is a community of grief. It was in reading Butler's (2004, 2009) work on personal understandings of grief and vulnerability in the broader context of global violence that I began to understand the depth of the community of grief the children had created and how this helped them to make

meaning of their personal loss but also to make a statement of advocacy about being a child refugee in South Africa, a political community.

Walker (2014) describes how through the processes of grieving and mourning an informal support group formed during the Sri Lankan violence of 2005 were able to use their vulnerability and their sense of personal dislocation to make personal meaning. She also applies Butler's (2004) work to suggest that being part of a group allowed for a "new form[s] of political community [created] through ... using [our] dependency on others, and mobilising bodily vulnerability as a means of transcending fear and forging connection ... against the destructive powers of control and manipulation" (p. 120).

This is exactly what the children in the Suitcase Project did. In Chapter 5 we see stories and images where the children share with us their vulnerability and fear and through this they create connections among each other and between themselves and the viewer. There was, from the start of the project, a sense of connection with outsiders. At the beginning of the project they said, "We want to make a book to tell people why we are here", "We want the rich people out there to see how refugees live". They did not want us to see them as mere "foreigners" or refugees. They wanted us to see each one of them as a loved child. A child placed carefully on a cloth in the shade to keep cool while their mother worked in the field, or a girl who had Sunday shoes, a boy who climbed a tree after school and whose father taught him to look after ducks, as a person who had lost all of this.

Butler's (2009) work helped me to understand how political an act it was for some of the most marginalised and vulnerable of society to speak out in this way. Butler suggests that the media frames those affected by war as disembodied, as having no life for us as outsiders to apprehend. By allowing those who have previously been invisible to be seen, those whose lives have not been worthy of notice to articulate how they are not disembodied children but daughters, sons, brothers, sisters is what we need if we are to create a more ethical world order.

We read about lives lost and are often given the numbers, but these stories are repeated every day, and the repetition appears endless, irremediable. And so,

we have to ask, what would it take not only to apprehend the precarious character of lives lost in war, but to have that apprehension coincide with an ethical and political opposition to the losses war entails? (p. 13)

The Suitcase Project gives a concrete example of the creation of a community of grief where the members of the community made themselves vulnerable to each other and thereby helped each other to find support and to make meaning. But much more than this, by including advocacy in the process through interacting with the broader community through exhibitions and book publication, the project made sure that refugee lives were “apprehended as a life” (Butler, 2009 p. 13) by themselves, each other and all of us who view their work.

6.8 Conclusion

In this final chapter I have tried to synthesise what distinguishes the Suitcase Project from other programmes for refugee children, what aspects of it were important from the point of view of the theory and from what the children themselves told me about their lives past, present and future. Given that there is never homogeneity in context or children, I cannot claim that what we have here is a process that we can replicate, but I do think that the key points made in this chapter are considerations that are relevant to work with vulnerable children in many different contexts.

I would like to return to the research question discussed in Chapter 4, “Can the Suitcase Project praxis add to our understanding of possible intervention processes for migrant and other vulnerable children?” There is a strong call for intervention at a psychosocial level for refugee children (see literature review) but few documented examples of interventions, especially interventions that have a more holistic view of children and trauma. The detailed documentation of the Suitcase Project given in this thesis is an important contribution in this regard because it allows for an imagining of alternatives. It provides a record of practice that others may be able to apply to their situation.

Alongside this, the theory that emerges from the praxis of the project can be applied to a wide range of interventions. The seven themes that emerged from my analysis of the children’s stories and artwork can be applied to not only visual art projects but

also to projects that use other means. The ideas of space to express agency, accepting fragments, and a community of grief that can advocate for itself can be built into projects of any form from entrepreneurial programmes to language programmes to simple support groups. Meaning-making, a focus on the everyday, making instead of talking and using metaphors can be built into dance, drama and music projects, in fact any expressive programme.

A simple Internet search of projects related to the integration and acceptance of refugees globally reveals an emphasis on art-based projects. For example, the following quote from a call for proposals for a European Union Funded programme.

At a time when Europe is receiving an extraordinary number of refugees, supporting European Union Member States in tackling this situation is a key priority of the EU. In November 2015, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council of Ministers have reaffirmed that intercultural dialogue through culture and the arts plays an important role to integrate refugees. (Creative Europe, 2016)

However, use of the arts is not enough. As I look back on the work I have done here it seems to me that one of the most important things it is saying is that we need to work in a way that is rooted in deep respect for the humanity of each individual. I hope that this work makes a contribution because of its emphasis on ethical approaches that take into account agency and resilience. Children can be agents of their own healing, but to bring that about, we, as adults, need to listen, observe and respond to them in their particular place and time.

This thesis has reflected on and sought to understand children's attempts to make meaning of the extraordinary. It provides an example of how to work with and represent children who have had to endure the extraordinary. It is my hope that it will assist other children who have to make this same journey.

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