

REFUGEES AT WORK

Narratives of Identity Construction

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

November 2025

Management, Technology and Organisation Department

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Abstract

Existing literature has documented identity losses, diminished self-esteem, and employment challenges among refugees while also revealing the importance of their work integration in resettlement societies. However, we have only a limited understanding of how refugees actively negotiate and potentially transform their identities through diverse forms of work. Furthermore, in the contexts of identity and work, scholarship usually focuses on single aspects of the migration journey. This thesis explores the complex processes of identity construction among refugees through the research question – *How are refugees’ identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?* Guided by a constructivist grounded theory methodology integrated with the translocational positionality framework, I collected and analysed data from 41 participants across three groups in Aotearoa New Zealand – 22 refugees, 11 managers and mentors (M&Ms), and eight pathways-to-work providers (PWPs) – in a way that privileged participants’ voices while emphasising the co-construction of knowledge.

Five significant findings emerged from analysis of the data collected from the refugee participants. The migration journey emerged as the contextual framework for understanding identity construction, encompassing refugees’ past, present, and future. Three primary identity constructs – anchors, refugeehood, and place – were found to be influential in the formation of identities for refugees. An insider-outsider continuum was a site for identity constructions, representing a dynamic process of negotiating multiple social positions. Refugees’ resourcefulness materialised through four interconnected strategies of exercising agency, demonstrating self-efficacy, finding alternative pathways, and remaining undeterred. Finally, the meaning of work, connecting intrinsically to identity constructions throughout the migration journey, was revealed in four themes of being oneself and to be more, working for survival, working for family, and working for communities, explaining why refugees chose to work in the roles that they do.

Findings from the interviews with M&Ms and PWPs revealed five distinct motives driving their refugee assistance. Empathy was found to be a key motive, in addition to economic value, job or organisational requirement, a moral imperative, and personal fulfilment. Five key

dimensions of work integration were identified – access to work, capabilities development, changing narratives, finding meaning in work, and social and cultural integration facilitation. Finally, the concept of a metaphorical stepping stone as a provisional meaning of work component also emerged as a finding from these two participant cohorts.

From the above findings, this thesis presents a new theory on the bidirectional relationship between refugees' identity and their meaning of work constructions. It contributes to reconfiguring understandings of the dialectic between the socially constructed 'Me' and the agentic 'I' in the migration journey and work contexts. The novel theory proposes a fluid identity construction process while highlighting the interplay between identity constructs and work meanings. Refugees' resourcefulness throughout their migration journey, alongside strategies utilised by M&Ms and PWPs, influence identity formation and work meanings, and this led to the development of a new relational work integration framework.

This research advances scholarship across disciplines – forced displacement and refugee resettlement studies, organisational behaviour, the meaning of work, and sociological and social psychology – and informs resettlement policy enhancement. It reconceptualises work integration beyond traditional employment pathways. The framework developed in this thesis is attentive to refugees' unique experiences in constructing meanings from work. It contributes to refugee studies through a holistic migration journey perspective that also conceptualises refugeehood as an intricate, fluid construct incorporating agency. This thesis demonstrates how an ecosystem of employers and resettlement services organisations can provide meaningful work while supporting refugees' identity formations and recommends policy improvements requiring coordination across individual, organisational and government levels.

Acknowledgements

Words cannot fully capture the depth of my gratitude to those who made this thesis possible. Nevertheless, I wish to offer my heartfelt appreciation to all who joined me on this journey.

I firstly give thanks to God, from Whom I sought and received assurance, guidance and help, and without Whom this mountain would not have been climbable. To the other rock in my life, Mike, who endured many sleepless nights, anxiety-filled days, and all the spaces in between responding with equal measures of unconditional love and an unwavering belief in me.

To all my participants, who have opened my mind to so much more than what has been produced in this thesis. You gave so freely of your life and experiences with so few expectations, for which I remain forever grateful. The refugee participants especially – your strength is inspiring. In the moments when I felt this doctorate degree was unachievable, I found renewed inspiration in your stories.

Roy, for being on two academic journeys with me and never doubting my ability to get to the end in both, I would like to acknowledge your encouragement, guidance and support. Edwina, who was there at the start, instilled discipline and showed me how to maintain focus. Nadia, thank you for picking up the reins midway, pushing me out of my comfort zone, and being attentive to the details. Jay, for being patient when I disappeared for months. I am grateful for your wise counsel. Thank you to all my supervisors for living with the ambiguities in my research until the mist cleared.

To the leaders and members of the resettled community, and the resettlement organisations who all helped me become an insider. Without your guidance and mentorship, I would not have been able to fully comprehend the complexities associated with being a person of a refugee background in Aotearoa New Zealand.

To all my family and friends – thank you for understanding my absence from your lives. I thank my doctoral colleagues who, like me, battled with life's challenges alongside completing the degree. I must also thank my furry friends – Junior, for always being at my side, and Fluffy and Harry, for helping me escape from time to time. I remain especially grateful to Dr Abann Yor and Dr Ehsan Hazaveh for your invaluable friendship and support throughout this journey.

Finally, I thank the Auckland University of Technology for awarding me a Vice-Chancellor Doctoral Scholarship, which funded my fees and stipend to pursue this degree. I also thank the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee for the pre-research guidance and ethics approval (number 21/212). I am grateful to Dr Paul Vincent for his meticulous proofreading of my work.

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Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Work	A holistic perspective on work borrowed from work scholarship (e.g., Stebleton, 2010; Taylor, 2004) that defines work as the constellation of roles that people engage in throughout their lives including non-paid ones, or a natural process through which an individual progresses from dependence on family and society resources to actively contributing to them. These include formal paid employment (e.g., contractual work), informal paid work (e.g., house-sitting), formal unpaid work (e.g., volunteering), informal unpaid work (e.g., care or domestic work), apprenticeship, entrepreneurship and internship.
Context of work	The contexts within which the holistic definition of work transpire, encompassing unpaid and informal work roles such as domestic and care roles, volunteer work, internships.
Workplace integration	A dynamic, long-term process whereby refugees become equal employees in the workplace, being provided with comparable advancement possibilities and access to promotions as non-refugee employees with equivalent qualifications.
Work integration	Combining the concept of workplace integration with the holistic perspective of work, work integration' encompasses integration into all work roles performed in the resettlement context.
Relational work integration	Integration at work extends beyond physical and digital workplace boundaries, encompassing diverse work forms including unpaid activities, entrepreneurship, and volunteer work. Work integration is relational in nature, emerging through complex interactions between refugees, employers, mentors, and service providers in creating sustainable employment that utilises refugees' full capabilities.
Work settings	Spaces (physical or digital) where work takes place e.g., digital work performed online is a work setting; creating social media content using one's phone is a work setting; working in an organisation, for family in a camp or home is a work setting.
Work meanings	The type of meaning people associate with work as defined by Rosso et al.'s (2010). These terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis, and work continues to mean the broad, holistic definition provided earlier.
Meaning of work	
Meaningful work	
Meaning in work	
Non-Western identity perspective	According to scholars (e.g. Adams, 2021; Yin, 2018) Western identity frameworks are rooted in individualism and develop within relatively stable WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) contexts, emphasising personal uniqueness and autonomy. Non-Western identity frameworks are based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions that prioritise collective traditions and communal self-understanding, while also being shaped by complex social challenges like historical legacies and socioeconomic disparities. Non-Western identity perspective in this thesis is situated between the Western and non-Western frameworks, acknowledging identity construction through social interactions.

List of Abbreviations

AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
CGT	constructivist grounded theory
COO	country of origin
COR	conservation of resources
DEI	diversity, equality and inclusion
HRM	human resource management
INZ	Immigration New Zealand
IOM	International Organization for Migration
M&Ms	managers and mentors
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
NZRAP	New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel
PWP	pathways-to-work provider
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Dated: 25 June 2025

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Chapter overview

This introductory chapter establishes the foundation of this research by contextualising the study of refugees' identity construction. The chapter begins by explicating the research problem through the motivations that underpinned this study, analysing relevant literature to highlight knowledge gaps and presenting the evolved research question and objectives. Following this, I provide a commentary on conducting research with refugee-background individuals in the Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter referred to as New Zealand) context and explain the terminology used throughout the thesis. The chapter concludes with an outline of the subsequent chapters.

1.1 The research problem

This section first explores the personal motivations that initiated the present research, then examines existing literature on migration journeys, identity, and work to frame the research problem. Finally, it explains how the research questions evolved throughout the study.

1.1.1 Why I chose this research

My motivation to undertake this research stemmed from personal experiences with refugee-background communities in New Zealand. Between 2014 and 2016, I volunteered with the New Zealand Red Cross, assisting with the resettlement of two refugee-background families. During this time, I witnessed firsthand the complex challenges they navigated during resettlement, including separation from family, friends, and familiar ways of life. Their experiences were marked by both struggles and moments of elation, joy, and pride.

During my volunteer work, I was intrigued by how these families rejected the 'refugee' label despite it being their official residential status in New Zealand. Neither family referred to themselves as refugees. They perceived themselves as people who had moved to New Zealand to build a new life, while acknowledging the challenges faced in their journeys. This observation, along with similar perspectives from other refugee-background individuals in my social circle, sparked my interest in identity construction, particularly how individuals maintain a sense of self through the challenges of migration, and how they negotiate externally imposed

labels that do not align with their self-perceptions. While scholars have established that work enables refugees to construct a new sense of self (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Davey & Jones, 2020; Ertorer, 2014; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020), there exists only limited exploration of refugees' unique identity construction processes as influenced by their ongoing migration experience. I noticed potential gaps between the academic literature and what I observed in my interactions with these refugee-background families and friends. This disconnect between scholarly knowledge and their specific contextual experiences, while not representative of all refugees, sparked my research interest.

The experiences of one refugee-background family I assisted highlighted the significant role of work in the resettlement context. The male adult in this family, though not fully conversant in English, secured work through his social connections within weeks of resettling. Having been a painter in his country of origin (COO) and a taxi driver while displaced, his first work role in New Zealand was in the fishing sector (in an informal capacity with community members), which provided supplementary income to social assistance. Through this role, he eventually found formal paid work as a painter in an organisation, and within two years had moved his family from government housing to a self-owned larger home. He was also able to successfully bring his eldest daughter to New Zealand through the family reunification programme.

These observations contrasted with much of the scholarship I encountered between 2019 and 2021, which predominantly focused on employment barriers. Although this family's experience is a single data point, it is an important one nonetheless, and it piqued my interest to explore the concept of work in parallel with identity construction. I found the literature that explored the intersection between identity and work to be focused on painting a rather grim picture of lost identities, identity struggles, and identity crises, resulting from employment barriers (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Wehrle et al., 2018). While the existing research acknowledges that work provides refugees opportunities to construct a new sense of self (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Davey & Jones, 2020), the process through which this occurs remained unclear. This study was therefore initiated to better understand the relationship between work and identity for refugees. In addition, being a human resources management practitioner and scholar also influenced my interest in the connection between identity and work.

1.1.2 Identifying gaps in the existing research

The refugee experience encompasses a complex journey that remains incompletely understood in existing literature. This section identifies critical gaps in our understanding of refugee migration journeys, identity construction, and work experiences.

According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the Convention), a refugee is a person outside their home country who is unable to return due to well-founded fears of persecution or due to situations of violence and armed conflict (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2016). The act of fleeing from one's usual place of residence is referred to as 'flight' (e.g., UNHCR, 2016). The UNHCR recognises three possibilities for refugees, one of which is resettlement in a country which is a signatory to the Convention or its related Protocol (Beaglehole, 2013; Glazebrook, 2018).

The migration journey of refugees, encompassing pre-flight, flight, displacement, and resettlement experiences (BenEzer & Zetter, 2014), is often approached in a segmented manner in existing research. Studies tend to focus on specific aspects such as camp or urban displacement (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Omata, 2021) or resettlement (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020; Nardon et al., 2021). This research collectively deeply explores aspects of the refugee journey and creates an opportunity to explore that journey holistically. Significantly, people's lives before displacement, crucial for understanding refugees' identities, has received less attention. As BenEzer and Zetter (2014, p. 299) note, "The medium that connects the two ends [flight and settlement in host countries] is largely ignored." Additionally, the literature would benefit from greater attention to the interplay between power and agency in refugees' identity constructions throughout their journey. Szkudlarek et al. (2021) call for more comprehensive theoretical frameworks incorporating macro-level contextual factors, which a holistic exploration of the migration journey could address.

Current identity theory frameworks may not fully account for the refugee experience. Identity is understood by Mead (1967) as 'being and becoming', manifested through the core process of reflexivity and self-awareness that arises from the interplay between the 'I' and the 'Me'. Refugee scholarship (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Baranik et al., 2018; Christensen & Newman, 2024; Morrice, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018) primarily employs Western identity

theories focused on the resettlement context. Non-Western perspectives on identity, emphasising collectivity, inclusivity, morality, spirituality, and transformability (e.g., Naude, 2021; Yin, 2018) warrant greater exploration in refugee identity scholarship. Furthermore, studies have focused primarily on stigma and labelling associated with the refugee status (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Baranik et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018). There is scope to explore how refugees perceive themselves beyond this imposed identity. The intersection of refugee status with other identity aspects such as gender also remains understudied (Knappert et al., 2018; Ozturk, 2023), with limited research on how refugees embody “a plurality of selves” (Taghavi et al., 2024, p. 71).

Research exploring the relationship between work and identity formation for refugees offers scope for development. Gaining employment in host societies is deemed an important resettlement goal and a means through which refugees can resume their lives and become self-sufficient (e.g., Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Marlowe, 2015; McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootten, 2019; Pisani & Grech, 2015). Existing literature has made valuable contributions by exploring barriers to finding paid employment in resettlement countries (e.g., Baranik et al., 2018; Campion, 2018; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; Hebbani et al., 2016; Pajic et al., 2018; Sebestyen et al., 2018; Sienkiewicz et al., 2013) and developing scholarship has explored refugee entrepreneurial endeavours (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Harima, 2022; Nayir, 2019). While the existing literature provides valuable insights into accessing work opportunities, there is scope to explore refugees’ lived experiences within work settings throughout their complete migration journey.

Temporal dimensions of work meanings for refugees across the entire migration journey also tend to be underexplored. This temporal dimension is critical, as Szkudlarek et al. (2024) and Wehrle et al. (2024) highlight. Management scholarship concerning refugees at work has overemphasised vulnerability narratives (Pesch & Ipek, 2024), with less attention to refugee agency and capabilities, although recent studies by Knappert et al. (2020, 2023) and Verwiebe et al. (2019) have started to address this oversight. Further, refugees’ identities are perceived as episodic constructs, such as de-identification from their past identities to reinvent or reinforce oneself through work (e.g., Christensen & Newman, 2024), creating the need for explorations of identity constructions that may be dynamic and fluid in nature.

Conventional definitions of work in refugee studies seldom include diverse work experiences throughout the migration journey. The conceptualisation of work could benefit from incorporating Stebleton's (2012) and Taylor's (2004) holistic definitions that encompass unpaid and informal work roles. The complex ecosystem of refugee work integration involves multiple interconnected stakeholders, with significant knowledge gaps remaining in understanding their diverse roles. Employers' preconceptions and socially responsible attitudes sometimes help facilitate refugee employment (Ravn, 2024). However, studies often overlook individual-level complexities by treating employers as a single unit of analysis. Service providers play crucial mediating roles between refugees and employers (Darrow, 2015; Koyama, 2024; Silva et al., 2021), creating positive refugee images (Knappert et al., 2023) and providing language and skills training (Gaillard & Hughes, 2014; Koyama, 2024; Numerato et al., 2023). A review of the literature reveals that apart from positioning tactics by service providers and employers (e.g., Koyama, 2024) and managers' attention to individual refugee workers (e.g., Pesch et al., 2023), these stakeholders' influence on refugees' identity construction remains understudied.

Finally, the concept of meaningful work for refugees requires expansion beyond existing frameworks. While the meanings refugees derive from work are deeply intertwined with how they construct their identities (Wehrle et al., 2024), research could benefit from explorations of how these meanings evolve throughout different stages of the migration journey or how they influence refugees' sense of self. Current meaningful work frameworks (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2012) provide valuable insights into the meaning of work. However, their primary development within formal work environments presents challenges when applying them to refugee contexts, where work experiences are often characterised by precariousness and informality throughout the migration journeys. These challenges reflect differences in context rather than limitations in the frameworks' conceptual foundations, suggesting potential for enhancement of the frameworks. Furthermore, while stakeholders like employers and service providers significantly influence refugee work experiences (Knappert et al., 2023; Koyama, 20; Ravn, 2024), their specific roles in constructions of the meaning of work for refugees remain insufficiently explored.

1.1.3 Why address the identified gaps in the literature?

Addressing the gaps in understanding refugees' identity construction discussed above is crucial for several compelling reasons. First, existing scholarship has provided important insights into the identity challenges that refugees experience, including identity losses, struggles, and

diminished self-esteem (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Wehrle et al., 2018). Drawing from this understanding, there are opportunities to explore the pathways through which identity challenges are navigated and potentially overcome, which can contribute to improved resettlement outcomes.

Second, while existing literature acknowledges refugee resilience (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Betancourt et al., 2015), there remains scope to explore how specific aspects of this resilience, particularly resourcefulness, develop throughout the migration journey. By analysing identity construction across pre-flight, displacement, and resettlement experiences, this study intends to illuminate the processes that underlie refugee resourcefulness.

Third, this research builds on Mead's (1967) theoretical framework by exploring how the dialectic between the socially constructed 'Me' and the agentic 'I' operates in contexts where identities can be persistently threatened. I reason that when societal discourses and interactions continually undermine one's identity, refugee-background people develop sophisticated mechanisms to distinguish and fortify the 'I' – the source of individuality – against external pressures to conform to limiting refugee stereotypes. This suggests a more complex and dynamic interplay between the 'Me' and 'I' dimensions. Additionally, a non-Western identity perspective on identities remains underdeveloped in refugee scholarship, which may be pertinent to identity constructions of refugees from non-Western origins. Within both Western and non-Western bodies of scholarship, there is diversity. The use of non-Western terminology in this thesis acknowledges the diverse space between both ends of the spectrum and research findings are situated within this diverse space between Western and non-Western identity scholarship.

Utilising translocational positionality (Anthias, 2002, 2008, 2009) as an analytical framework illuminates the multiple and sometimes conflicting identities that refugees inhabit – such as navigating gendered expectations around care and domestic work alongside family provider roles – and how these identities interact and are transformed throughout the migration journey and in work contexts. Translocational positionality understands lives as spatially situated and identities as consistently connected to shifting locations, encompassing the ways that social categories and hierarchies formed through gender, ethnicity, and class interactions influence individuals within specific temporal and spatial contexts (Anthias, 2009).

A central focus of this thesis is the holistic migration journey context. The current fragmentation evident in the literature, which tends to focus on either the displacement or resettlement stages in isolation, obscures the continuity of refugees' identity construction throughout their migration journey, limiting understandings of how past experiences shape present and future conceptualisations of the self. Recognising this fragmentation shifts attention to the intersection between identity construction and work. As highlighted earlier, work (broadly conceptualised beyond traditional employment frameworks) represents a crucial yet understudied domain for refugees' identity formation. Existing research has established the crucial importance of employment for resettlement outcomes (e.g., Lumley-Sapanski, 2019; Marlowe, 2015; McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019; Pisani & Grech, 2015), creating opportunities to explore how diverse work experiences across the migration journey contribute to identity development.

Moreover, while scholars like Knappert et al. (2023) have cast the spotlight on the role of multiple stakeholders within refugee employment ecosystems, there is scope to explore how these stakeholders specifically influence identity formation, particularly at the individual level where managers and service providers implement policies and practices that directly shape refugee-background individuals' work experiences. This foundation also opens possibilities to expand conceptualisations of work integration beyond traditional employment pathways to include diverse forms of economic participation such as care and domestic work, entrepreneurship, informal paid work, internship programmes, and volunteer work. By exploring how refugee participants derive meaning from various forms of work (paid and unpaid; formal and informal) throughout the migration journey, this research answers Bailey et al.'s (2019) call for an improved understanding of meaningful work across diverse contexts. Furthermore, it responds to Bendassolli and Tateo's (2018) emphasis on exploring how different life contexts influence work's meaning.

In summary, studying the identity and meaning of work nexus across the migration journey can produce nuanced understandings of the complex experiences of refugees. Theoretically, this study extends identity theory beyond Western frameworks by exploring identity construction in forced displacement contexts, potentially generating new insights that could be relevant to other populations experiencing profound transitions. The study offers a counter-deficit narrative by highlighting refugees' agency in constructing meaningful identities through work. The holistic approach to the migration journey and work experiences in this study can

help illuminate how macro-contexts influence refugee-background individuals' sense of self. This thesis also offers recommendations for more effective refugee support policies that recognise diverse work pathways and their impact on identity formation. For practitioners, it provides actionable insights for the development of programmes that address both employment needs and identity challenges simultaneously. By reinforcing the importance of non-traditional forms of work like care work and volunteering, this thesis challenges narrow economic frameworks and recognises broader refugee contributions.

1.1.4 The research question and objectives

This section outlines how the research questions evolved throughout the study, shaped by Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and findings from early data collection. The revised research objectives are also explored.

The research questions (RQs) I started with, to be explored with three participant groups of refugees, managers and mentors (M&Ms) and pathways-to-work providers (PWPs), were:

RQ1: How are refugees' work-related identities constructed in the country of resettlement?

RQ2: How do refugees' work experiences and agency influence their work-related identity construction?

These questions were formulated in line with Dey's (1999) view of approaching the research field with an open mind but not an empty head. Based on my personal experiences with refugee-background individuals and myself being a human resources management academic and practitioner, I was drawn to exploring the intersection of identity and work in the resettlement context. Charmaz's (2006) CGT as the chosen methodology for this study enabled the evolution of the research questions during the study because the methodology emphasises paying attention to emergent concepts in the data analysis. As data collection progressed, it became evident that refugee participants narratives centred on how they saw themselves *throughout* their journey from displacement to resettlement, focusing on work and its meanings rather than work-related identity specifically. Similarly, the other participant cohorts discussed ways they assisted refugee-background individuals in finding or maintaining work or becoming entrepreneurs, within a larger narrative of identity and work integration.

All three participant cohorts highlighted the interplay between the ‘refugee’ identity, associated hegemonic discourses in New Zealand’s resettlement context, and the person at/looking for work. In essence, work-related identity was not a concept that participants explicitly discussed, although employment, entrepreneurship and work featured prominently in their narratives. Consistent with Charmaz’s (2006) CGT methodology, I was attentive to the topics important to participants. Consequently, RQ1 focusing on work-related identities no longer seemed relevant. Instead, work as a broader concept encompassing all forms of work, and the emergent concept of the meaning of work, replaced the focus on work-related identity.

Through data collection and analysis, it became increasingly clear that narratives of identity, mobilised through reflections on self-versus-refugee identity, individual beliefs, cultural and religious values, and work motives, were crucial in forming meanings associated with who participants are within their migration journey and work contexts. These meanings provided filters for belonging and identity, concepts that all participant groups engaged with in their narratives. Champion (2018) notes that identity and belonging are subjective aspects of resettlement. Furthermore, while RQ1 focused solely on the resettlement context, I was also interested in work performed by refugee participants prior to resettlement.

As data collection unfolded, participants narrated experiences spanning multiple spaces and times. Through the memoing process, a key feature of CGT (e.g., Charmaz, 2006, 2009), I recognised the importance of the entire migration journey in constructions of both identity and work meanings. This holistic view aligns with Gecas and Burke’s (1995) perspective on self-continuity – to understand the present, one must comprehend the past. Therefore, it became necessary to broaden the research question beyond the resettlement context to encompass the holistic migration journey. RQ1 and RQ2 thus evolved into:

How are refugees’ identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?

Refugees constitute the largest participant group in this research, and the revised question focuses on their lived experiences. A primary research objective from the outset was to theorise how refugees construct their identity during the migration journey, presenting their stories in the context of work. Embedded in this objective was an exploration of how refugee participants navigate the often-stigmatised identity of a refugee. A second objective was to break away from resettlement discourse that tends to cast refugee-background individuals as victims, a shift

pioneered by scholars like Mozetič (2018) and Pesch et al. (2023). This study therefore aims to explore the delicate balance between individual agency and institutional structures, such as global and national entities, their governing regulations, and policy parameters, and to demonstrate how constructions of identity and work meaning enable refugees to navigate resettlement challenges themselves, contributing an alternative narrative to resettlement literature as to how refugee-background individuals contend with and overcome the multitude of barriers.

A third objective was to explore the critical roles played by M&Ms and PWPs in refugee-background individuals' constructions of identity and work meanings. This is consistent with the view that the host community is equally responsible in assisting refugee-background individuals integrate (e.g., Pepworth & Nash, 2009). Finally, recognising Kanal and Rottmann's (2021) call for interdisciplinary approaches in refugee studies, this research aims to demonstrate the usefulness of such approaches in understanding refugee-background individuals' complex experiences. The present study is therefore situated at the intersection of multiple knowledge domains – forced displacement and refugee resettlement studies, the meaning of work, organisational behaviour, and sociological and social psychology. By integrating these diverse perspectives, this research will explore how contextual factors across the migration journey influence refugees' identity constructions as they navigate new work environments.

The answer to my research question of '*How are refugees' identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?*' is that refugees' identities are constructed through the interplay of three constructs of anchors, refugeehood and place identity within the context of the migration journey, through the insider-outsider continuum as an identity navigation site. The continuum allows refugees to hold simultaneous identity positions at any one time, positions that can change as the journey unfolds. The continuum allows refugees to hold simultaneous identity positions at a given point in time. This identity construction process influences how meanings of work are constructed, leading to a bidirectional relationship between meaning of work and identity across time and space.

1.2 Researching in the New Zealand context

This section explains how I established myself as a researcher within refugee-background communities in New Zealand and clarifies the terminology used for participants that is specific to this research context.

1.2.1 Building relationships

This research would not have been possible without dedicated time spent building relationships with refugee-background community leaders and resettlement service providers. As scholars such as Dantas and Gower (2021), Guerin and Guerin (2007) and Pincock and Bakunzi (2020) suggest, such relationships enable community involvement throughout the research process. Community leaders openly discussed challenges faced by their communities, providing insights that would have been inaccessible had I approached the field with preconceptions rather than an open mind.

I, as an interested observer, volunteered at meetings with community leaders, listening to the various issues that refugee-background individuals navigate during resettlement. Organisations involved in resettlement encouraged me to meet with their leaders and teams, where they discussed daily challenges arising from their position between government agencies and refugee-background individuals. I attended book launches, community events, forums and fundraisers to engage with the resettled community. I observed daily activities at resettlement service providers' offices, witnessing interactions such as a refugee-background bringing newly arrived relatives to seek employment advice. This immersion complemented the formal data collection through research interviews. My engagement with refugee-background communities and resettlement service providers deepened my understanding of resettled life in New Zealand. As Guerin and Guerin (2007) note, researcher immersion allows for nuanced understandings beyond initial impressions and uncovers complexities that might be missed by conducting interviews alone. Through two years of immersion in the research field, the accumulated experiences and insights enriched the data analysis. Without this immersion, I would have been unable to effectively articulate, comprehend and analyse my participants' stories.

1.2.2 Context-specific terminology for participants

This section explains the terminology chosen for each participant group – why the refugee cohort is referred to as refugee-background individuals, the distinction between employers and M&Ms, and why resettlement service workers are termed PWPs.

1.2.2.1 Refugee-background individuals

The definition of a refugee extends beyond legal frameworks to encompass the complex realities of those seeking safety under precarious conditions. Refugee scholarship has criticised the UNHCR definition for being too narrow (e.g., Glazebrook, 2018). When beginning my doctorate journey in 2019, I was not fully aware of the divergent perspectives on the term ‘refugee’ within New Zealand’s resettlement sector and refugee-background communities. I had also believed that media-created perceptions of refugees globally, including New Zealand, were responsible for some refugee-background individuals’ dissociation from the label. My personal experiences had alerted me to the possibility that the refugee identity construct can be deeply personal for multifaceted reasons.

Pesch and Ipek (2024, p. 547) define refugees as “people who have fled their country of nationality or habitual residence to seek protection and security in another country, due to life-threatening conditions that result from the absence of state protection for citizens.” I adapt this definition, but add that security is not guaranteed, and that most refugees are aware of this when they flee. My research revealed that participants often made choices to move to countries that do not recognise the refugee plight according to the Convention. Seeking protection without guaranteed safety or security was a common experience for most of my refugee-background participants, who described precarious lives in these contexts. This precarious reality was recently reported on by Lloyd (2024) in *The Times*, highlighting a family’s dilemma of risking death at sea (in the English Channel) versus certain death in their COO.

In this research, refugees are defined as persons who, as Pesch and Ipek (2024) note, have fled their habitual residence because of a lack of protection. Moreover, refugees are persons who traverse geographical places seeking permanent protection and security that simultaneously reduces precarious living conditions and offers settlement opportunities. Thus, feeling settled and living in non-precarious settings are pertinent to this definition. Settlement for refugees represents far more than physical relocation (e.g., Marlowe, 2018),

constituting a multidimensional process of rebuilding lives and establishing belonging. Precarious living is also a phenomenon associated with refugees (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Earle & Brown, 2024; Lloyd, 2024). Under this broad definition, the term ‘refugee’ in this thesis encompasses asylum seekers, family reunification pathway refugees, quota refugees, and those granted protection under ad hoc humanitarian responses.

For conciseness, I use the term ‘refugee-background individuals’ in this thesis rather than the phrase ‘individuals with refugee background’. Several reasons underpin the ‘refugee background’ terminology. During the research process, I realised that most refugee participants had little association with the ‘refugee’ identity. This insight dawned on me as I analysed the first few interview transcripts and reflected on their meanings through CGT’s analytical memoing process (e.g., Charmaz, 2006). Recognising that refugees are not a homogeneous population (e.g., Berghs, 2015; Pajic et al., 2018; Yako & Biswas, 2014; Yeo, 2015), I noted that most this participant cohort (17 of 22) did not identify as refugees in their narratives. When they did refer to themselves as refugees, it was contextual to countries where the UNHCR (or another aid agency) was present. Identifying as a refugee meant accessing survival resources like food vouchers, medical assistance, or shelter. This association was not voluntary, highlighting power imbalances in the international humanitarian space, an observation noted by other scholars (e.g., Ikanda, 2018; Oka, 2014; Palillo, 2022; Smets et al., 2019). These reflections led to nuanced findings on the concept of refugeehood, which are explained in detail in Chapter 4. The five participants who did refer to themselves as refugees also did so contextually. For them, being a refugee was synonymous with living somewhere that was not their *homeland*. Four participants associated continued feelings of non-settlement with the refugee identity, although two of these noted they might not feel settled even if they returned to their home country. The fifth participant linked his pride in refugees’ resilience to his identification as a refugee.

Respecting how participants define themselves is crucial to this research. The term ‘refugee-background’ captures the complexities of my refugee participants’ experiences in two ways. First, they stopped identifying themselves as ‘refugees’ under international and national legal definitions that utilise the UNHCR terminology of ‘refugees’. At the same time, some participants described ongoing experiences as refugees due to non-settlement, which aligns with the definition of ‘refugee’ adopted in this thesis. Additionally, some participants continued to feel pride in their resilience while others utilised their background as refugees to pursue work

that is meaningful to them. Thus, ‘refugee’ denotes ongoing experiences while ‘background’ acknowledges the end of the legal definition of a ‘refugee’ as stipulated by the UNHCR. The use of ‘refugee-background’ term is also consistent with other refugee scholars in New Zealand, such as Campanella (2023), Charania (2023), Marlowe (2015), O’Donovan and Sheikh (2014) and Sampson et al. (2016). The term ‘refugee-background individuals’ aligns with the perspectives of most M&Ms who participated in this research. Some M&M participants refer to their employees or mentees as ‘former refugees’ in their narratives, which acknowledges the end of the applicability of the UNHCR definition of a ‘refugee’.

1.2.2.2 Managers and mentors

Another participant cohort that was redefined during the research process was employers of refugee-background individuals. During data analysis, I adapted the term ‘managers and mentors’ to delineate this group. Managers are defined here as people with direct responsibilities for refugee employees in paid organisational employment. In recent research (e.g., Pesch et al., 2023), the focus has been on the manager-refugee employee relationship rather than organisations or workplaces. Mentors are defined in this thesis as workplace employees who assist refugee-background individuals in pursuing work endeavours and navigating work-related challenges. One mentor assisted refugee-background individuals voluntarily, while the other was engaged in mentoring budding entrepreneurs, both refugee-background individuals and non-refugees.

Data analysis revealed that this participant cohort worked with refugee-background individuals to integrate them into the workplace primarily through personal actions and motivations. Organisational policies were less obvious regarding how participants helped refugee-background employees navigate work. Some organisations lacked diversity and inclusion policies, so participants’ actions were not policy guided. Where policies existed, they were often deemed ineffective for working with refugee-background individuals. This lack of adequate policies often led to individual participants acting autonomously in their interactions with refugee-background employees. Six of nine participants (who were direct managers of refugees at the time of the interviews) had worked with refugees as managers, supervisors or co-workers in previous roles at other organisations. Their narratives included these previous experiences, some of which shaped their current approaches, distinguishing them from organisational practices. All participants in this category chose to work with or mentor refugees, taking it upon themselves to build relationships and trust, provide support, challenge

their beliefs and practices, and engage with refugee-background employees and mentees. Overall, these actions represented individual initiative rather than organisational policy.

1.2.2.3 Pathways-to-work providers

Organisations in resettlement countries assist refugee-background individuals in navigating the complex process of rebuilding their lives. Within these organisations, one function is helping refugee-background individuals find work in their new societies. In the New Zealand resettlement sector, people in this role are generally called a ‘pathways-to-employment coordinator/manager’. As this study focuses on a holistic conceptualisation of work, I substituted ‘employment’ with ‘work’ and ‘coordinator/manager’ with ‘provider’ to better frame these participants’ roles. While most pathways-to-work providers (PWPs) interviewed for this research assisted with paid employment, at least two helped with entrepreneurial endeavours, and one worked with refugee-background individuals to maintain skills in a setting where career advancement or paid employment were not primary work motivations. Instead, this participant’s work pathway focused on developing the language and social skills of refugee-background individuals to begin integration in New Zealand.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2 explores the existing literature on migration journeys, identity theories, non-Western identity concepts, and how work and its meanings influence identity. The analysis reveals a fragmented understanding of refugees’ migration journeys, with researchers typically focusing on isolated stages rather than the complete trajectory. Existing research predominantly employs Western-centric identity theories prioritising individualism. Furthermore, the identity and meaning of work nexus is revealed to be underexplored. The chapter concludes that addressing these knowledge limitations has the potential to contribute to theoretical advancements and provide practical insights for improving resettlement services and policies.

Chapter 3 explores the research’s philosophical underpinnings, researcher positionality, ethical considerations, and methodology. This study adopts a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, employing Charmaz’s (2006) CGT methodology integrated with Anthias’s (2002, 2008, 2009) translocational positionality framework. Data were collected from 41 participants – 22 refugees, nine managers and two mentors, and eight PWPs. Refugee participants’ data collection was done with a combination of narrative interviews and photo elicitation. Narrative interviews alone were conducted with the other participants. The research

progressed with approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (approval number 21/212). Data analysis followed Charmaz's (2006) CGT methodology, with research rigour maintained through Charmaz and Thornberg's (2021) framework of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews and photo elicitation with refugee participants. The migration journey provides the context within which identity and work meaning constructions transpire. The insider-outsider continuum represents a dynamic process of negotiating social positions central to identity construction. Refugee participants demonstrate notable resourcefulness throughout the journey. Finally, work holds meaning connected to their sense of self, survival and relationships with family and community.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the interviews with M&Ms and PWP, focusing on their motives for assisting refugee-background individuals and the work integration outcomes they help achieve. Work integration emerges as a crucial multistakeholder process with five key dimensions – access to work, capabilities development, changing the narratives, finding meaning in work, and social/cultural integration facilitation.

Chapter 6 presents a theory of, and a conceptual model depicting, the bidirectional relationship between refugees' identity and the meaning of work constructions. The theory reveals how refugees actively construct identities and meanings of work, making a distinct contribution by illuminating the temporal complexities embedded in this process. A relational work integration perspective is also discussed, showing how stakeholder collaboration influences work meanings and identity formation for refugees. The relational work integration perspective extends beyond workplace boundaries and acknowledges refugees' agency while recognising the importance of support within an ecosystem approach.

The final chapter, Chapter 7, discusses the contributions of this research to three bodies of knowledge – identity, management, and refugee studies. The implications for practice for employing organisations, M&Ms of refugee-background individuals, resettlement services providers, and refugee-background individuals are all discussed. The limitations of the research are associated with contextual factors, cultural representation, managerial perspectives, methodology, and sampling and triangulation of data. These limitations are shown to highlight avenues for future research, and the conclusions of the thesis are summarised.

1.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has established the foundation for understanding how refugees construct their identities throughout the migration journey in the context of work. Beginning with my personal experiences that revealed a disconnect between lived realities and scholarly representations, I identified critical knowledge gaps in existing literature – the fragmented approach to studying refugee experiences, limitations of Western identity theories in refugee contexts, insufficient exploration of the identity and meaning of work nexus, and narrow conceptualisations of meaningful work for refugees. These gaps guided the evolution of my research question from a focus on work-related identities in resettlement to a holistic exploration of the identity and meaning of work constructions throughout the migration journey.

The decision to employ Charmaz's (2006) CGT methodology enabled a research approach that privileges participants' voices and experiences while acknowledging the co-construction of knowledge. Through building relationships with refugee-background communities and resettlement service providers in New Zealand, I gained contextual understanding that enriched my data collection and analysis. The terminology adopted in this research – refugee-background individuals, managers and mentors, and pathways-to-work providers – reflects both the participants' self-perceptions and the analytical insights that emerged during the research process.

This study makes a significant contribution by exploring identity construction across the migration journey rather than isolated stages, incorporating non-Western identity perspectives, recognising diverse forms of work beyond formal employment, and exploring the bidirectional relationship between identity and work meanings. The following chapters will develop these themes, beginning with Chapter 2's analysis of relevant literature that informed my initial approach to the research field, entering it with an open mind but not an empty head. The evolved research question – *How are refugees' identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?* – will be addressed through the CGT methodology to produce a theory on the bidirectional relationship between identity and meanings of work for refugees, providing insights relevant to both scholarly understanding and resettlement practice.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.0 Chapter overview

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for exploring refugees' identity construction through their migration journeys and work experiences. The literature review progresses through three interconnected conceptual areas. First, I analyse refugees' migration journeys and experiences therein, establishing the overarching context that shapes their identity. This sets the scene for exploring existing identity theories, refugee identity, and non-Western identity philosophies. Then I explore work conceptualisations and meaningful work literature, positioning work as the micro-context in which identity construction manifests throughout the migration journey. These three dimensions converge in New Zealand's resettlement context, revealing the significant knowledge gaps this research addresses. The chapter concludes by summarising knowledge gaps pertinent to refugees' identity constructions within work and migration journey contexts.

The literature search was performed using the following databases – EBSCO, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Ovid, Sage Publications, Science Direct, Scopus, Taylor Francis, Web of Science, and Wiley Library. Backward searching through journal articles' reference lists and forward searching using journal authors' names and corresponding subjects were also used. Search terms on databases related to camp, urban, and resettled refugees; the migration journey; temporality of refugees' journeys; employment and work for refugees; New Zealand; resettlement strategy; identity theories; identity work; non-Western identity concepts; refugeehood; meaning of work; the meaning of work frameworks; refugees' meaning of work; and types of work for refugees, including camp work, entrepreneurship, informal work, rural work schemes, and volunteering. Academic books were also useful to understand the works of Blumer (1969), Foucault (1995) and Mead (1932, 1967).

2.1 The migration journey

This section examines the migration journey through the processes and experiences embedded in humanitarian spaces governing refugee protection and resettlement. As this thesis aims to explore refugees' identity construction processes, particular attention is given to the macro-context – the migration journey. The section highlights the global refugee context and the

research gap regarding migration journeys. It also analyses scholarship on camp and urban displacement. Finally, it explores resettlement as an ongoing part of the migration journey.

2.1.1 The global context and the migration journey

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR], 2016) defines refugees as people outside their home country who cannot return due to well-founded fears of persecution or situations of violence and armed conflict. The UNHCR (2024) estimated that, in mid-2024, there were 37.9 million refugees and eight million asylum seekers worldwide. The act of fleeing one's usual residence is referred to as 'flight' (e.g., UNHCR, 2016). Not all displaced people cross international borders (Arar & FitzGerald, 2023). Those who remain within their country of origin (COO), known as internally displaced people, are considered distinct from refugees (Lokot et al., 2023; UNHCR, 2024). Urban refugees settle in towns or cities (Dermikol, 2023) while camp refugees inhabit (supposedly) temporary shelters while seeking displacement solutions (USA for UNHCR, 2021). Glazebrook (2018) notes that the UNHCR offers three durable solutions – repatriation to COO, integration in refugee-seeking communities, or resettlement to a country that is a signatory to the UNHCR's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the Convention).

Some authors (e.g., Milner & Khawaja, 2010; Slonim-Nevo & Lavie-Ajayi, 2017) have articulated stages of the migration journey, such as life in the COO, escape, life in resettled country, and future hopes. Within refugee studies, there is a lacuna regarding refugees' experiences *throughout* their migration journeys, with focus often on either camp/urban displacement or resettlement. Indeed, BenEzer and Zetter (2014, p. 299) note that “the medium that connects the two ends [flight and settlement in host countries] is largely ignored or forgotten.” Crawley and Jones (2021) highlight that migration journeys are often perceived as linear movements, rendering invisible the economic, emotional, and social lives in transit places. In this thesis, the migration journey encompasses pre-flight, flight, displacement, *and* resettlement experiences. ‘Displacement’ in humanitarian terms refers to the involuntary movement from habitual residence to escape conflict, violence, human rights violations, or human-instigated disasters (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). However, displacement constitutes more than physical movement and encompasses experiences inherent in transit places and processes (Tefera, 2021). Bradley (2014) postulates that displacement is more about the struggle to regain a place in the world. Thus, the experience of displacement can continue even after physical relocation if refugees cannot establish the cultural, emotional

and social attachments that constitute a meaningful ‘place’ in the resettlement country. Displacement leads some to seek permanent protection in other countries (S. Becker, 2022). Others seek temporary protection in transit countries while waiting to repatriate or resettle elsewhere (BenEzer & Zetter, 2014; Carpi et al., 2021; FitzGerald & Arar, 2018). Sometimes transience evolves into permanence unprompted by individual choice (Crawley & Jones, 2021).

2.1.2 Camp and urban displacement

Crisp (2017) notes that protracted displacement materialises through confinement to camps, with little/no access to labour markets and living means (e.g., land, house, etc.). Scholars have explored aspects of camp experiences such as gender inequalities (e.g., Grabska 2011; Kirk 2010; Olivius 2014), endless protracted displacement (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Bender, 2024; Milton et al. 2017), and restricted camp movements (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Ikanda, 2018). According to Omata (2021, p. 871), camps are created “as exceptional spaces to contain refugees” and represent exclusion from humanity (e.g., Bender, 2024; Brankamp, 2022). Such exclusions create otherness between host societies and isolated refugees (Dermikol, 2023).

Feldman (2015) shows how camps can be spaces where judgements occur about how to be a refugee. For instance, Oka’s (2014) study revealed that humanitarian workers perceived camp refugees as ungrateful and undeserving when they sold aid goods on local black markets. Harrell-Bond (2002) also highlighted stereotypes of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ camp refugees, where helplessness performances indicated goodness, while ingratitude indicated badness. Hasan et al. (2024) and Wake and Barbelet (2020) found that camp refugees in a protracted state of limbo could not achieve independence or dignity due to linear humanitarian programming. Camp refugees face complex realities including starvation (Earle & Brown, 2024), shelter, safety, and sanitation issues (Hasan et al., 2024). Urban displacement, discouraged by the UNHCR until 2009 (Crisp et al., 2012; Earle & Brown, 2024), is deemed more humane as camp living increasingly exposes refugees to psychological, social and physical issues (Dermikol, 2023).

Most refugees today live in urban displacement (Hasan et al., 2024), often in low- and middle-income countries (Alawneh & Rashid, 2022; Crisp et al., 2012) like Lebanon, Jordan, Kenya and Turkey. Generally, self-settled urban refugees experience a myriad of integration and employment challenges (Dermikol 2023; Polzer & Hammond, 2008), housing in overcrowded

or slum areas, health care access difficulties (Crisp et al., 2012), education inaccessibility (Crisp et al., 2012; Easton-Calabria & Wood, 2022), rising food costs, and restricted movement (Easton-Calabria & Wood, 2022). Urban refugees often remain invisible due to lacking legal documentation and being indistinguishable from impoverished locals (Crisp et al., 2012). Invisibility also stems from unreported arrivals (Easton-Calabria & Wood, 2022), unrecognised rights to inhabit urban areas, and refugees maintaining low profiles for safety (Earle & Brown, 2024). Urban refugees receive secondary aid compared to camp refugees (Betts et al., 2019; Dermikol, 2023), which increases their vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity (Earle & Brown, 2024). However, studies (e.g., Earle & Brown 2024; Tiltnes et al., 2019; Wake & Barbelet, 2020) show that self-settling urban refugees often fare better than their camp counterparts in economic and physical wellbeing. Social class distinctions impact displacement experiences, as Chang (2022) found with Syrian businessmen whose economic resources mitigated some host country challenges. It is worth reiterating that refugees are a heterogenous group, with camp and urban experiences varying widely.

Despite diverse experiences, refugees remain largely voiceless in global policy formulation regarding aid, vulnerability and self-reliance (Garnier, 2023; Krause & Schmidt, 2019; Wake & Barbelet, 2020). The UNHCR's (2011) self-reliance policy emphasises labour integration in host countries, and asserts financial independence (Carpi et al., 2021; Field et al., 2020; Skran & Easton-Calabria, 2020), even where refugees lack work rights (Carpi et al., 2021; Field et al., 2020). Refugees' access to labour markets is generally restricted due to non-citizenship, regulatory obstacles by the host government, and securitisation (Field et al., 2020; Omata, 2021). Studies (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Culcasi, 2019; Ikanda, 2018; Oka, 2014) show that camp refugees find ways to earn a living despite these impediments. Ethnic and social bonds enable economic activities and contribute to wellbeing in both settings (e.g., Carpi et al., 2021), challenging the individualised focus in UNHCR policy and illuminating non-economic livelihood sources (Krause & Schmidt, 2019). These diverse examples illustrate that refugees in camps demonstrate resourcefulness and entrepreneurial initiative despite constraints, revealing how work experiences in displacement contexts can influence identity constructions and meaning-making processes.

2.1.3 Resettlement

Most refugees remain in protracted displaced states. According to the UNHCR (2024), of the 37.9 million refugees worldwide in 2023, only 85,000 resettled through UNHCR assistance or

self-settlement. Resettlement, a refugee protection tool (Garnier et al., 2018; Schneider, 2021), is defined as the “transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence” (UNHCR, 2025). In the Convention, the UNHCR distinguishes between quota refugees and asylum seekers seeking international protection (IOM, 2019). Family reunification provides a third resettlement pathway and entails people with international protection needs being reunited with their family members in the resettlement country (IOM, 2019; Valtonen, 2004). Global events like the mass displacement of Syrians since 2011 can impact host country migration politics and resettlement programmes. The UNHCR’s response to such crises redefines which people qualify for urgent resettlement, downgrading the resettlement needs of other groups (Ehrkamp et al., 2022).

Resettlement is not available to all refugees, as the UNHCR only identifies candidates meeting specific criteria (Garnier, 2023; Schneider, 2021). From refugees’ perspectives, resettlement often represents a goal for building a full life (Earle & Brown, 2024). Refugees contend with balancing integration potential with vulnerability to qualify for resettlement (Schneider, 2021; Welfens, 2023). Garnier (2023) argues that suffering and vulnerability must be demonstrated, yielding power to the UNHCR to decide what is best for the person seeking international protection. Integration potential is generally determined through refugees’ education and work experiences, and this selection practice is increasingly replacing the traditional protection goals for vulnerable populations (Schneider, 2021).

Performances of suffering and vulnerability become necessary for the much-coveted prize of resettlement (Ikanda, 2018) and can be perceived as agency exercises. Agency is understood as one’s ability to purposefully influence one’s circumstances (Bandura, 2000; Gecas, 1982) and can be individual or collective (Earle & Brown, 2024). Using Foucauldian power concepts (Foucault, 1995), Toyoki and Brown (2014) note power’s influence in creating stigmatised identities while agency alters stigma-defining parameters. In vulnerability performances, refugees exercise agency within defined parameters to achieve desired ends. Refugees, again, are a heterogeneous group, with varying vulnerability layers (Humpage et al., 2019). The issue is that refugees must respond to criteria determined by powerful entities who decide, without refugees’ input, what is best for them and how to measure their suffering, vulnerability, and consequent deservedness. Research indicates refugees sometimes alter parameters by merchandising aid (e.g., Oka, 2014) or leaving camps without permission to integrate in host communities despite humanitarian or legal violations (Omata, 2021).

Power dynamics and agency distinguish resettlement from settlement. Resettlement follows top-down structures driven by host countries and international organisations, such as the UNHCR and IOM (Garnier et al., 2018; Krause & Schmidt, 2019; Schneider, 2021; Simich, 2003), while settlement involves more refugee agency and bottom-up processes and can be constrained by resettlement bureaucracy (Simich, 2003). For example, Simich (2003) found that social support drove refugees to relocate within Canada, as the initial resettlement locations were based on the host country's political interests. Resettlement can therefore either enable or hinder settlement. This example shows that refugees are not merely passive resettlement recipients nor completely independent settlement actors, indicating a complex interplay of structure and agency across both processes. Additionally, resettlement tends to operate on standardised models, following the UNHCR and/or IOM guidelines (e.g., Schneider, 2021), while settlement can be organic, diverse and individualised. Resettlement conditions and preparation, such as pre-departure orientation programmes, cultural learning, and initial placement decisions significantly impact settlement outcomes (Schneider, 2021). Finally, resettlement has clear temporal boundaries, such as from selection to arrival (e.g., Schneider, 2021; Simich, 2003), while settlement is often an open-ended process and potentially long-term (e.g., BenEzer & Zetter, 2014; Marlowe, 2018; Schneider, 2021; Simich et al., 2010). Spatially, resettlement operates at international and national levels, while settlement occurs in specific local contexts (Schneider, 2021). In this research, 'resettlement' is the operative term, recognising that the migration journey can be an ongoing process that may not culminate in settlement (e.g., BenEzer & Zetter, 2014).

Resettlement research highlights refugees' struggles with finding belonging (e.g., Edgeworth, 2015; Marlowe, 2018; Morrice, 2011; Shamai & Amir, 2016) and navigating integration issues (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Pietka-Nykaza, 2015), despite resettlement selection criteria that espouse their integration-potential (e.g., Schneider, 2021). Resettled refugees experience, *inter alia*, barriers to social connections and networks (Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Nardon et al., 2021), cultural acculturation challenges (Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020), language barriers hindering employment (Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Davey & Jones, 2020; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020), and limited access to employment opportunities (Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Davey & Jones, 2020; Nardon et al., 2021). Moreover, resettlement literature (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Luimpöck, 2019; Marlowe, 2018; Mozetič, 2021; Wehrle et al., 2018) highlights that refugee labelling and stigmatisation accentuates social inclusion barriers, leading to prolonged feelings of non-settlement. These

experiences perpetuate victimhood perceptions in resettlement societies (Bottura & Mancini, 2016; Greenbank, 2024).

Narratives of how to be a refugee – concerning self-reliance, suffering victimhood, and vulnerability – permeate the journey, requiring people to embody these narratives for aid access, protection, resettlement qualification, and visibility. In displacement contexts, and sometimes in resettlement, refugees' agency can be structurally constrained. The influences of power and agency in refugees' identity constructions warrant further explorations. Additionally, Szkudlarek et al. (2021), following their study on contexts shaping refugee and expatriate experiences, suggest the development of more comprehensive theoretical frameworks incorporating contexts, such as macro-level factors. Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) recommended exploring identity construction processes across different cultural contexts. The migration journey provides the macro-level context for understanding refugees' identity constructions at work. Stets and Serpe (2013) argue that identity theory concepts require further development to explain formation processes, underpinning reasons and demographic variations. The literature on identity is analysed next.

2.2 Identity theories and the refugee identity

In this section, the literature on prominent identity theories is analysed. Non-Western identity frameworks are then discussed, and the construction of the refugee identity is explored. The section concludes by positioning the research agenda towards a broader identity framework. Understanding identity construction is fundamentally important as it shapes how individuals perceive themselves and navigate their social worlds, with particular significance for refugee populations whose sense of self can undergo profound transformations through forced displacement.

Several scholars have revealed that finding work in the resettlement context enables refugees to construct a new sense of self (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Davey & Jones, 2020; Ertorer, 2014; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020), and that the lack of access to work prospects results in loss of self-esteem and identity (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Wehrle et al., 2018; Willott & Stevenson, 2013). While the relationship between work and refugees' identities is acknowledged, the scholarship does not explicitly explore the uniqueness of refugees as a population and how their identity construction processes may be influenced by the migration journey. A broader framework that encompasses the journey, alongside refugees' voice in

terms of who they are, is pertinent to addressing current gaps in refugees' identity. As Orwenjo et al. (2021, p. 352) highlight, refugees' identities are constructed "through a complex web of processes constrained by many internal factors such as feelings, beliefs, ethnic and cultural traditions" alongside external factors such as forced migration and resettlement policies, and the host country's cultural, political and socioeconomic conditions.

2.2.1 Identity theories intersecting with refugees at work

With their origins in social psychology, several theoretical perspectives on identity and how it is formed have been developed (Gecas, 1982). These include the concept that identity is socially constructed (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Newman et al., 2018; Refai et al., 2018), incessantly shaped through, and for, interactions with others and in specific situations (Warhurst & Black, 2019). Stets and Burke (2014, p. 412) state that identity is "a set of meanings that defines individuals in terms of the roles they occupy, the social categories or groups they belong to, and the individual characteristics that define them as unique persons."

Identity construction is the process individuals engage in for self-definition (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). An individual's subjective experiences create these meanings, where the individual seeks to understand who they are and how they should act (Alvesson et al., 2008). According to Mizzi and Rocco (2013), identity is not bestowed but involves the individual's struggles in creating and maintaining an ideal sense of self. Moreover, some scholars agree that (dominant) narratives have an influential role in identity construction (e.g., Abkhezr et al., 2018; Shamai & Amir, 2016; Smollan & Pio, 2018) through the process of internalisation (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Walter et al., 2015).

The literature on identity is vast (Warhurst & Black, 2019), with approaches to identity (e.g., Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), conceptualisations of identity construction (e.g., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), identity work (e.g., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Morrice, 2011), and types of identities (e.g., Alvesson, 2010; Smollan & Pio, 2018; Stets & Burke, 2014). In Table 2.1, existing identity theories, such as identity theory (Stryker, 1968), identity work (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), optimal distinctive theory (Brewer, 1991), and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) are summarised. Several scholars (e.g., Groen et al., 2018; Refai et al., 2018; Tiwari et al., 2017) have explored refugees' identities using alternative approaches to these identity theories. Others have utilised terms such as 'professional identities' (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Zikic & Richardson, 2016), suggesting

opportunities to more explicitly connect these concepts to existing theoretical frameworks. To maintain focus on refugees' identity constructions in the context of work, Table 2.1 includes only the most relevant studies.

Table 2.1

Key identity theories and intersections with refugees-at-work scholarship

Influential social psychologists & scholars	Theory name	Key elements	Utilised in refugees-at-work research
Blumer (1969); H. Becker (1973); Glaser & Strauss (1965) <i>Origins:</i> Mead (1967); M. H. Kuhn (1964)	Processual interactionist <i>or</i> Symbolic interactionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlights the importance of the social situation in identity creation, maintenance and negotiation Inseparable cause and consequence in social interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugee labelling and stigma (Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Baranik et al., 2018; Morrice, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018)
Mead (1967); M. H. Kuhn (1964); Stryker (1968, 2008)	Structural symbolic interactionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity is linked to roles in society Multiple social roles organised in a hierarchy and role commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not applicable
Tajfel (1974); Tajfel & Turner (1979)	Social identity theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intergroup relations in a social context construct identity Interpersonal–intergroup continuum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social identity (Alfadhil & Drury, 2018)
Ashforth & Mael (1989); Kreiner & Ashforth (2004)	Organisational identity – an extension of the social identity theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes through which people identify with the organisations they work in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational inclusion and identity (Ortlieb et al., 2021)
Turner (1975, 1982, 1984, 2010)	Self-categorisation theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity is unique in some situations (personal) and in some defined through social group memberships (social) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not applicable
Brewer (1991)	Optimal distinctiveness theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social identity a result of a fundamental tension between the need for belonging and need to be unique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugees' exclusion at work (Knappert et al., 2018)
Alvesson & Willmott (2002); A. D. Brown (2017); Caza et al. (2018); Ibarra & Barbulescu (2010)	Identity work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process through which a person creates, adapts, maintains, rejects and claims social, role and personal identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liminality and identity work (Öztürk, 2023) Three types of identity work (Taghavi et al., 2024)

Refugee identity studies reveal significant challenges in workplace integration and identity construction. Alfadhil and Drury (2018) found that shared social identities of co-nationals and refugees facilitated social network support alongside experiences of labelling and

stigmatisation of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Baranik et al. (2018), in a multicountry study, found that stigma associated with being a refugee created vocational stresses for refugees, particularly when accessing work. In the same vein, Wehrle et al. (2018) explored barriers to work in Germany, finding that identities imposed on refugees included the stigma of being a refugee, being a social and/or resource drain, and being a cheap workforce. Similarly, societal discourses of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ refugees were found to influence managers’ and co-workers’ perceptions of refugees as good, glorious and grateful workers in Ortlieb et al.’s (2021) study in Austria, limiting refugees’ sense of self while simultaneously achieving workplace inclusiveness. Morrice (2011) found that refugees in the United Kingdom experienced stigmatisation, which created internal tensions with the desire to be identified as respectable people, leading to some participants hiding their refugee identity out of shame and vulnerability.

Knappert et al. (2018), meanwhile, concluded that the intersection of gender and refugee status made Syrian women refugees more susceptible to harassment at work and unfair employment practices in Turkey, while country-specific elements such as institutional voids, rejection of refugees, legitimisation of refugees’ exploitation, and precarious employment enabled the exclusion of refugees. Öztürk (2023) subsequently found, inter alia, that working in cooperatives enabled Syrian women in Turkey to reconstruct their sense of self, experience a shift in gender roles, and find belonging. Finally, Taghavi et al. (2024, p. 71) revealed three identity work strategies of adjusting, detaching, and enhancing utilised by refugees in France in relation to their professional and social integration, highlighting that labelling of refugees “often reduces them to a fixed identity instead of plurality of selves”, which influenced the type of strategy adopted.

These studies illuminate negative associations with the refugee identity in the context of work, particularly regarding labelling or stigmatisation. There remains scope to explore additional dimensions of meaning-making, including how these meanings are constructed and their influence on refugees’ experiences. While these studies provide crucial understanding of resettlement experiences, expanding the analytical lens to encompass the full migration journey could offer additional insights. The existing focus on the refugee identity offers important foundations for exploring the multifaceted nature of identity, including how individuals perceive themselves *before* displacement and *throughout* their journey. Knappert et al. (2018) and Öztürk (2023) have begun to explore the intersection with other aspects of identity, such

as gender, pointing towards the potential for further research on refugees embodying a plurality of selves, as noted by Taghavi et al. (2024).

2.2.2 The need for non-Western identity perspectives for refugee studies

The previously discussed identity theories are perceived to be Western-centric, with a focus on the individual. Western-centric identity theories have predominantly been applied to explain and understand refugees' experiences. Stebleton (2012) highlighted that African immigrants experience unique identity issues, while Duderija (2007) noted that Muslim immigrants' Islamic identity, as a sociohistorical phenomenon, becomes uprooted during migration to Western countries. Furthermore, Sideri (2012) found that identity markers of family genealogies and social practices and rules anchored identity formation of Greek diasporic communities in Georgia. These few studies reveal that non-Western identity concepts may be relevant to migration studies and, in line with Sideri's (2012) view, pertinent to understanding refugees' experiences.

Non-Western identity perspectives take the epistemological stance of the individual existing in the context of the world around them, which is embedded in and inseparable from self-conceptions (Naude, 2021). Yin (2018) offered a non-Western framework for understanding identity through a comparative analysis of Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) and Confucian philosophies, identifying five common identity dimensions. Collectivity was conceptualised as the self being relationship-centred; morality as representing the self's ethical development, sensitivity as representing a spiritual or emotional awakening, transformability as representing a capacity for growth or change, and finally inclusivity as an interconnected worldview (Yin, 2018). The interconnected worldview was also highlighted by Naude (2021, p. 17) through the African concept of *ubuntu*, which emphasises the construction "of the self through rootedness in interpersonal connectedness and engagement in cultural life." Naude (2021) theorised that the meaning of places, cultural symbols, language and ethnicity are tenets of the African identity, while other scholars (e.g., Gibbons et al., 2021; Jessop, 2021; Tseung-Wong, 2021) have explored layered meanings within national identities in the contexts of ethnicity, politics and religion.

Identity conceptualisations proposed by Naude (2021), Sideri (2012) and Yin (2018) go beyond culture as a dimension relevant to identity formation. Whereas Hofstede (1989) had focused on culture as the basis for self-definition, Yin (2018, p. 203) notes that culture is not immutable;

rather historical memory provides a sense of cultural identity, which is “continuously being invented, reinvented ... proactively blending the old and new”. In sum, aspects of collectivist cultures play an influential role in identity formation (Sugimura et al., 2021) but are not the only element in construction of non-Western identity philosophies, as highlighted by Gibbons et al. (2021), Naude (2021) and Tseung-Wong (2021).

Klimstra and Adams (2021) note that in non-Western contexts, existing scholarship has focused on identity during adolescence and emerging adulthood but has not explored the development of identity over time. Moreover, non-Western identity philosophies do not distinguish the individual from the group or community they are embedded, highlighting a fundamental problem with Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory, which tends to dichotomise groups and the individual. While the literature on non-Western identity perspectives is sparse (B. G. Adams, 2021), it is even more so in the context of refugees and their experiences, noting that within non-Western identity philosophies, there may be distinctions, despite some similarities (B. G. Adams, 2021), and that refugees are a heterogeneous group.

2.2.3 The refugee identity

The construction of refugee identity emerges from complex interactions between personal factors and external circumstances. Refugees’ own conceptualisations of identity, such as cultural and ethnic traditions and beliefs, combined with forced migration policies, socioeconomic and political conditions, as well as cultural practices of host countries, create the refugee identity (Orwenjo et al., 2021). The migration journey, from pre-flight, displacement to resettlement (in the context of this thesis), gives rise to varied meanings of refugeehood. Generally, refugees are perceived as hidden, invisible and marginalised (Alawneh & Rashid, 2022). Displacement instigates a reckoning with the label of ‘refugee’, a concept unfamiliar and not normally part of a person’s identity in their COO (Fee, 2025; Orwenjo et al., 2021), unless family members or community members in their COO were refugees. As Pearlman (2019, p. 302) notes, “... refugees’ own identification as refugees evolves over time as a contingent process not necessarily coterminous with actual physical displacement.” Ticktin (2006, 2014) has shown that exceptionality is a condition for assistance in the humanitarian system wherein recipients must demonstrate a version of humanity that is limited and embodied in suffering to be seen worthy of humanitarian rewards. Host populations also influence meanings of refugeehood. State-driven non-recognition of refugees constructs societal discourses of refugees as unwelcome visitors, illegal, and a burden on society (e.g.,

Earle & Brown, 2024; Orwenjo et al. 2021). Ikanda (2018) found that locals outside the Dadaab camp in Kenya perceived Somali refugees as non-refugees because they were thriving in business activities within and outside the camp. Similarly, Chang (2022) found that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Egypt were perceived by locals as wealthy and not fitting the ‘refugee’ stereotype. What these studies reveal is that refugees try to counter narratives of dependency and victimhood by earning a living but, in doing so, can contribute to constructing other pejorative host community narratives. The perceptions of others may have implications on how refugees make sense of themselves and their place in the world, as noted by Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022) and Orwenjo et al. (2021). Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022, p. 1599) sum it up through their research with Syrian refugee women living in a protracted state of limbo in Jordan, concluding that identity work can “stretch the boundaries of indeterminate liminality, enabling [refugees] to maintain cognitive control over their sense of self.” Their analysis shows that refugees can be subjected to various perceptions in displacement.

The resettlement process introduces additional ramifications for refugee identity, often shaped by expectations of the host society. Some scholars suggest that refugees internalise these identity aspects ascribed by the resettlement society (e.g., Bottura & Mancini, 2016; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020; Ortlieb et al., 2021). Eligibility for resettlement is often dependent on demonstrating ‘refugee-ness’, conceptualised as a process of becoming the embodiment of suffering and vulnerability (Ikanda, 2018; Palillo, 2022; Ticktin, 2006, 2014; Welfens, 2023). Such eligibility can be independently designed by host countries, whose priorities for refugee intakes per the quota programme stipulated in the Convention can range from ensuring security for the nation-state, economic considerations such as refugees’ abilities to work and contribute to society, and cultural integration (Schneider, 2021; Welfens, 2023). In resettlement societies, refugees are often “depicted as passive victims and as a threat to the economic, social, and security welfare” (Mozetič, 2018, p. 231).

Resettlement scholarship reveals other societal perceptions of refugees as benefit scroungers and a drain on local resources (Wehrle et al., 2018), boat people (Espiritu, 2014), good or bogus refugees (Bottura & Mancini, 2016), the ‘other’ (Fee, 2025; Luimpöck, 2019; Racine & Lu, 2015), problems for society such as threats to safety and culture (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Wehrle et al., 2018), and unskilled people (Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Mozetič, 2021). Morrice (2011, p. 110) argues that the identity of a refugee is already problematic, in that it is “impossible to generate valuations of being a moral subject.” Marlowe (2018), meanwhile, has

highlighted the need for reflexive practices in unpacking assumptions of the meanings of words such as belonging, refugees, and resettlement. However, existing scholarship does not explore how refugees, and those in the host society, may counter such narratives.

The distinctive nature of the refugee experience separates it from broader migration narratives. The refugee identity is often perceived as distinct from that of migrants. Immigration can arise from various reasons, such as family reunification, economic reasons, holiday and work schemes, and expatriate assignments (e.g., Harvey, 2012; Murray & Marx, 2013; Pio, 2005). Refugees, unlike migrants, often cannot return to their COO (e.g., Pisani & Grech, 2015) and leave their COO unprepared (e.g., Sebestyen et al., 2018). While these distinctions between migrants and refugees are valid to an extent, they also tend to imply that refugees lack agency, reproducing narratives of refugee victimhood, vulnerability and deservingness. Several scholars (e.g., Ikanda, 2018; Knappert et al., 2020, 2023; Mookerjee, 2019; Oka, 2014; Smets et al., 2019) advocate for refugees' agency to be situated alongside accounts of vulnerability in both displacement and resettlement scholarship. For example, Ikanda's (2018) study demonstrated that refugees in protracted displacement were not passive victims lacking agency; nor did they possess limitless agency. There was an endless negotiation of their circumstances and responses to uncertain contexts (Ikanda, 2018). Despite such accounts, the scholarship on refugees tends to ignore refugee agency (Pietka-Kykaza, 2015). Moreover, Espiritu (2014), Harrell-Bond (2002) and Rajaram (2002) contend that humanitarian organisations and host countries articulate narratives that depict themselves as saviours of victimised refugees. Smets et al. (2019) found that refugee participants acknowledged pity and victimhood as valid responses to refugeehood but desired these responses to be contextualised to a limited period in their lives, thus signalling a shift from pity to empathy, the latter being a mechanism for revaluing and rehumanising the individual.

Consistent with the view of Diedrich and Styhre (2008), the term 'refugees' could be perceived as a fluid and permeable construct, its definitions altering across time, institutions, countries and actors, all of which create and re-create meanings of refugees according to their motives. Studies discussed in this section have shown how to conceptualise the refugee identity while simultaneously revealing societal actors' (such as humanitarian workers and employers in both displacement and resettlement) generally pejorative perceptions of the refugee identity. How refugees respond to identities ascribed by societal actors is also not well established in refugee scholarship. A person's sense of self and maintaining control of that selfhood is inevitably

entwined with what being refugee means, as demonstrated by the study of Oka (2014). Furthermore, Kallio (2019, p.1) posits that “identities and agencies ... as processes of ‘becoming refugee’ are subjectively experienced and enacted but also shared and practiced with other individuals and collectives.” Thus, the refugee identity, its social construction, and the lived experiences of the individuals negotiating identification with refugeehood demand a nuanced, bottom-up research approach.

What is distinctly missing in refugee scholarship is how one’s conceptualisations of identity are negotiated with the varying notions of the refugee identity throughout the migration journey. In essence, *how* are refugees’ identities constructed throughout the migration journey? A broader framework that explores ‘being and becoming a refugee’ – in the context of Mead’s (1967) theory of identity – may be able to better capture the refugee experience, and the multiple complexities associated with refugees’ lives. Such complexities entail the transnational ties and family connections, as highlighted by Arar and FitzGerald (2023), or how individuals engage with being categorised as refugees (Banko et al., 2022). There is agreement in refugee scholarship that refugees are not a homogeneous group, and they come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Fedrigo et al., 2023; Field et al., 2017; Heilbrum & Iannone, 2019; Knappert et al., 2023; J. Sampson et al., 2016). Taking all these perspectives further, analysis of the existing literature on refugees’ identities reveals that not only are studies using established identity theories that may benefit from expansion for refugees’ work contexts, but the studies also tend to not explore how refugees’ construct a sense of selfhood during displacement *and* resettlement – a journey that can be prolonged and entrenched in precarity – and how these experiences in turn impact the work pursued. The literature on work, refugees at work and meaningful work is explored next.

2.3 Work

This section begins with an analysis of conceptualisations of work, positioning work from a holistic perspective. The literature on refugees at work is then analysed, followed by research on work within the migration journey to present a roadmap of current knowledge gaps. Finally, the concepts of meaningful work and the meaning of work as they are currently understood in management scholarship are analysed in the context of refugee experiences.

2.3.1 Work conceptualisations

Sociological perspectives on work emphasise the role of work in social organisation and identity formation (e.g., Weber, 1978). Traditional views have conceptualised work as instrumental to identity formation (e.g., Erikson, 1980), as the context for self-actualisation (e.g., Maslow, 1943), and as a source of meaning and purpose (e.g., Bushkin et al., 2021). These conceptualisations have evolved over time to more holistic understandings of what constitutes work.

The perspectives of Stebleton (2012) and Taylor (2004) challenge traditional notions of work or careers as applicable only to continuous paid employment, illuminating careers that may be invisible in voluntary, domestic and community work. Stebleton (2012, p. 52) provided a holistic perspective on work through an exploration of the totality of human lives, stating that “work is defined holistically as the constellation of roles that [people] engage in throughout their lives, including non-paid roles”. Taylor (2004) earlier defined work as labour involving the provision of services or production of goods for others, occurring across multiple spheres of institution, community, and family. In this way, different forms of work are interconnected and interdependent; work is constructed as a concept that cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined within broader social structures. Taylor (2004) proposed a new conceptual framework to recognise six forms of work – paid employment, formal voluntary work, informal unpaid work, informal economic activity, paid labour within family, and unpaid domestic labour. While Taylor’s (2004) typology does not explicitly incorporate entrepreneurship, his framework be assumed to subsume entrepreneurship as a form of work. Moving beyond the private and public dichotomy, Taylor’s (2004) six work forms are placed along a continuum rather than in separate spheres, suggesting that some activities can occur across various domains and carry different meanings.

Work conceptualisations in management scholarship are still evolving, building on the foundational work of Stebleton (2012) and Taylor (2004). Management practitioners (e.g., Beierschoder, 2024; Hagel & Wooll, 2019) recommend that work be redefined due to the increasing use of artificial intelligence. Even so, such redefinition is confined to work performed within organisations. Other forms of work, such as care and domestic work (e.g., Blofield & Jokela, 2018; Fraser, 2016; Sarti, 2014), digital labour, (e.g., Wood et al., 2019), and gig work (e.g., Mousa & Chaouali, 2023; van Zoonen et al., 2024), challenge the traditional

separation between paid and unpaid work, and employer-employee relationships. Adopting a broader lens on what constitutes work is therefore imperative for this research, as refugees' divergent migration journeys comprise work that goes beyond a workplace and traditional notions of employment.

2.3.2 Work in displacement

Refugees tend to find various ways to earn a living rather than solely relying on humanitarian aid in refugee camps. Work in camps is largely based around incentives or cash for work and is set up by the UNHCR as short-term, paid voluntary work whereby refugees provide services within their displaced communities (Ginn, 2023; Hasan et al., 2024; Jabbar & Zaza, 2016; Kattaa, 2016; Tiltnes et al., 2019). However, such work was found to be unsustainable (Betts et al., 2019) and generally low-paid (Hasan et al., 2024; Kattaa, 2016). Betts et al. (2019) established, in their research with Congolese and Somali refugees in the Kakuma (Kenya) and Nakivale (Uganda) camps, that despite higher employment rates in Kakuma, refugees in Nakivale were employed in more sustainable jobs such as self-employment in agriculture, and work in commercial activities. Other studies found in-camp work to constitute commercial trade of black-market (unwanted humanitarian aid) items (e.g., Oka, 2014), innovative entrepreneurship (e.g., Betts et al., 2017), market stall enterprises (e.g., Kattaa, 2016), and merchandising handmade craft (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022). These diverse examples illustrate that refugees in camps demonstrate resourcefulness and entrepreneurial initiative, though they often face sustainability challenges and limited compensation for their labour.

While camp settings present certain work limitations, the challenges intensify in urban contexts, where protracted urban displacement instigates work in the informal sectors (Crisp, 2017; Field et al., 2020; Omata, 2021; Sebestyen et al., 2018; Wake & Barbelet, 2020). These informal economic spaces tend to subject workers to exploitative conditions (Korkmaz, 2017). Several structural factors drive refugees towards informal work – a lack of work permits, restrictions on the right to work, and work permits being specific to an employer can push refugees to work in the informal sector (Barberis et al., 2022; Earle & Brown, 2024). The precarity of refugeehood, particularly for those who are undocumented or lack legal work rights, creates conditions where exploitation flourishes (Field et al., 2020; Korkmaz, 2017; Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021a). Exploitation materialises through harsh working conditions, underpayment, and/or extremely long working hours (Del Carpio & Wagner, 2015; Field et al., 2020; Kattaa, 2016; Knappert et al., 2018). Moreover, because of limited access to justice,

refugees are more susceptible to harassment from locals and police officers (Earle & Brown, 2024; Jacobsen, 2006; Omata, 2021), and often subject to deportation or imprisonment if found to be working illegally (Earle & Brown, 2024; Jacobsen, 2006; Wake & Barbelet, 2020). In displacement, particularly in middle-income countries such as Jordan and Turkey, refugees are perceived as job stealers who simultaneously benefit from humanitarian aid (e.g., Mencutec & Nashwan, 2021a, 2021b), because many host society members also work in the informal sector (Ginn, 2023). Despite these barriers, refugees tend to find various work pathways. For example, Tiltnes et al. (2019) revealed that 93% of Syrian refugees in Jordan worked as paid employees in formal and informal sectors, while 5% were self-employed. Many Syrians worked in roles consistent with those in their COO, and such work was performed in private businesses (Tiltnes et al., 2019). Similarly, Betts et al. (2019) found that urban refugees in Uganda worked in private businesses, and that Somali refugees tended to work for Somali employers there.

Research shows that refugees' actions and strategies are based on contextual perceptions and their own understandings of policies and risks in displaced settings. Wake and Barbelet (2020) found that the introduction of a work permit for both camp and urban refugees in Jordan and Turkey was perceived by refugees as riskier than working undocumented because they were afraid that work permits would lead to more exploitation, that the permit was not synonymous with the right to work, and that they may be negatively impacted by identifying as refugees. Indeed, Tiltnes et al. (2019) found that Syrian refugees in Jordan, except those who resided in camps, were not well protected by work contracts. Additionally, a work permit meant a reduction in/loss of humanitarian aid (Badalič, 2023; Wake & Barbelet, 2020). Such aid was not enough to provide for basic needs of a family, thereby necessitating additional income, which came from work in the informal sector (Badalič, 2023) as well as formal sector jobs (Mencutec & Nashwan, 2021a). Gendered roles also created the need for informal sector work, as women with young children preferred to work in situ rather than go out to work (Badalič, 2023). Finally, income from work in this sector was not subject to taxes and statutory deductions. According to Stave et al. (2021) and Tiltnes et al. (2019), in 2018 only one-third of the Syrian population in Jordan, mainly men, held work permits. These studies reveal nuances in the work performed in the informal sector and highlight the concepts of refugees' agency and choice. However, some of their choices may be influenced by restrictive structural factors and barriers to formal sector work. Institutional and structural barriers, such as regulations on the right to work (Barberis et al., 2022; Earle & Brown, 2024), are harder to overcome by agency alone. These studies reveal the complex interplay between structural

constraints and individual agency in displacement work contexts, highlighting how refugees strategically navigate employment options. Attention is next turned to how this complexity plays out in the resettlement context.

2.3.3 Work in resettlement

The UNHCR policy on self-reliance appears to underpin resettlement policies (e.g., Garnier, 2023) in countries like New Zealand, which states self-sufficiency through employment as a resettlement goal (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [MBIE], 2023). Gaining employment is deemed an important resettlement goal, a means through which refugees can resume their lives and become self-sufficient (e.g., Abur & Spaaij, 2016; Field et al., 2017; Marlowe, 2015; McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019; Pisani & Grech, 2015). Nardon et al. (2021) argue that refugee employment scholarship is dominated by discourses on barriers to gaining employment, as demonstrated by studies by Baranik et al. (2018), Campion (2018), Fozdar and Hartley (2013), Hebbani et al. (2016), Pajic et al. (2018), Sebestyen et al. (2018) and Sienkiewicz et al. (2013), for example. However, few studies have explored refugees' experiences at work.

Resettlement scholarship illuminates significant challenges for refugees, including lost identities, identity struggles, and identity crises resulting from employment barriers (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Wehrle et al., 2018). Several studies (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Morrice, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018; Willott & Stevenson, 2013) have identified the impacts on refugees' identity pursuant to barriers to employment encountered. Extant literature notes that due to barriers encountered, refugees experience downward occupational mobility (Baranik et al., 2018; Hebbani et al., 2016; Jackson & Bauder, 2014; Lumley-Sapanski, 2021), unemployment (Sienkiewicz et al., 2013), or employment in 'refugee jobs' (Jackson & Bauder, 2014) and the informal labour market (Sebestyen et al., 2018). Refugee jobs are usually precarious, undesirable, part-time or temporary jobs (Jackson & Bauder, 2014), or jobs specific to the refugee identity, such as language interpretation (Frykman 2012). Consequently, refugees resort to work which is often beneath their previous qualifications and experiences (Campion, 2018; Davey & Jones, 2020; Hebbani et al., 2016). Refugees' personal identities were impacted through non-recognition of their qualifications (Wehrle et al., 2018). These studies bring into focus the intertwined relationship between identity and work.

Resettlement processes are inherently embedded in discourses of vulnerability and deservedness (Welfens, 2023). Morrice (2011, p. 113) notes that “the negative social definitions and associations imposed by powerful discourses contrast sharply with the self-definitions and identities constructed by refugees themselves.” Some societal narratives are underpinned by what Koyama and Chang (2018) term ‘benevolent othering’, which positions the resettlement host society as humanitarian actors assisting those in need (Koyama, 2024). Refugee victimhood narratives have permeated management and refugees-at-work scholarship (Pesch & Ipek, 2024). Studies have highlighted, for example, feelings of powerlessness (Wehrle et al., 2018), language barriers (Ortlieb & Weiss, 2020), learned helplessness and precarious work (Hirst et al., 2023), identity insecurity (Schaubroeck et al., 2022), negative impacts of organisational identity regulation (Ortlieb et al., 2021), non-recognition of former professions (Campion, 2018), and trauma (Pajic et al., 2018). While this scholarship provides beneficial organisational insights, research exploring refugee agency and voice in parallel could potentially offer a more complete picture. Refugees are a heterogeneous population (Fedrigo et al., 2023; Knappert et al., 2023), and some barriers are indeed difficult to overcome in resettlement work contexts by agency alone (E. S. Lee et al., 2020). Refugees’ agency can be valuable resources in resettlement contexts (Knappert et al., 2020) and therefore understanding how refugees actively navigate (work) challenges could complement and enrich existing scholarship.

An increasing amount of management scholarship (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023; Nardon et al., 2021; Tomlinson, 2010; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002; Verwiebe, 2019) has begun to advocate for balanced perspectives that acknowledge refugee agency while also recognising heterogeneity within refugee populations. Scholars such as Nardon et al. (2021), Szkudlarek et al. (2021) and Tomlinson (2010) recognise the impacts of micro-, meso- and macro-level policies and structures on refugees’ integration at work. In the context of work, refugee agency is, according to Pesch and Ipek (2024) and Tomlinson and Egan (2002), how refugees cope with integration challenges through utilising their career development capabilities. A research objective of this thesis is to explore this delicate balance between agency and vulnerability as an active social process. Adeeko and Treanor (2022) found that refugee women in the United Kingdom were intentional about how they presented themselves to the host society, crossing the borders of social structures and discourses that implied difference and marginalisation. The women were found to engage in identity work that positioned them as becoming a female entrepreneur in contrast to being subject to single, fixed-identity states, such as ‘refugee’ (Adeeko & Treanor,

2022). Knappert et al. (2023, p. 351) found that refugees “demonstrated tremendous endurance and proactiveness in surmounting” employment barriers, such as, inter alia, engaging in apprenticeship, internship or volunteer work, learning the local language, and overcoming constant job application rejections. Verwiebe et al. (2019), meanwhile, showed that, despite the existence of employment barriers, refugees became gainfully employed in Austria through the mobilisation of personal agency traits such as willingness, self-discipline, patience, perseverance, confidence, proactivity, and being flexible, mobile, and adaptable. These few studies point to refugees’ roles in their own work journeys in resettlement, signalling further scope to more explicitly explore the relationship between work and refugees’ identities, as well as the roles of other stakeholders in the work context.

2.3.4 Resettlement stakeholders influencing work integration

Having access to work is crucial for social integration in resettlement countries and involves multiple stakeholders. Numerous studies (e.g., Bache, 2020; Baranik, 2021; Bešić et al., 2022; Diedrich & Omanović, 2023; Diedrich & Styhre, 2008; Pesch & Ipek, 2024) affirm the importance of work integration for refugees. Unemployment among refugees, while common, remains problematic for both the individual and the host society because it limits refugees’ integration (Pesch & Ipek, 2024). While integration research often focuses on the newcomer, integration is a holistic process where both the newcomer and host society change and inevitably change each other, signalling interrelatedness between these, and other stakeholders, in the host society (Hynie, 2018). In that vein, some authors (e.g., Guo et al., 2020; Oguzertem, 2020) argue that host societies have a legal and moral responsibility to support refugees’ right to work and facilitate their labour market inclusion. Key actors that enable refugee employment are private companies (e.g., Diedrich & Omanović, 2023; Silva et al. 2021), public service organisations (e.g., Bešić et al., 2022), and refugee support agencies (e.g., Diedrich & Styhre, 2008). Knappert et al. (2023, p. 340) have also noted that refugee employment is influenced by “a complex network of independent actors with idiosyncratic interests and responsibilities”, terming this a multifactor effort while also highlighting that individual motives at the micro-level of employers, refugees and service providers were influential in shifting meso- and macro-outcomes for refugee employment. This thesis explores the roles of managers and mentors who employ or work with refugees, and service providers who assist refugees into work or entrepreneurship pathways. Consequently, the review of literature relating to work in resettlement focuses on these two key stakeholders.

Scholarship pertaining to work in resettlement tends to focus on inclusive organisational practices with limited insights on the specific roles played by managers of refugees. According to Pesch et al. (2023) and Silva et al. (2021), managers' roles in inclusive organisational practices scholarship are underexplored. The role of mentors in assisting refugees, specifically in the transitional spaces between refugees being employed and seeking work, is also understudied (Diedrich & Omanović, 2023). Mentors in Diedrich and Omanović's (2023) study were workplace-appointed managers who assisted refugee interns to learn about Swedish workplace cultures and practices, with the objective of interns either being employed by the organisation or becoming employable by other organisations. E. S. Lee et al. (2020) found that employers in host societies imposed higher pre-entry standards for refugee applicants compared to other migrants and were unwilling to spend time to navigate the challenges of assessing foreign-acquired skills and qualifications. This helps explain Ravn's (2024) finding that employers are more likely to employ refugees when contacted by service providers. Additionally, Ravn (2024) concluded that employers' preconceptions about refugees and their own socially responsible attitudes played a mediating role in refugees' employment, increasing the likelihood of refugees being employed. Similarly, employers in the United States positioned refugees as hardworking as well as desperate to work, and such positionings were pertinent to the recruitment of refugees (Koyama, 2024). However, work integration of refugees does not end with recruitment; it represents merely the beginning of a complex process requiring ongoing support, cultural adaptation, and organisational commitment to create workplaces where refugees can establish themselves and integrate successfully.

The post-recruitment phase presents additional challenges that employers must address. For example, Yanar et al. (2022) revealed gaps in employer safety practices and safety communication in integrating refugee workers safely into work. On the other hand, Knappert et al. (2023) found that managers tried to create bias-free workplaces to ensure longer-term employment of refugees, alongside learning from their past experiences and planning for more effective engagement with refugee workers. In their seminal work conducted in Germany, Pesch et al. (2023) established three types of management styles in the context of refugee employees – the humanitarian, the lecturer, and the pragmatist. The pragmatist style was a blended approach of acknowledging refugees' vulnerabilities as well as their capabilities, leading to mutually beneficial outcomes, such as employee retention, job satisfaction, and professional development (Pesch et al., 2023). Conversely, the humanitarian and lecturer approaches focused on keeping refugees from failing at work, and managers' tendencies to

become overinvolved with their employees (Pesch et al., 2023). Moreover, akin to Ravn's (2024) findings, humanitarian managers utilised a socially moral perspective (associated with vulnerability) when employing refugees (Pesch et al., 2023). Pesch et al.'s (2023) work underscores the importance of a balanced integrative lens, but the issue remains as to how to effectively develop and apply such a lens in practice, particularly against the milieu of negative societal perceptions of refugees, which filter through to organisational structures and practices. These workplace integration challenges highlight the critical role managers play in shaping refugees' ability to construct positive work identities and derive meaning from their work, illustrating the connection between organisational practices and identity formation.

Assistance from resettlement service providers is crucial in navigating refugee employment (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Knappert et al., 2023; Nardon et al., 2021; Ortlieb & Weiss, 2020) as they play an intermediary role between refugees and employers (Darrow, 2015; Koyama, 2024; Silva et al., 2021). Studies in Canada (e.g., Kosny et al., 2020; Senthanaar et al., 2020), Europe (e.g., Numerato et al., 2023), New Zealand (e.g., McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019) and the United States (e.g., Darrow, 2015) have revealed that support services are directed as well as limited by public funding. Additionally, service providers have little influence on national policies affecting refugees' labour market integration (Numerato et al., 2023). Ravn (2024) and Silva et al. (2021) found that where service providers were involved, employers were more open to recruiting refugees, respectively due to employers not knowing where to find them and not being confident in engaging with them directly.

Service providers often play a crucial role in creating a positive image of refugees for the public and consequently potential employers (Knappert et al., 2023). For example, Koyama (2024) established that vocational trainers and career counsellors in the United States positioned refugees as hardworking, eager and economically necessary for the local labour market. Service providers also assist refugees to get work-ready, through language and skills training (Gaillard & Hughes, 2014; Koyama, 2024; Numerato et al., 2023), as well as building confidence (Koyama, 2024). However, sometimes service providers are unable to place refugees into sustainable jobs. Darrow (2015) and Senthanaar et al. (2020) found service providers were measured according to how quickly they placed clients into paid work, which often resulted in refugees being placed in low-waged, low-skilled, precarious work incommensurate with their education and experience, meaning providers tended to neglect the specific situations of refugee clients.

These studies reveal the roles played by employers and services providers in refugees' work experiences in resettlement, while also demonstrating the influence of the refugee identity in the pursuit of work. The scholarship on service providers reveals a careful balancing of priorities, which tends to simultaneously benefit and disadvantage refugees. The analysis shows that apart from the positioning tactics utilised by services providers and employers in Koyama's (2024) study, and managers intentionally paying attention to individual refugee workers in Pesch et al.'s (2023) research, the influence of these stakeholders on refugees' identity construction is an area that could be further explored.

Additionally, Ravn (2024) and Yanar et al. (2022) have highlighted the need for greater attention to employers' role in refugee employment scholarship, and contemporary studies (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023; Pesch et al., 2023) are bringing the role of managers into sharper focus. Employers can often be perceived as a single unit of analysis, presenting opportunities to explore the intricacies involved at the individual managerial level. Koyama (2024) argues that refugee employment in resettlement discourses could benefit from greater attention to refugees' work aspirations as well as their abilities to strategise long-term pathways for work, akin to Pesch et al.'s (2023) finding that humanitarian- and lecturer-style managers presented challenges in ensuring refugee workers' success in future endeavours.

Existing research on refugees' work experiences has largely focused on single stages of the migration journey rather than considering the entire journey. The literature has examined work experiences during specific phases such as protracted displacement in refugee camps (e.g., Ikanda, 2018; Kodeih et al., 2023; Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021a, 2021b; Oka, 2014; Omata, 2021; Tiltnes et al., 2019) or displacement in urban areas (e.g., Bahar et al., 2021; Baranik, 2021; Carpi et al., 2021; Omata, 2021; Zadhy & Erman, 2023). The vast majority of studies, in addition to those already noted, have explored refugee experiences during resettlement in UNHCR signatory countries (e.g., Baran et al., 2018; Baranik et al., 2018; Codell et al., 2011; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; Hebbani et al., 2016; Sebestyen et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018) or while refugees were in the process of obtaining refugee status in these signatory countries (e.g., Fleay et al., 2013). What emerges from this scholarship is an opportunity to explore how refugees' identities develop *across* the migration journey rather than remaining *within* displacement or resettlement binaries. Indeed, Szkudlarek et al. (2024, p. 285), in advocating for the use of a temporal lens in refugees-at-work scholarship, argued for a move beyond single

aspects of the journey and for considering “the accumulated experience and transition trajectories that make up the refugee in their entirety” in work integration efforts.

Recent refugee literature encourages other avenues of work to be explored, such as rural work schemes such as farming, apprenticeships and volunteer work (e.g., Hebbani et al., 2016), entrepreneurial endeavours (e.g., Freudenberg, 2019; Harima et al., 2019; Hartmann & Schilling, 2019; Nayir, 2019), and internships and mentorship for highly skilled refugees (e.g., Diedrich & Omanović, 2023). These studies highlight the need to explore work experiences outside of paid employment. Reverting to the concept of integration highlighted earlier in this section, workplace integration has been perceived as a social location that enables refugees’ overall integration in the host society (e.g., E. S. Lee et al., 2020). Workplace integration is a dynamic, long-term process whereby refugees become equal employees in the workplace (E. S. Lee et al., 2020; Pesch & Ipek, 2024), being provided comparable advancement possibilities and access to promotions as non-refugee employees with equivalent qualifications (Lai et al., 2017).

The lived experiences within the holistic model of work conceptualised by Stebleton (2012) and Taylor (2004) have been neither storied nor explored enough to explain their influences on refugees’ identities. The next sub-section explores what is known about meaningful work in general, and in the context of refugees’ migration journeys.

2.3.5 The meaning of work

This section analyses the literature on the meaning of work and meaningful work, with particular attention to research strands and existing frameworks. The analysis also extends to the few refugee studies that have explored meaningful work, highlighting key findings and gaps in the knowledge. Finally, the entwined nature of identity construction and meaningful work is discussed.

The literature reveals several distinct but overlapping conceptualisations of the meaning of work. Ardichvili and Kuchinke (2009) define the meaning of work as an individual’s overall attitudes and beliefs about work, including how they conceptualise work, and the level of importance and significance they assign to work in their life. This definition emphasises both individual beliefs and social influences. Rosso et al. (2010), meanwhile, distinguished between *meaning* (the type of meaning employees make of their work) and *meaningfulness* (the amount

of significance employees attach to their work). The meaning of work encompasses people's beliefs about the function/role of work in life, including work centrality, job involvement, and work orientation (Rosso et al., 2010). Work orientation is an individual's perceptions of work as a job (focus on material benefits and financial rewards), career (advancement and progression in careers) or calling (work which is fulfilling and socially valuable) (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Some strands of meaningful work research have explored concepts such as 'dirty' work (e.g., Zhang et al., 2023), employee wellbeing (e.g., Lips-Wiersma et al., 2023), influence of corporate social responsibility on employees' work meaningfulness (e.g., Lips-Wiersma, 2019), job autonomy (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2017; Martela et al., 2021), leaders' roles in shaping employees' meaning of work (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013; Lepisto, 2022; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2020; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2022), meaningfulness formed in organisations through rituals and emotions (e.g., Lepisto, 2022), organisational attempts to manage employee meaningfulness (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017), post-retirement work decisions (e.g., Fasbender et al., 2016), relationships between identity and meaningfulness (e.g., Kamp et al., 2011), and temporal lenses on meaningful work (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2017; Tommasi et al., 2020). Measurements of meaningful work (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Peltomäki et al., 2024; Pignault & Houssemand, 2021; Steger et al., 2012) and frameworks for understanding meaningful work (e.g., S. Lee, 2015; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2012) also permeate this body of literature.

Several frameworks have been developed to conceptualise meaningful work, each offering different perspectives and dimensions. S. Lee (2015, p. 2258) attempted to clarify the concept of meaning in work, identifying "Four critical attributes ... (1) experienced positive emotion at work; (2) meaning from work itself; (3) meaningful purpose and goals of work; and (4) work as part of life that contributes towards meaningful existence." Realisation as focus on self-actualisation through work and justification as accounting for why work is worthy are key factors in Lepisto and Pratt's (2017) conceptualisation of meaningful work. Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012), meanwhile, developed and validated a comprehensive, multidimensional measure of meaningful work. The authors identified seven dimensions of meaningful work – developing the inner self, expressing full potential, serving others, unity with others, reality, inspiration and balancing tensions (between self/other and being/doing). Rosso et al.'s (2010) literature review identified four main sources of meaning or meaningfulness in work – the self, others, the work context, and spiritual life, alongside seven mechanisms of meaning –

authenticity, belongingness, cultural/interpersonal sensemaking, purpose, self-efficacy, self-esteem, transcendence – all of which the authors integrate into a theoretical framework depicting four pathways to meaningful work – individuation, contribution, self-connection, and unification. Finally, Steger et al. (2012, p. 322) proposed “a multidimensional model of work as a subjectively meaningful experience consisting of experiencing positive meaning in work, sensing that work is a key avenue for making meaning, and perceiving one’s work to benefit some greater good.”

These frameworks were developed for specific contexts and present prospects for adaptation to refugees’ experiences. The frameworks focus on workers in professional or semi-professional jobs (e.g., Kamp et al., 2011; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2023; Steger et al., 2012) and in administration, hospitality, manual and retail jobs (e.g., Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2023; Williams, 2019) in predominantly formal-sector work scenarios. In doing so, the frameworks offer foundations that could be built on to include meaningful work across various socioeconomic levels, which is important in the context of refugees because of their various work experiences throughout the migration journey, particularly those in the displacement context, which this literature review has revealed to be precarious and often in the informal sector. Moreover, incorporating volunteer work and domestic care roles would enhance the comprehensiveness of these frameworks.

While Lips-Wiersma and Wright’s (2012) Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (CMWS) scale is grounded in extensive research, enhancing its content validity, their conceptualisation of meaningful work may be influenced by individualistic perspectives. For example, the framework positions others as external to the self, and two of its dimensions – ‘serving others’ and ‘unity with others’ – are represented as tensions between needs of others and needs of the self, the latter consisting of the inner self and expression of one’s full potential (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). Earlier, in Section 2.2 on identity, it was noted that non-Western identity concepts tend to overlook certain identity constructs that may be relevant to some groups of refugees, such as interconnectedness with others being integral to the self-concept. Rosso et al. (2010) emphasise the need for exploring interactions between multiple sources of meanings of work, alongside studying the social and cultural factors influencing work meanings. Finally, the above frameworks do not address how meaningful work develops over time, whether meanings change, and which influences are pertinent to meaning change or stability.

A growing body of research in refugee studies is exploring the concept of meaningful work. In Switzerland, Fedrigo et al. (2022), utilising subjective identity forms as a theoretical concept, developed three career profiles of refugees as altruists, vocation seekers, and work-lovers, which align with the respective meanings they associated with their work. Using Rosso et al.'s (2010) framework, Fedrigo et al. (2023) established that refugees found meaning in work when it was 'decent' work, corresponding with their interests and personality, and when it enabled meaningful relationships with others. Conversely, Ginevra et al. (2021) found that refugees in Italy set more materialistic goals relative to decent work goals, which were shaped by contextual factors, as well as connected with family and community relationships.

Hammad et al. (2023) examined meaningful work in Australia, finding that enhancing work-related acculturation (knowledge of local employment laws and practices) was integral to refugees securing meaningful work. Smith (2015) found that asylum seekers in the United Kingdom perceived work performed for the benefit for others especially meaningful. Akin to Ginevra et al.'s (2021) findings, Stebleton (2012) found that work experiences of Black African refugees (and migrants) in the United States were deeply connected to community and family obligations, and the meaning of work was shaped by contextual factors such as civil unrest and cultural influences. Finally, in Germany, Wehrle et al. (2024) built upon Lips-Wiersma and Wright's (2012) model and found that temporality was influential in the meaningfulness of work, with many refugee participants utilising temporal connections to envision a future self.

These relatively few studies have begun establishing important foundations in refugee research on meaningful work, creating opportunities for further exploration. These foundations present avenues to further explore how meaningful work unfolds across diverse work landscapes, including precarious work and within the migration journey contexts. The studies discussed above demonstrate the diversity of approaches to understanding meaningful work, with scholars like Hammad et al. (2023) focusing on job satisfaction and skill-job alignment, while Wehrle et al. (2024) advocate for theoretical development through temporal additions to the established frameworks of Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) and Rosso et al. (2010). Building on these insights, there is an opportunity to explore how refugees' own concepts of self and the refugee identity intersect with meanings of work. Bendassolli and Tateo (2018, p. 155) have called for the deconstruction of 'meaningfulness' as an objective concept, calling for theoretical constructs to explore the "interplay between different life contexts in elaboration of work's meaning". Bailey et al. (2019) have suggested explorations of meaningful work across a wider range of work contexts. Paid employment for refugees in both displacement and resettlement

contexts has been the focus in most refugees-at-work scholarship. Taking a holistic perspective of work throughout the migration journey opens possibilities to explore diverse forms of work and their evolution across different migration stages and contexts. The relationship between meaningful work and identity construction represents an important area for further theoretical development.

T. Kuhn et al. (2008) postulated that meaningfulness is wrapped up in complex identity projects extending beyond workplaces, noting that discursive resources from workplaces, occupations and commercial systems shape work meanings. Moreover, discourses such as impermanence (e.g., disrupted work, contract work) and differences (e.g., gendered work) disrupt notions of meaningful work, pointing to the significance of individual reflexiveness in constructing the meaning of work (T. Kuhn et al., 2008). Concepts of impermanence and disruption are relevant to refugees' migration journeys, as the previous sections have illustrated, and inevitably impact on identity. Other scholars (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010) allude to the self in conceptualisations of meaningful work, paving the way for further explorations of the nuanced and interlacing relationship between finding the meaning of work and identity. More recently, Wehrle et al.'s (2024) seminal study begins to explicate the links between meaningful work and conceptualisations of self. While Wehrle et al. (2024) focus on future selves, it is also important to understand the self in the past and present, not only because identity is multifaceted and can be constructed in many ways, as analysed in Section 2.2, but also because past and present self-perceptions provide the foundation from which future selves emerge. The meaning of work and identity are intertwined concepts, with each influencing, and being influenced by, the other. With the conceptual parameters of the research problem established, it is now imperative to understand the context within which the research reported in this thesis was conducted.

2.4 The research context – Aotearoa New Zealand

New Zealand's refugee resettlement landscape provides a compelling context for exploring the intersection of identity construction and work meanings for refugees. As one of the few countries accepting refugees with special medical needs and women at risk (Beaglehole, 2013; McBrien, 2014), New Zealand resettles up to 1,500 refugees annually through multiple pathways, including quota programmes, family reunification, and asylum processes (Immigration New Zealand [INZ], n.d.). However, the country's resettlement approach, which is characterised by an emphasis on self-sufficiency as a primary goal, coordination

gaps between stakeholders, persistent employment barriers, and complex media representations that often position refugees as either victims or threats, creates a challenging environment for refugees' identity negotiation. This section examines how these contextual forces shape refugee experiences in New Zealand, highlighting both the structural constraints they face and the research gaps.

Refugees in New Zealand enter the country through multiple pathways, each with different support structures and implications. In New Zealand, refugees arrive through three main avenues – the government quota programme, the family reunification programme, and asylum-seeking processes, which are complemented by community organisation sponsorship programmes and ad hoc humanitarian responses, such as the Afghanistan response in 2021 (INZ, n.d.). New Zealand is one of the few countries that accepts refugees with special medical needs, disabilities, and women at risk (Beaglehole, 2013; McBrien, 2014). However, New Zealand is also perceived critically for its small refugee intake (e.g., Amnesty International New Zealand, 2018), lack of financial resources for resettlement support (e.g., McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019), and gaps in the provision and accessibility of support and services to refugees (Pepworth & Nash, 2009). The New Zealand Government in 2020 limited the refugee quota programme to 1,500 per year (INZ, n.d.; New Zealand Parliament, 2020). At the end of November 2024, refugee arrivals in New Zealand for the year to date were 1,514 through the quota programme, 481 as family reunification, 144 via asylum, and 104 through the community organisation sponsorship (INZ, 2024). Refugees under the quota programme are resettled throughout the country in one of 13 locations and provided with resettlement support for up to a year (INZ, n.d.). In this thesis, those who arrived in New Zealand through all (the three main and complementary) pathways are collectively termed refugees. This is consistent with Pesch and Ipek's (2024) proposal for management scholars to perceive refugees as people who have fled their homes or regions due to the absence of protection, taking an agnostic stance on the legal status set by national and international agencies that manage protection and resettlement.

New Zealand's refugee resettlement strategy has evolved over time but continues to emphasise self-sufficiency as a primary goal. The 2012 New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy stated five resettlement goals of self-sufficiency – housing, education, health and wellbeing, and participation (INZ, 2018). Much debate existed around some goals in the resettlement strategy being more critical than others, and around some goals resulting from the achievement

of others (e.g., McBrien, 2014). Moreover, McBrien (2014) pointed out that the strategy neglected the integral foundational element of the communities within the resettlement country being as much responsible for resettlement as refugees. The strategy was also silent on how resettlement stakeholders could collaborate to help achieve self-sufficiency. Moreover, the self-sufficiency goal suggested that self-reliance was a universal trait that inspires all individuals. Field et al. (2017) noted that the Western ways of making the individual responsible for self-sufficiency are perhaps unachievable for refugees who do not possess the relevant political, psychological and economic assets to do so.

In July 2023, the New Zealand Government refreshed the 2012 Refugee Resettlement Strategy (MBIE, n.d.). Five settlement outcomes that underpin the 2023 strategy were identified as employment and self-sufficiency; education, training and English language; health and wellbeing; housing; and participation and inclusion (MBIE, n.d.). The revised strategy and settlement outcomes were the result of a collaborative effort between refugee-background individuals and resettlement stakeholders, such as local councils, representatives from various refugee and migrant support communities, and service providers (MBIE, n.d.). Despite the revision, some of the previous issues with the strategy, such as self-sufficiency positioned as an outcome, remain in the new strategy.

Research in New Zealand has shown that gaps exist in collaboration and coordination between New Zealand's resettlement stakeholders of government, resettlement services, and non-governmental organisations (Marlowe & Lou, 2013; McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019). For example, McBrien's (2014) empirical work in New Zealand found disparities between employment policies and the continued presence of employment barriers for refugees. Similarly, McIntosh and Cockburn-Wooten (2019, p. 707) established, *inter alia*, that resettlement services participants in New Zealand identified "the need for greater collaborative relationships between stakeholders to ... strengthen existing resettlement support". To be self-sufficient, refugees must engage in the labour market (e.g., Marlowe, 2015; McIntosh & Cockburn-Wooten, 2019). Several scholars have highlighted barriers to employment in New Zealand (e.g., O'Donovan & Sheikh, 2014; Rafferty et al., 2020). Recently, attention has turned to employable identities of refugees (e.g., Greenbank, 2024), entrepreneurial intentions, and behaviours of refugees (e.g., Ranabahu et al., 2024), and refugee self-employment (e.g., Ranabahu et al., 2023). Data on the types of refugees undertake in informal, unpaid spaces in New Zealand is needed and at the time this thesis was being finalised, MBIE was in the process

of a survey that seeks answers to questions type of work refugees were engaged in which included domestic or care roles, entrepreneurship, volunteer work, and studying. A holistic perspective on work and how refugees seek out various work opportunities, derive meanings from such work, and how these processes impact refugees' identities is missing in the New Zealand context. Moreover, McIntosh and Cockburn-Wooten (2019) highlight an urgent need for research in New Zealand to stop portraying refugees as helpless people and instead showcase their diversity, alongside the exploration of better coordinated resettlement of refugees and the roles played by resettlement organisations and employers. Marlowe et al. (2024) revealed, through their longitudinal study of settlement outcomes of refugees in New Zealand, that qualitative studies which explore the barriers and outcomes to access to employment (and services) are needed. These studies reveal the importance of bringing nuance to the refugee identity in the context of resettlement and work, in addition to their overall migration journey. The present study addresses these identified gaps by exploring the dynamic interplay between identity construction and work meanings across refugees' migration journeys, while highlighting their agency and resourcefulness.

Media discourse fundamentally shapes societal perceptions of refugees through narratives that influence public policy, employment opportunities, and social reception. In New Zealand, reporting frequently employs crisis-oriented language, with headlines describing how refugee claims have *exploded* since border reopening (e.g., Sabharwal, 2024), refugees committing crimes (e.g., Feek, 2025), and detailing plans to deport refugees who *pose threats* to national security (e.g., Armah, 2025). Academic research confirms these patterns, with Greenbank (2024) documenting how media portrayals of refugees in New Zealand predominantly cast them as victims (vulnerable, needy, trauma-sufferers), creating discourses that negate their employability potential. These framings mirror global media trends positioning refugees within problematic narratives. In Australia, Bleiker et al. (2013) demonstrated how media coverage dehumanises refugees by focusing on impersonal imagery – boats packed with groups of people – rather than individual faces and stories. In the United States, media outlets emphasise how border officials prepare for an influx of asylum seekers (e.g., Gonzalez, 2023), while British media highlight the *staggering* cost to taxpayers of housing asylum seekers (e.g., Barrett, 2025; Dathan, 2025). The political climate in many countries has intensified these portrayals, with Poland's 2025 presidential election creating tensions for Ukrainian refugees (Vernon, 2025) and Germany limiting refugee entries under its new chancellor ("Germany Halts," 2025). These

securitisation and economic-burden narratives construct refugees as unwanted others, potentially shaping public reception and policy approaches.

Even seemingly sympathetic media coverage often reinforces problematic identity frameworks for refugees. Some New Zealand reporting inadvertently positions refugees as people who have been ‘saved’ by the country allowing them entry (e.g., Bonnett, 2025; Croad, 2024), establishing a saviour–victim dynamic that undermines agency, an issue highlighted earlier in this literature review. Global humanitarian-oriented news reporting also paradoxically perpetuates victimhood through coverage of deaths and traumatic journeys (e.g., Durrant, 2025; Lloyd, 2024). In their content analysis of Belgian and Swedish media portrayals of refugees, De Cock et al. (2019, p. 52) found that refugees were represented as “a massive, undifferentiated group”. Instrumental to these depictions is visual imagery that shows broken or disabled bodies (e.g., Sullivan, 2013) or refugee women and children in camps with empty plates receiving aid (e.g., Kekatos, 2024; Wright, 2024). These media framings, often emphasising refugees as helpless victims, create powerful discourses that refugees must navigate in their identity construction processes, particularly as they seek meaningful work and social recognition in resettlement contexts. Such narratives shape not only public perceptions but also organisational practices, as Ortlieb et al. (2021) and Yang and Bacouel-Jentjens (2019) have noted, creating a complex discursive environment that refugees must negotiate while constructing coherent identities across their migration journeys.

The New Zealand context offers a particularly compelling setting for exploring the relationship between identity construction and the meaning of work for refugees. The emphasis on self-sufficiency in New Zealand’s resettlement policy, combined with employment barriers and sometimes pejorative local and international media portrayals of refugees, creates a complex terrain where identity negotiation becomes especially challenging and consequential. By exploring how refugees navigate these contextual forces while constructing meaningful work experiences across their migration journeys, this research addresses critical gaps identified by scholars like McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten (2019) and Marlowe et al. (2024), while also developing a theoretical framework that captures both the agency and vulnerability dimensions of refugee experiences.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has aimed to justify the research question and outline why research on refugees' identity constructions in the context of work is pertinent. The evolved research question developed in Chapter 1 was:

How are refugees' identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?

The literature review conducted this chapter has revealed three critical knowledge gaps at the intersection of the migration journey, identity construction, and the meaning of work. First, despite growing recognition that refugees are a heterogeneous population with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Field et al., 2017; Heilbrum & Iannone, 2019), researchers continue to apply homogeneous frameworks that inadequately capture this diversity. Particularly lacking are non-Western identity perspectives that might better represent refugees' own conceptualisations of selfhood beyond individualistic Western paradigms.

Second, existing scholarship tends to fragment the refugee experience into discrete stages of pre-flight, displacement, and resettlement, rather than exploring identity construction as a continuous process across the entire migration journey. This fragmentation obscures how early experiences shape refugees' subsequent identity negotiations and work meanings. As BenEzer and Zetter (2014, p. 299) note – “The medium that connects the two ends (flight and resettlement) is largely ignored or forgotten” – thereby creating a theoretical gap.

Third, the existing research has inadequately explored the dynamic interplay between agency and vulnerability throughout refugees' migration journeys. Studies often emphasise either victimhood (highlighting suffering, trauma, exploitation) or agency (focusing on entrepreneurship, resilience, strategic decision-making) but overlook how these dimensions coexist and evolve contextually. This dichotomy perpetuates incomplete understandings of refugee experiences, particularly in work contexts where both vulnerability and agency manifest simultaneously.

The New Zealand context offers a suitable setting to address these gaps. Despite the country's resettlement approach incorporating refugees with special needs and various intake pathways,

research has predominantly focused on employment barriers rather than identity construction processes. Recent calls by McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten (2019) to move beyond portraying refugees as helpless and by Marlowe et al. (2024) for qualitative studies exploring employment outcomes align with this study's objective to develop a more detailed and contextual understanding of refugees' identity construction throughout their migration journeys in the context of work.

The research methodology utilised to explore the research question from the perspectives of refugees and two resettlement stakeholders is discussed in the next chapter, which sets the scene for the development of the new theory on identity and the meaning of work proposed by this thesis.

Chapter 3 Research methodology

3.0 Chapter overview

In this chapter, I explain my relativist ontological and social constructionist epistemological stance. Next, I reflect on who I am in this research, explaining the use of the translocational positionality framework as an analytical tool. I then discuss the ethical considerations and research methodology, followed by outlining the methods for collecting and analysing data. The penultimate section discusses research rigour, followed by a chapter conclusion.

3.1 Ontology and epistemology

The philosophical underpinnings of academic research are defined by their ontological and epistemological foundations, which ultimately shape methodological decisions. Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are interdependent concepts that form the backbone of academic inquiry and guide research approaches (Otoo, 2020). Ontology represents our understanding of what exists and describes the nature and structure of existence (Crotty, 1998). It refers to how reality is constructed (Tracy, 2013) and can often be viewed through the lenses of realism or relativism (Scotland, 2012). Realism proposes that phenomena or truths exist independently of human knowledge or experience (Rawnsley, 1998; Scotland, 2012), while relativism asserts that phenomena or truths exist only when meaning is attributed to their existence (Crotty, 1998), suggesting that multiple realities exist which are constructed through human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A researcher's ontological stance directly influences their epistemological position by establishing their perception of reality (Gannon et al., 2020). Epistemology constitutes the theory of knowledge or the understanding of "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). It addresses how knowledge is constructed (Tracy, 2013) and thus is intrinsically linked to one's ontological perspective (Grant & Giddings, 2002). According to Crotty (1998), there are three epistemological stances – objectivism, social constructionism, and subjectivism. Crotty (1998) explains that social constructionism challenges the concept of objective truth or meaning existing independently of human consciousness, instead arguing that meaning is constructed through social interactions and engagement with the world. Social constructionism has profoundly influenced research in the social sciences, where researchers employ this

perspective to explore how individuals construct meaning through interactions with others and their environment (Charmaz, 2014b). However, social scientists acknowledging a social constructionist perspective do not deny that a physical or material world exists independently of human perception (Charon, 2010). Rather, they argue that this material reality remains irrelevant until human social interactions and interpretation ascribe meaning to it.

The theoretical frameworks of social constructionism and social constructivism are prominent in social sciences, education, and psychology as approaches to understanding knowledge production (Lincoln et al., 2018). Both constructs share the epistemological premise that reality is constructed but differ in application and emphasis. Social constructionism focuses on knowledge creation as a process between people and relationships (Castelló, 2016), while social constructivism emphasises intra-individual processes and consensus between individuals as key to creating knowledge (P. Adams, 2006; Amineh & Asl, 2015).

In alignment with Crotty's (1998) concept of social constructionism, which emphasises the social and cultural dimensions of knowledge production, I do not agree with the intra-individual stance that social constructivism adopts. For me, meaning-making occurs through interactional processes. Additionally, recent scholars in refugee studies (e.g., Daledrop, 2024; M. Moore, 2024) have grounded their research in the constructionist perspective that knowledge creation emerges through processes between researchers, participants, and their relationships. The relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology provided valuable frameworks to guide my qualitative research. Beyond my philosophical stance, it is essential to analyse my place in the research, which is discussed next.

3.2 Who I am in the research?

Researcher positionality fundamentally shapes the research process through the researcher's social, cultural and professional identities that influence relationships with participants and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Qin & Li, 2020). I entered the research field with the intention to create knowledge alongside my participants, recognising that my worldview, history and being are inevitably interlinked with how I approach and interpret my research.

Reflexivity entails the researcher critically reflecting on self, the research process, and representation (Sultana, 2007), requiring continuous self-awareness and critical examination

of assumptions, biases and experiences that may influence the research process (Charmaz, 2020). Some migration researchers (e.g., Carling et al., 2014; Moralli, 2024) refer to this as researcher positionality, a concept entangled with researcher reflexivity. Giampapa (2011) argues that reflexivity focuses the lens on what is researched. According to Bergold and Thomas (2012), the researcher's position, privilege and identity impact the research process and must be critically examined and acknowledged. Dodgson (2019), meanwhile, explains that reflexivity occurs when researchers clearly examine the contextual, intersecting relationships between themselves and their participants regarding aspects related to social identity.

I am a Fijian woman of fifth-generation Indian descent, now living in New Zealand. I come from an ethnic-minority background and am married to a British man who is also a migrant to New Zealand. I have worked as a human resource professional for over 20 years, holding undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in management and human resource management (HRM). Currently I am pursuing a doctorate degree. My social identity differs from my refugee participants in several ways. I was educated in the English language from the age of six, whereas most of my participants began learning the language during or after their displacement experiences, at later stages of their lives. Some participants had completed undergraduate qualifications, in some cases multiple degrees, while a handful were pursuing postgraduate qualifications. Some were at least two decades younger than me, while a few were more advanced in years. Furthermore, my migration experience differs from their migration journeys as I did not experience displacement, its challenges, and the experiences embedded within the journeys of displacement and resettlement.

Despite these differences, many connections emerged between the participants and me during the research process. I empathised, to an extent, with refugee participants because several of my extended family members left Fiji during the 1987 military coups out of fear for their safety. Some refugee participants connected with me because of my social identity as a woman of colour, a representative of an ethnic minority, and a migrant. Some participants, aware of my origins, felt comfortable discussing some aspects of their identity, implicitly signalling that they understood my sociocultural background, exemplified by comments such as, "You're from Fiji, you know we pray, we fast in Ramadan."

As a migrant to New Zealand, despite arriving with undisrupted work experiences and having language proficiency and cultural understanding of the New Zealand society, I too have

struggled with feelings of non-belonging and non-settlement for most of my 10 years in the country. Being a Fijian (of Indian descent) living in a society that applied labels such as ‘Indian’ or ‘Asian’ to define my social identity – labels at odds with my self-perception – I was acutely sensitive to the impact of labels on one’s sense of self and the personal striving to assert an identity distinct from ascribed categorisations.

My experience of holding multiple identities throughout my life further enhanced my capacity for empathy and understanding with my refugee participants. Situated between two different racial groups in my country of origin (COO), I embodied both Fijian and Indian identities, along with a fusion of the two in terms of cultural practices, language and worldviews. Being married to a man who originates from a different country with a different culture, traditions and values has further enriched my worldview, creating yet another fusion of perspectives in my life. Through our union, I am straddling two distinct cultural worlds that have become intertwined, adding another layer to my already culturally complex identity. This deeply rooted experiential knowledge enabled me to be sensitive to refugee participants’ experiences of navigating multiple identities in their migration journeys. Additionally, I am a spiritual person and almost all my refugee participants spoke of their religious or spiritual beliefs as anchors in their lives.

Nevertheless, embedded within this familiarity were some instances of awkwardness in my research interactions. Three participants spoke Hindi, which I understand but cannot speak fluently. The inability to converse fully in Hindi with these participants created discomfort for both parties. They expected me to reply in our common language, which I could not do. I found myself incorporating the few Hindi words I could pronounce into my sentences, while simultaneously navigating the complex position of being both an insider *and* outsider in the context of language. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I engaged in the process of crossing the boundaries of age, culture, migration status, socioeconomic and academic circumstances to listen to and understand the voices of refugee participants. My position as both insider and outsider in various contexts required constant reflexivity but ultimately enriched the depth of understanding I could bring to the research.

Maintaining reflexivity and practising compassion creates meaningful experiences for both researcher and participants (Priya, 2019). The following extract from an interview that was deeply moving for both the participant and me illustrates this dynamic: “Because you’re from

a different culture too ... So, you [have] empathy with me. Because you understand me.” Although the interview ended on a positive note, I continued to question my role as a researcher in consequent interviews regarding the access participants granted me to their deeply personal stories. This reflection led me to the concept of mutual care. According to Moralli (2024), mutual care is a desired outcome of reflexivity in qualitative migration research, achieved through a relational positionality between researcher and participants, and the ethics of care extending beyond participant confidentiality and anonymity to creating a safe and inclusive research space. I was entrusted with personal narratives, which participants willingly shared through the empathetic connections established within the interview process, in an environment where they felt secure sharing intimate details about their lives – details they were not required to disclose, and which would not be reproduced in the research findings. Maintaining reflexive practice throughout the research process – and particularly in the interview excerpted above – allowed me to achieve the outcome of mutual care and fully appreciate the crucial role of empathetic connection between researcher and participant.

Qualitative research in migration studies can be a transformative process that challenges dominant discourses (Moralli, 2024). Stewart (2015) identified the need to humanise refugee-background individuals through their stories. Through reflexive practice, I realised that most of the refugee participants desired their stories to be heard and retold, to educate their host society. This realisation led me to recalibrate my research objectives to focus on refugee participants’ meanings of identity, what being a refugee meant, and which aspects of this internal reckoning were pertinent to countering hegemonic discourses. Additionally, because of my positionality as a migrant, some refugee participants saw me as an ‘insider by proxy’. According to Carling et al. (2014), insider-outsider positions in migration research extend beyond binary ethno-national divides between the researcher and participants, focusing instead on analysing other social identities that position researchers along the insider-outsider continuum. Carling et al. (2014) highlighted that ‘insider by proxy’ researchers find commonality with participants through their own migration experiences. Some participants recognised aspects of my culture and heritage and noted the similarities with their own cultures. This ‘insider by proxy’ positionality during data analysis enabled me to attribute meanings to refugee participants’ experiences, informed partly by my own migration experiences.

Charmaz (2014a) emphasises paying close attention to what participants do *not* say. I noticed that almost all refugee participants avoided detailed descriptions of the specific circumstances

that precipitated their displacement. I observed these ‘glossing over the details’ tactics employed by some of the earlier participants and made it a point in subsequent interviews to ask, if they had not already mentioned it, why and how they left their home countries. As I was interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the migration journey and the context-specific properties of this construct, I aimed to ask participants about their flight decisions. However, my probing began and ended with a simple question: “Would you like to talk about why you left your home country?” A negative response made it clear I should leave this topic alone. This delicate balancing act was maintained throughout all subsequent interviews. Some participants continued to provide only brief descriptions, indicating pain and suffering they felt uncomfortable sharing. These experiences heightened my awareness that despite empathetic connections, certain information remained sacred and reserved. Moreover, participants demonstrated agency and choice in narrating aspects of their lives they felt comfortable with.

Power relations between researcher and participants can be balanced through a decolonisation of the ‘other’ discourse and critical awareness of the effects of the researcher’s cultural standards (Berger, 2015). Through my lived experience as the ‘other’ in New Zealand, I was already sensitive to this concept. Reflexive practices enabled me to monitor my sensitivities. During data analysis, I occasionally found myself immersed in refugee participants’ experiences and their worldviews due to the similarities with my own. At times, this immersion prevented me from examining their experiences in the context of the other two participant cohorts. For example, the ‘other’ during some analytical stages was the host society, and the two participant cohorts of managers and mentors (M&Ms) and pathways-to-work providers (PWPs) represented this host society. Attending to the perspectives of M&Ms and PWPs helped restore critical analysis of refugee participants data. Conversely, when analysing data from the other two cohorts, their accounts sometimes contrasted starkly with refugee participants’ descriptions of their experiences. The framework of translocational positionality (Anthias, 2002, 2008, 2009), discussed next, created an opportunity to add depth to my understanding of refugees’ identity formation processes over time.

3.3 Translocational positionality

According to Anthias (2002), identities can be perceived as stagnant, unitary measurements or descriptions of the ‘who am I’ question, which produce a narrow focus on self-ascribed identity. The more I contemplated refugees and their journeys of dislocation, relocation and resettlement, the more it became apparent that their identities become fragmented, less static,

and departed from single units of identity description, such as Mead's (1967) 'I' and 'Me'. I therefore drew upon Anthias's (2002) concept of translocational positionality to address the multilocality of refugees' identities. Translocational positionality offers a valuable framework for studying identity concepts for migrants and refugees (Adeeko & Treanor, 2022) because it extends analysis beyond the local to the global while maintaining focus on the differing contexts between and within both spheres. I found this framework sufficiently flexible to explore and theorise identity-formation processes for refugees, with particular attention to work.

Anthias (2002, p. 502) argues that the term 'translocational' recognises "variability with some processes leading to more complex, contradictory and at times dialogical positioning" than other positioning processes. This comparison acknowledges that certain social contexts and migration experiences create more layered and potentially conflicting identity positions, with refugee experiences often embodying particularly complex positionalities compared to other forms of migration. Lives are located across numerous but also fragmented and interrelated social spaces (Anthias, 2009). Translocational positionality assists in conceptualising lives as located and identities as always related to (unstable) locations, "both situationally and in terms of the ways in which the categorical formations of boundaries and hierarchies produced in relation to gender, ethnicity and class (amongst others) impact [individuals] within a time and space context" (Anthias, 2009, p. 12). Translocational positionality has proven useful in migration research, encompassing both migrants and refugees, due to its consideration of geographical transitions and its capacity to capture people's identities in terms of the social locations they inhabit (Mozetič, 2018). Refugees originate from diverse countries, ethnicities, race, religions and social classes (e.g., Field et al., 2017). The translocational positionality perspective acknowledges refugees' heterogeneity because, according to Anthias (2008, 2009), it highlights the multiplicity of social locations inhabited by individuals. Additionally, translocational positionality helps assess social locations and hierarchies to highlight privilege and oppression as a set of processes rather than being results of individual characteristics (Doan & Portillo, 2017).

I selected translocational positionality as an analytical framework over the similar yet distinct concept of intersectionality for several reasons. While intersectionality seeks to understand human beings and their experiences as structured by the interaction of the multiple identities they may hold (Hansen et al., 2017), translocational positionality moves away from treating

gender, race, class and other categories as distinct groups that intersect, instead examining broader social processes that produce differentiation (Mozetič, 2018). Additionally, applying translocational positionality as an analytical lens helped me understand the nuanced experiences of refugees throughout their migration journeys and how they negotiated multiple identities across varying contexts.

Beyond its analytical utility, translocational positionality also aligns closely with the social constructionist epistemology underpinning this research. Translocational positionality does not perceive identities, differences and belongings as fixed but rather as constructed through processes, discourses, practices and structural forces (Anthias, 2009). The philosophical alignment with social constructionism materialises through Anthias's (2009) emphasis on the role of societal interactions in how individuals perceive identity and belonging. The second epistemological overlap occurs through positionality defined as the interplay of social structures or positions and individual practices or positionings. Crotty (1998) argues that knowledge is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world. Finally, translocational positionality emphasises the importance of context, situation, meaning and temporality in shaping one's positionalities and sense of belonging (Anthias 2008), aligned with Crotty's (1998) view that knowledge in social constructionism is shaped by cultural, historical and societal contexts. Contextualisation is central to both social constructionism and translocational positionality.

In my daily life, I make sense of my identity and belonging through the lens of translocational positionality. Bringing this personal concept into the research field allowed me to create meanings alongside my participants. Utilising this analytical tool strengthened my social constructionist epistemology while simultaneously guiding my chosen methodology of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2008, 2009), which I explain after the next section, on ethical considerations.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The research proceeded with formal ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (reference number 21/212), granted on November 1, 2021. The ethics approval letters are provided in Appendix A.

Ethical considerations in refugee research can be complex due to participant vulnerability (Pincock & Bakunzi, 2020; Seagle et al., 2020) and power asymmetries between researchers and refugees (Clark-Kazak, 2021; Pincock & Bakunzi, 2020). Paying careful attention to power dynamics is important, as fear of stigma, persecution, and trauma history can challenge meaningful consent and trust establishment (Seagle et al., 2020). A key concern is ensuring truly voluntary and informed consent, as refugees may feel pressured to participate when approached via gatekeepers in positions of authority or because they are reluctant to refuse anything that might bring benefit to their situation (Deps et al., 2022). To address this challenge, I implemented a two-stage consent process. While initial contact occurred through community leaders or mutual contacts, I subsequently contacted participants directly via phone or writing to confirm their understanding of the research aims and verify their voluntary participation. Secondly, when I met them to build rapport and talk about the research project and use of photos prior to the research interview, I reiterated their right to participate voluntarily. These processes were in addition to the final written consent obtained during interviews. Obtaining meaningful consent is only one dimension of ethical refugee research. Equally important is developing the cultural competency needed to understand and respect participants' ways of being.

Best practices emphasise engaging with stakeholders throughout the investigation and building cultural competency (Seagle et al., 2020). Cross-cultural research introduces additional complexity, as universal ethical guidelines need to be translated in culture-sensitive ways, requiring deep understanding of and respect for cultural values and norms that may differ from the researcher's own background (Cossham et al., 2024). My approach addressed these concerns through sustained immersion in resettlement sector organisations and refugee-background communities, as noted in Chapter 1. This long-term engagement proved crucial. I observed that participants only volunteered to participate once they felt comfortable with me and my research, demonstrating how relationship-building can address the challenges of obtaining meaningful consent in contexts of power asymmetry. The community immersion also helped me develop cultural competency through the practice of reflexivity, which involves, according to Deps et al. (2022), the researcher continuously examining their own assumptions, interpretation and power position. This meant regularly questioning my initial reactions and interpretations and asking myself whether I was missing cultural subtleties. When I felt uncertain about physical greetings, I examined whether my discomfort stemmed from imposing my own cultural norms rather than adapting to theirs. This reflexive questioning of

my own cultural lens enabled me to notice and adapt to cultural nuances – from learning not to shake hands with or hug everyone, to understanding the importance of scheduling interviews outside of prayer times for some participants, to learning to discern that a polite ‘yes’ sometimes meant ‘no’.

Gender norms in some cultures became more pronounced through this process. One female participant brought her brother to the interview. The brother played on his phone during the interview and did not contribute to the research in any way, but it was important to the participant that he be there. What struck me most was that this participant did not mention bringing her brother prior to the interview. She simply arrived with him, demonstrating both her agency as a participant and, more importantly, that my sustained community engagement had fostered sufficient trust and cultural understanding for her to feel comfortable acting naturally within her own cultural framework. This moment illustrated that genuine cultural competency manifests not in the researcher’s ability to grant or deny cultural accommodations, but in creating space where participants feel free to be themselves without explanation or justification.

Beyond trust-building and cultural competency development, protecting participant confidentiality was equally crucial. Researchers must address confidentiality concerns, as people displaced due to political persecution or conflict have legitimate fears about identity and location disclosure (Deps et al., 2022). The use of pseudonyms was found to be a comfort for most of my participants, although some asked me to use their real names, which I have not. Not identifying their past or current employers also created a safe space for refugee participants. Although community leaders and mutual contacts assisted in participant recruitment, I did not inform them how many or which of their referrals had taken part. Additionally, digital technologies create opportunities for meaningful communication with refugee participants (George et al., 2024; Pincock & Bakunzi, 2020). Nearly all participants shared contact details and maintained communication via social media and WhatsApp, creating an informal researcher-participant space that facilitated ongoing dialogue and photo-sharing while respecting privacy boundaries.

The use of photos in my research required further ethical considerations. While writing the thesis, I was keenly aware of secondary identification risks using photos. Some photos shared during the research process contained contextual clues that could inadvertently identify

participants. These included unique identifying features such as building signs and potentially identifiable homes, workplaces, and refugee camps. Photographs that could potentially reveal participants' identities, even indirectly, were either excluded or modified. For example, one participant who works as a magazine producer and editor shared photographs of their publication; however, the magazine's name has been blurred to protect the participant's identity. Additionally, storage and protection of all photographs was an ethical consideration. The digital photos were stored in a password-protected document in a folder with an ambiguous name on my personal computer. At the completion of my doctoral degree, the digital photos will be deleted. Physical copies of the photos do not exist. Perhaps due to the cultural and social identity similarities between myself and the refugee participants, I encountered no ethical challenges with the photo elicitation method, except for the one I describe shortly. I observed that both women and men participants showed equal enthusiasm for using their own photos during interviews. They also readily provided consent for their photos' inclusion in the results chapters.

An important methodological adaptation occurred during the second year of data collection, when the initially proposed photovoice method was replaced with photo elicitation alongside narrative interviews for refugee participants. Photo elicitation uses existing photographs during interviews to evoke emotions, memories, and deeper meanings, with images sourced from either researchers or participants (Glaw et al., 2017; Shaw, 2020), fostering common understanding between both parties (Harper, 2002). Photovoice requires participants to use their own photographs and then explain their significance through oral narratives (Humpage et al., 2019; Miled, 2020; Wang, 2003), and the method emphasises spending time with participants explaining how to use the camera and what photos to take (e.g., Miled, 2020). This change addressed several limitations, including the challenge of establishing rapport with participants during initial meetings. The amendment was processed without complications by AUTECH, as long as participants were fully informed about the photo elicitation protocol, which they were, and which is provided in Appendix B. This protocol prohibits the use of unaltered photographs containing people in research documentation, allowing such images only if identities were obscured through blurring techniques. Additionally, refugee participants were required to provide explicit consent and release for the use of their photographs in the thesis and any subsequent publications. All photographs presented in this thesis adhere to these ethical guidelines.

The research process revealed certain limitations in how ethical frameworks conceptualise research with refugee-background communities, specifically regarding assumptions of vulnerability. Throughout the study, most refugee participants demonstrated agency in determining the scope and emotional content of their narratives, particularly regarding the pre-displacement phase. This observation challenges some established ethical guidelines that potentially limit participants' autonomy by viewing them primarily through a lens of vulnerability (e.g., Humpage et al., 2019). Rather than being passive subjects, participants actively controlled multiple aspects of their research participation – what experiences to share, interview locations, who to bring along to the interview, and whether to participate at all. This agency was further illustrated when a potential participant declined to participate due to concerns about photograph use, despite assurances regarding confidentiality. This individual exercised agency by opting out of research that felt unsafe for him, while other participants demonstrated agency through their selective sharing of photographs. Additionally, other participants who agreed to share their photos exercised agency in determining what photos to use in their narratives. I did not find myself in a situation where commentary was required on the applicability of participants' photos to the research question and objectives, which is discussed further in the next section. Furthermore, most Auckland-based refugee participants chose to be interviewed at their homes, which George et al. (2024, p. 4) found gave refugee participants “an added sense of control”. All other refugee participants, especially those in other locations, were interviewed at places of their choosing, either at a mutually convenient location or at their workplaces. Five interviews from the other two participant cohorts were done via Zoom. Only one participant chose to not use video conferencing, while all others consented to both audio and video recordings.

Having outlined the ethical considerations, I now turn to the methodological framework that guided this research.

3.5 Grounded theory

The foundational principles of methodology serve as the theoretical framework for knowledge creation and inquiry processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Methodological choices are inherently influenced by the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions (Gray, 2014). For this research, the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as developed by Charmaz (2006, 2008, 2009) was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach. The evolution of this theory begins with the pioneering work of Glaser and Strauss (1965), whose

‘classic grounded theory’ was firmly rooted in objectivism (Charmaz, 2000, 2013; Hicks, 2018). This approach was later refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), who introduced more technical procedures while departing from the constant comparison technique characteristic of classic grounded theory. Despite these modifications, their approach continued to conceptualise knowledge as an external, discoverable entity (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2008). Charmaz’s significant contribution to the grounded theory methodology was to give it constructionist foundations (Folgueiras-Bertomeu & Sandín-Esteban, 2023), positioning the researcher within the data through reflexive practice. CGT acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants, with reality being subjective (Charmaz, 2006). According to Cohen et al. (2007), CGT is underpinned by social constructionism because the methodology perceives the world as a system of interrelated parts within a co-constructed framework, where each element inevitably influences the others.

CGT is a useful methodological tool in exploratory research where there is limited existing theory or research on a topic (Hicks, 2018; Urquhart, 2013). Akin to the classic grounded theory, CGT aims to build theory from data, however unlike its predecessors that conceptualised knowledge objectively, CGT acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). According to Berthelsen et al. (2018) and Charmaz (2014a), the CGT methodology excels in studies of social processes and interactions.

I selected CGT as a methodology primarily because this research aims to capture the dynamic nature of adaptation, identity formation, and work integration of refugees. Moreover, CGT’s usefulness in generating new theoretical frameworks grounded in participants’ lived experiences (Charmaz, 2006, 2014a) made the methodology suitable for developing nuanced understandings of complex social phenomena, such as refugees’ identity construction processes. Finally, the methodology acknowledges that phenomena are situated within specific contexts (Charmaz, 2006). This makes it suitable for the present study considering the divergent local conditions, cultural factors, and social settings embedded in refugees’ migration journeys.

Recent scholarship in refugee studies has successfully employed CGT to illuminate the complexities of resettlement experiences. For instance, Ballard-Kang and Sar (2023) investigated how refugee torture survivors reconstruct safety post-resettlement, and Dalderop (2024) examined adult literacy among refugees, identifying self-efficacy as a core

differentiating factor in learner experiences. Lippi et al. (2023) utilised CGT to explore the impact of policy changes on refugees' lived experiences, and M. Moore (2024) investigated English language development among refugee writers using CGT. These studies collectively demonstrate CGT's effectiveness in generating nuanced understandings of refugee experiences. While this existing research primarily focuses on resettlement contexts, there remains scope to explore refugees' identity constructions and work experiences more extensively. It is also worth noting that CGT was paired with symbolic interactionism in the studies of Ballard-Kang and Sar (2023) and Lippi et al. (2023). Charmaz (2014a, p. 261) acknowledges that researchers may find symbolic interactionism serves as "a brief detour before entering another possible route", highlighting the flexibility in methodological approaches. The synergies between CGT and translocational positionality, the alternative approach used in this study, are discussed in the next sub-section.

3.5.1 Constructivist grounded theory and translocational positionality

Anthias's (2008) translocational positionality provides an analytical lens for exploring refugees' lives as spatially situated and their identities perpetually relational to (unstable) locations. Through this analytical framework, this research aimed to generate conceptual understandings of identity-formation processes for refugees within work contexts. CGT is particularly valuable in fields lacking established theoretical frameworks (Hicks, 2018; Urquhart, 2013), as it facilitates the development of middle-range theories by engaging with 'what' and 'how' questions to address the underlying 'why' of a phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). The methodological core of CGT involves closely studying behavioural patterns and the processes embedded in social interactions and contexts to generate theoretical explanations for these behaviours (Berthelsen et al., 2018). This research sought to develop new conceptualisations of identity formation, acknowledging that identity for refugees is not static but rather potentially fractured and fluid. The application of a translocational positionality analytical lens to this research represents, to the best of my knowledge, a novel methodological approach. While one recent conceptual study by Kassam et al. (2020) attempted to integrate intersectionality with CGT, there appears to be no existing research that employs translocational positionality as an analytical framework within CGT. This methodological innovation necessitated careful consideration of the philosophical alignment between these two approaches.

The philosophical compatibility between CGT and translocational positionality is evident in several key areas. First, there is alignment in their epistemological foundations. As previously established, translocational positionality demonstrates significant congruence with the social constructionist epistemology. Secondly, Anthias (2002) emphasises that the researcher's position and experiences fundamentally shape the research process and outcomes, highlighting reflexivity as a cornerstone of the concept. This emphasis on reflexivity distinguishes CGT from classic grounded theory approaches. According to Charmaz (2006), attentiveness to social processes and their temporal unfolding enables theory construction. Similarly, translocational positionality conceptualises identity and belonging as dynamic processes rather than fixed states (Anthias 2008), emphasising their processual nature. Additionally, contextual awareness is deeply embedded in both CGT and translocational positionality. Finally, both approaches utilise inductive logic in the research process. CGT emphasises the inductive generation of theory from data (Charmaz, 2014a), while translocational positionality focuses on the multiplicity of "locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation" (Anthias, 2008, p. 16) and how this shapes knowledge production. Essentially, CGT provides a specific methodological framework for data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014b), while translocational positionality serves as an analytical lens for understanding the complexities of social identities and their impact on research (Anthias, 2002). Used in tandem, the approaches enabled theoretical insights specifically attuned to the lived experiences of refugees.

This methodological innovation combines CGT's analytical procedures with translocational positionality's fine-grained understanding of identity within spatial contexts, creating a unique approach for exploring how refugees construct identities across multiple social locations throughout their migration journeys.

3.5.2 Data collection method

This research gathered data from three groups – refugees, M&Ms and PWPs. I wished to obtain views from the meso-level stakeholders involved in the resettlement and employment of refugee-background individuals and refugees themselves as to how identities are formed in work contexts. Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory looks for rich, detailed data gleaned from narratives of personal experiences, interviews, field notes, and journals. My data collection methods were narrative interviews combined with photo elicitation for refugee participants, and narrative interviews for the other two participant groups. The following

sections detail the recruitment process and narrative interview approaches, followed by a discussion of the photo elicitation method. The section concludes by examining the simultaneous processes of data collection and analysis, which represent one of the defining characteristics of CGT (Urquhart, 2013).

3.5.2.1 The participants

This research engaged with participants representing multiple resettlement pathways (ad hoc humanitarian responses, asylum-seeker process, family reunification and the quota programme). No participants had arrived in New Zealand through the community sponsorship programme. The final sample consisted of 41 participants – 22 refugees, nine managers, and two mentors (M&Ms), and eight PWPs. In Tables 3.1–3.3, details of each participant group are provided. Pseudonyms are used to protect refugee participants' identities. I have used a numbering system (e.g., Manager # 1, PWP #1) to identify M&M and PWP participants while maintaining anonymity; I also avoid repeatedly writing out full participant role descriptions (e.g., manager participant, mentor participant, and so forth) throughout the text. The initial recruitment target was 40 participants (20 refugees and 10 each from the other cohorts), but this was adjusted based on theoretical saturation achieved in the data. Of the 10 organisations providing work pathways in New Zealand, eight participated; the other two cited time constraints as their reason for non-participation. Theoretical saturation, the point where no new properties or dimensions of concepts emerge from data analysis (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), guided the decision to conclude data collection.

Participant information sheets, consent forms, and recruitment flyers (provided in Appendix C) were approved by AUTEK and ready by November 2021. Participant recruitment commenced in January 2022. Between November 2021 and January 2022, I developed and implemented an extensive participant outreach strategy, contacting 105 organisations including community groups, resettlement services, and employer organisations through various communication channels (emails, phone calls, social media, and in-person visits). Additionally, I created a video about my research for social media and utilised my personal networks to distribute the recruitment information. Some resettlement organisations included my recruitment advertisements in their community bulletins, which generated interest among refugee-background communities.

Table 3.1*Refugee participants' demographic information (in order of interview)*

Participant pseudonym	Country of origin	Location	Gender	Age Group	Education	Years in NZ	Transit place(s)	Years in transit	Work			Resettlement pathway to NZ
									Country of origin	Transit place(s)	New Zealand	
Ahlam	Iraq	Auckland	F	30+	Bachelor's degree	20+		12	None	None	Digital media, entrepreneur	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Akram	Pakistan	Auckland	M	40+	Double bachelor's degree	10+	n/a	n/a	Natural medicine, president & founder of not-for-profit	n/a	Social worker, executive director & CEO of not-for-profit	Asylum seeker
Idris	Somalia	Auckland	M	30+	Double bachelor's degree	8+	Malaysia	6	Bookkeeper	Translator/interpreter	Translator/interpreter, student, social worker	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Bakhit	Sudan	Auckland	M	40+	Master's degree	7+	Ethiopia, Kenya, USA	20+ (at least 20 in camps, 7 in USA)	None	Entrepreneur, teacher, vaccine administrator, translator, hotel worker, QC in manufacturing	Resettlement community worker, advisor in government agency	Family reunification
Karam	Pakistan	Auckland	M	40+	Bachelor's degree	2+	Thailand	9	Office boy, accountant	Car washer, restaurant worker, translator/interpreter	Student, retail worker, entrepreneur	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Thet	Myanmar	Nelson	M	40+	Vocational training	17+	Malaysia	2	Van driver	Kitchen hand, driver	Team leader – factory	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Mira	Colombia	Wellington	F	40+	Bachelor's degree	6+	n/a	n/a	Accountant/taxation	n/a	Administrator, database administrator	Family reunification
Rafi	Somalia	Wellington	M	50+	Bachelor's degree	20+	Ethiopia, Sudan	15 (4 in Ethiopia, 11 in Sudan)	None	Case worker	Social worker, manager, founder & chair of not-for-profit	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Fawaz	Afghanistan	Wellington	M	30+	Bachelor's degree	2+	n/a	n/a	Entrepreneur	n/a	Entrepreneur	Emergency evacuation – Kabul

Participant pseudonym	Country of origin	Location	Gender	Age Group	Education	Years in NZ	Transit place(s)	Years in transit	Work			Resettlement pathway to NZ
									Country of origin	Transit place(s)	New Zealand	
Solan	Ethiopia	Wellington	M	30+	Bachelor's degree	20+	n/a	n/a	Shepherd	n/a	Social worker – disability and mental health, resettlement community worker	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Bernard	Burundi/Rwanda	Auckland	M	50+	Double bachelor's degree, social work degree	20+	Rwanda, Kenya	25	n/a	Student	Cleaner, resettlement worker, immigration advisor	Quota refugee – African intake
Rashid	Somalia	Auckland	M	50+	Certificate, degree	20+	n/a	n/a	Casual jobs, student	n/a	Casual jobs, taxi driver, founder of not for profit	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Adrian	Ethiopia	Auckland	M	50+	Not declared	20+	Sudan	14	Political activist	Security guard, shoemaker, embassy driver	Taxi driver, resettlement worker, GM of resettlement organisation	Quota refugee – African intake
Mehar	Myanmar/Thailand	Hamilton	F	20+	High school	5+	Thailand	14	Not born there	Student, retail (family shop)	Student, fruit picker	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Basma	Somalia/Yemen	Hamilton	F	20+	No formal education, literate and learning English	1+	Yemen, Indonesia	24 (14 in Yemen, 10 in Indonesia)	Not born there	Interpreter	Interpreter, student	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Hamza	Pakistan	Auckland	M	30+	Bachelor's degree	5+	Thailand	6	Student	Entrepreneur, web designer, user experience designer, graphics designer	Resettlement worker, web designer, user experience designer, graphics designer, entrepreneur	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Jahed	Somali Region/Ethiopia	Hamilton	M	20+	High school	3+	Ethiopia	22	Not born there	Student, ad hoc camp jobs	Truck driver	Family reunification
Nadira	Somalia	Hamilton	F	20+	No formal education	2+	Yemen, Malaysia	12 (6 in Yemen, 6 in Malaysia)	Taxi driver, camera person	Retail, online media content creator, restaurant	Volunteer interpreter, student	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Jamal	Somalia	Hamilton	M	20+	Bachelor's degree - incomplete	3+	n/a	n/a	Machine operator	n/a	Machine operator	Family reunification

Participant pseudonym	Country of origin	Location	Gender	Age Group	Education	Years in NZ	Transit place(s)	Years in transit	Work			Resettlement pathway to NZ
									Country of origin	Transit place(s)	New Zealand	
John	Pakistan	Auckland	M	50+	Master's degree - incomplete	14+	n/a	n/a	Master's student, advocacy, preacher	n/a	Disabled services worker, preacher, proofreader	Asylum seeker
Nomi	Pakistan	Auckland	M	40+	Bachelor's degree	4+	Thailand	6	Civil service – office work	Professional painter	Professional painter	Quota refugee – UNHCR application
Caleb	Myanmar	Auckland	M	40+	High school	10+	Malaysia	6 months	Construction admin worker	Car mechanic	Entrepreneur	Quota refugee – UNHCR application

Table 3.2

Managers' and mentors' demographic information (in order of interview)

Participant ID	Type of organisation	Industry	Location	Years worked with refugees	Role	Gender	Local or Migrant	Number of refugee employees directly managed	Prior experience with refugees
Managers									
Manager #1	Social enterprise	Manufacturing	Wellington	5+	CEO/founder	F	Local	10+	y
Manager #2	Not-for-profit	Resettlement	Wellington	15+	National manager	F	Migrant	10+	y
Manager #3	Private enterprise	Manufacturing	Nelson	20+	Production leader/trainer	F	Migrant	20+	y
Manager #4	Private enterprise	Manufacturing	Nelson	10+	Production leader	F	Migrant	30+	y
Manager #5	Private enterprise	Manufacturing	Nelson	10+	Line manager	F	Local	20+	y
Manager #6	Not-for-profit	Resettlement	Wellington	5+	General manager	F	Local	10+	y
Manager #7	Not-for-profit	Resettlement	Auckland	15+	CEO	M	Migrant	10+	y
Manager #8	Government agency	Public service	Auckland	20+	Department manager	F	Migrant	20+	y
Manager #9	Private enterprise	Professional services	Auckland	2+	CEO	M	Local	2	y
Mentors								Number of refugees mentored	Worked with refugees in previous roles
Mentor #1	Private enterprise	Professional services	Wellington	3+	Mentor	M	Migrant	20+	y
Mentor #2	Private enterprise	Professional services	Auckland	1+	Mentor	M	Local	8	n

Table 3.3*Pathways-to-work providers' demographic information (in order of interview)*

Participant name	Role	Type of organisation	Location	Years worked with refugees	Gender	Local or Migrant	Works with employers
PWP #1	Employment pathways coordinator	Employment & integration support	Wellington	3+	F	Local	Y
PWP #2	English for work language teacher	Language services provider	Wellington	5+	F	Migrant	Y
PWP #3	Resettlement community coordinator	Migrant community support	Wellington	5+	F	Local	Y
PWP #4	Founder/director	Migrant & refugee support	Wellington	5+	F	Migrant	Y
PWP #5	Entrepreneurship programme facilitator	Entrepreneurship support for migrants	Auckland	5+	F	Migrant	N
PWP #6	Micro-enterprise manager	Refugee support	Auckland	3+	F	Local	N
PWP #7	Founder	Employment & training services	Hamilton	20+	M	Migrant	Y
PWP #8	Manager – employment pathways	Resettlement & employment support	Masterton	2+	F	Migrant	Y

Building trust within refugee-background communities proved to be crucial and time intensive. During the first year of data collection (2022), only five participants were recruited through snowball sampling (see Smythe & Giddings, 2007). The remaining 17 interviews occurred within five months between November 2023 and March 2024. This timeline reflects the time needed to establish researcher credibility and community trust, as noted by George et al. (2024). The endorsement of respected community members created a foundation of trust that gradually snowballed, except with a slower speed than the metaphor implies.

Refugee participants were all over 18 years of age and had worked in their COO and/or transit countries as well as in New Zealand. The one exception related to the pilot interview participant who had only worked in New Zealand. The data from this interview was included in the research as it proved useful to the analysis on identity and work. PWPs had at least one year of experience helping refugee-background individuals find employment or establish businesses. Similarly, M&Ms had worked with refugee-background individuals for more than a year. ‘Work’ included entrepreneurship, internships, or part-or-full-time employment, and volunteering. The following sections describe the primary data collection methods employed – narrative interviews and photo elicitation.

3.5.2.2 Narrative interviews

Narratives play a fundamental role in understanding how individuals construct their realities and form their identities (Tracy, 2013). Narrative research approaches stories as essential to the human experience, providing an optimal pathway to represent and understand lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Importantly, narrative research can empower those whose voices are not represented in dominant societal discourses (Daiute, 2014). The process of narration engages individuals in constructing and reinterpreting their experiences, establishing a foundation for identity construction (Daiute, 2014). Within CGT, interviews, whether narrative or semi-structured, can serve as a primary data collection method (Charmaz, 2006).

Given this study’s focus on identity construction throughout migration journeys, Anthias’s (2008, 2009) translocational positionality framework provided a valuable lens, emphasising that experiences and identity narratives are context-bound, with meanings associated with identity and work dependent on space, time, and embedded social structures. In grounded theory, researchers typically begin with an initial research focus that evolves during the

investigation process (Folgueiras-Bertomeu & Sandín-Esteban, 2023). For ethics application purposes, I developed indicative questions for each participant group based on the preliminary research questions (see Appendix D), using these as flexible guides for the initial interviews.

These interviews covered three broad subjects – work experiences, challenges with being a refugee in the workplace, and the contexts of resettlement and work. This approach aligned with Charmaz’s (2006) CGT methodology, which advocates for a preliminary literature review to inform research questions and conceptual frameworks. It also reflected Dey’s (1999) distinction between approaching research with an open mind versus an empty head. During interviews, I followed each participant’s narrative closely, allowing them to direct their storytelling while occasionally interjecting with focused questions or prompts. Some of these initial interview questions are noted in Table 3.4, excluding demographic questions such as length of stay in New Zealand, type of work in New Zealand (refugee participants), type of work and years worked with refugee-background individuals (only asked of the other two cohorts). Refugee participants’ narratives typically progressed from their lives in their COO (where applicable), displacement experiences, asylum in intermediate countries, and resettlement in New Zealand. For the other two participant groups, narratives focused on experiences helping refugee-background individuals find work, establish businesses, and navigate subsequent employment journeys.

My interviews were positioned between unstructured and semi-structured approaches. Unstructured interviews provide the richest data for theory building (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015), while both semi-structured and unstructured interviews facilitate new insights and in-depth understanding of phenomena and relationships between evolving concepts (Makri & Neely, 2021). The interview approach evolved in accordance with Charmaz’s (2006) view that data collection becomes more focused as researchers engage simultaneously in data analysis and collection. As new concepts emerged during analysis, the focus of subsequent interviews shifted towards these concepts. In this manner, grounded theorists control the data by limiting it to the concepts deemed relevant, which are produced from simultaneous processes of analysis (Berthelsen et al., 2018).

For example, building trust emerged as a significant concept from the M&M interviews. However, the data lacked insight into why trust-building was necessary for employers, whether they sought reciprocal actions from refugee employees, and whether trust was relevant in

mentor–mentee relationships. In subsequent interviews, I explored these dimensions with direct questions such as the following:

- Would you spend the same amount of time and energy building trust with a non-refugee employee? Why/why not?
- What makes refugees different?
- Do you expect refugee employees to build trust with you in return? If yes, how can they do it?
- Do you have any examples from your employees?

Table 3.4

Indicative questions per participant group for initial interviews

Participant group	Type of questions
Refugees	What is happening in the photo? Meanings and significance Types of work done in COO and/or transit country and why? Who do you say you are? Has your identity/who you are changed during your journey?
Managers and mentors	Describe the role you played in assisting refugees at work. What was this experience like? Did the refugees you worked with describe their past work lives – from their home countries? What did you think of those experiences? In what ways did they change, if any, in their work, work attitudes, confidence, etc. during your work with them? Who was responsible for such changes?
Pathways-to-work providers	Describe the role you played in assisting refugees at work. What was this experience like? Did the refugees you worked with describe their past work lives – from their home countries? What did you think of those experiences? How easy or difficult was the transition for refugees from their past work lives to the ones they experienced in New Zealand? What factors led/contributed to the easiness or difficulties?

All interviews were recorded on my laptop and a backup device, with participants’ permission. Audio files were transcribed using Otter software, with transcriptions reviewed and corrected immediately after each interview. An interpreter was used only once, for a refugee participant interview. The participant spoke English well but requested her daughter’s assistance due to confidence issues. Transcribing interviews and checking for accuracy were time intensive. I also kept field notes, which proved to be useful in the data analysis. Field notes are written

during the interviews and observations (Berthelsen et al., 2018) and add richness to the data and analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Makri & Neely, 2021). The following field note excerpt from a refugee participant interview demonstrates the value of this approach.

May 13, 2022

Interview #2. The story transported me to his world. Even though he seemed to speak without emotions (I attribute this to people who speak English as their second language, because I find that in myself sometimes – the language translation process tends to lose the emotions that are inherent in words), I still felt his emotions. He spoke in English interspersed with Hindi, which I understand. The participant asked to pause the interview at time stamp 15 minutes or so, because he wanted to explain a joke in Hindi, denoting comfort due to our common language. The narrative unfolded as he flicked through his photo album. Like participant #1, the photos served as a repository of life events. The narrative focused on his not-for-profit work organisation, which he founded in his COO, even though he is a medical practitioner. Using photos of the organisation's work in COO, he talked about the arduous hours spent studying for a degree alongside fulltime paid work so that he could re-establish his not-for-profit organisation in New Zealand. This organisation, and the people it serves, came across as his pride and joy, the motivating factor for working extremely hard and overcoming many challenges. As he flicked through the album, pride, sadness, nostalgia and hope flickered across his face. Photos spoke where language had failed.

This field note was useful when transcribing the interview data and to understand the concepts that emerged later. During analysis, I reconnected with emotions experienced during the interview, aligning with Berger's (2015) observation that emotional awareness enables greater data engagement. The participant's story was one of remaining undeterred despite a myriad of challenges, a theme I am personally drawn to because of my own experiences and worldviews, and this theme found its way into the data analysis. This process exemplifies knowledge co-construction and reflexive practices. Additionally, I was "transported" into "his world", which as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observe, adds to an interviewer's knowledge about a participant's identity. This field note illustrates how knowledge creation transcends language barriers through visual elements like photographs, allowing me to interpret the participant's emotional narrative despite linguistic constraints.

3.5.2.3 Photo elicitation for refugee participants

Understanding identities requires examining social locations within their contexts (Anthias, 2008, 2009), and photographs effectively convey contextual information (Charmaz, 2006). Photo elicitation involves using photographs – provided by either researchers or participants – to access deeper layers of meaning during interviews by evoking emotions, memories and ideas (Glaw et al., 2017; Shaw, 2020). This method fosters common understanding between participants and researchers by using photographs to guide and stimulate dialogue (Harper, 2002).

In this study, I wanted to prioritise refugees' voices, and photos were therefore shared only by the participants. While I was prepared to provide photographs if needed, all participants used their personal images. I gathered photos of traditional dress and workplaces from my home country to demonstrate photo narration techniques, anticipating some participants might need guidance in storytelling through images. Neither my photos nor the guidance was ultimately required. Photo elicitation was not employed with the other two cohorts primarily because the research focused on refugee participants' identities, rendering their photographs and associated narratives more relevant to the study.

Numerous qualitative researchers have found photo elicitation valuable when combined with CGT (e.g., Liebenberg et al., 2012; Poku et al., 2019). Liebenberg et al. (2012) conducted a multisite CGT study using video and photographic data alongside interviews, finding that photo elicitation helped researchers access participants' tacit knowledge. Torre and Murphy (2015, p. 12) noted that photo elicitation "can shift the power dynamic and empower participants by making them the experts". My research demonstrated that photo elicitation methods gave refugee participants greater control over their narratives. Participants had flexibility regarding when to incorporate photos into their narratives. When they did so, I would ask guiding questions if they hadn't already explained the photo's significance, such as 'What is happening in the photo?' or 'Why is this photo significant to your story?'

Despite photo elicitation's strengths, the method presents certain limitations. As noted in Section 3.4, ethical considerations restricted reproduction of most photographs in this thesis. Poku et al. (2019) discuss the challenge of pursuing theoretically relevant questions during interviews while remaining responsive to participants' narratives about their photos. I

endeavoured to create space for photos without compromising theoretical inquiry. When using photos, participants' responses typically connected back to identity concepts or work roles. In the few instances where answers were unclear or irrelevant to emergent concepts, additional guiding questions redirected the conversation. Photo elicitation provided access to participants' tacit knowledge that might otherwise have remained unexplored. For example, some photos depicted aspects of refugee participants' identities such as cultural traditions. Without those photos, I would not have been able to understand the significance of cultural traditions in participants' identity constructs. Given that CGT values dialogical interaction between researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2014a), photo elicitation enhanced the co-construction process central to this methodology.

As noted above, in grounded theory, data collection and analysis are intertwined processes that frequently overlap (Egan, 2002; Urquhart, 2013), with analysis driving subsequent data collection (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The following sub-section details the analytical approach employed in this research.

3.5.3 Data analysis

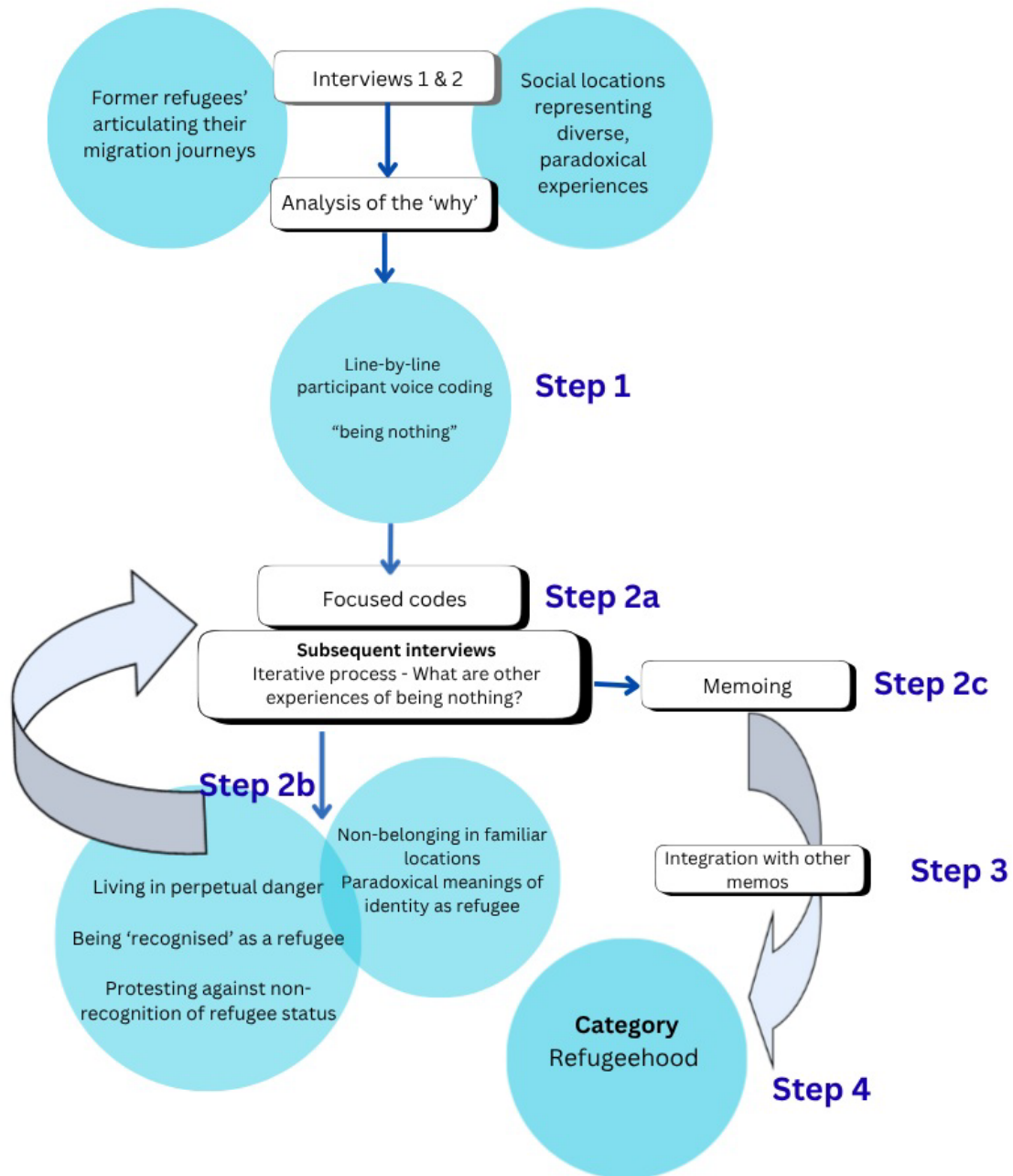
CGT offers considerable flexibility in research design and implementation (Berthelsen et al., 2018; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Hicks, 2018). Charmaz's (2006) CGT methodology enabled innovation and creativity in this research, evident in the incorporation of photo elicitation and the integration of Anthias's (2002, 2008, 2009) translocational positionality framework within analytic processes. The analysis procedure followed Charmaz's (2006) approach as depicted in Figure 3.1, with each step elaborated in the rest of this section.

Line-by-line coding generates initial codes reflecting the data's essence (Tracy, 2013) and facilitates understanding participants' experiences and perspectives (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Initial codes can be in participants' language (Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013), and Charmaz (2006) recommends using gerunds, such as 'advocating', 'seeking' and 'advertising', to emphasise actions and processes. Initial coding employed gerunds (e.g., "persevering with learning English", "reframing meaning of learning") and, where possible, participants' language.

I provide examples of line-by-line and coding by data chunks in Tables 3.5 and 3.6. Refugee participants' data were analysed separately from the other two cohorts. The research question

Figure 3.1

Data analysis process



sought to explore the identity construction processes of refugee participants throughout their migration journeys in the context of work, thus, it was imperative to keep these participants' voices front and centre of the analysis. The data from M&Ms and PWPs were analysed together because of their similar yet distinct roles in the identity construction and work integration of refugee-background individuals. After the first three interviews in these cohorts, the similarities

became apparent, although some tactics and levels of influence in achieving positive work integration outcomes differed in the data.

Table 3.5

Example of line-by-line coding for M&M and PWP participants

Excerpt	Line-by-line coding
<p>“[F]or me, I make sure that I advertise through my networks and my channels in the refugee space, I do still advertise on, you know, mainstream channels, of course, as well. But in addition, I put it through my networks, so that I can attract people from those backgrounds. And so that, in a way, it makes it easier, because I’m already open to employing them, I’m seeking them out for employment” (Manager #2)</p>	<p><i>utilising networks</i> <i>advertising within community</i> <i>advertising mainstream</i> <i>utilising networks</i> <i>attracting refugee applicants</i> <i>being open to refugees</i> <i>seeking refugee employees</i></p>

Table 3.6

Example of coding data by chunks for refugee participants

Excerpt	Analysis
<p>“We have a lot of downtime ... okay start a class ... there are some families with kids, then they start the class in the morning. And then because I went to UNHCR ... they have blackboard, and they have chalks and they have books. So I can just start teaching them ABCD ... the number of the kids now grown now. And the UN was like, Oh, okay. How about if we cut down this tree? And then build a classroom here ... They then cut it, chop it off when they build a big classroom ... And then the Somali is now sending in the kids ... they want to know ‘what are you teaching them?’ And then they came and look ‘is there any religion in it?’ The mentality is that we are changing them to Christianity. And this is a lot, a lot of bad things. And then I was like, I need to change the camp.” (Bakhit, refugee participant #3)</p>	<p>Bakhit speaks about <i>utilising initiative, starting a school, enlisting help from others, being resourceful, growing the school, building relationships with Somali parents, and being careful about religious teachings</i>. I still used gerunds to code the data here (in italics), as some line-by-line coding was possible. However, the context needed for this data was that Bakhit was in a Somali refugee camp, and he could not practise his religion of Christianity, and so when he refers to the questions from parents about Christianity, there is fear in his voice. This fear, tied to his precarious social location as a refugee-in-camp, a Christian in a predominantly Muslim country, a foreigner running a school, makes him change camps and abandon the work he had started. Despite similar social locations as others (refugees, in camp, African), he runs away, revealing insider–outsider negotiations.</p>

The initial codes (Step 1 in Figure 3.1) were marked on Microsoft Word documents of the transcripts using Word’s Comments feature. The transcripts were then saved as html documents so that the comments (initial codes) could be extracted from the document. The initial codes were then analysed to derive focused codes (Step 2a in Figure 3.1). This was an iterative process, switching between the interview transcript, the initial codes, and analysing what the codes meant. Once initial coding was completed, I analysed the processes and actions to develop focused codes (Step 2b in Figure 3.1) through memoing (Step 2c in Figure 3.1).

Memos document the researcher's conversations with the data (Berthelsen et al., 2018; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss 2008; Minas et al., 2018). Grounded theory enables the researcher to look for processes, and memos provide the avenue where the researcher can identify and analyse the processes in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Memos are the bridge between the data and the researcher's interpretation of that data (Charmaz, 2014a). For each memo, I asked myself questions such as the following:

- What is happening here?
- Why are the participants saying this?
- Why are they behaving this way?
- What processes are being described?
- Who are the actors in these processes and what is their intent?
- What are the participants doing?
- What are the boundaries for this code?

I assigned properties to each memo by defining the quotes and summarising the contents. Memos help categorise data and draw relationships between emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2006). My memos went through iterative processes of revisions and title changes, in line with the process of constant comparison in grounded theory, which entails constantly making comparisons between the data and the entire analysis (Urquhart, 2013). Comparisons are done between data and data, data and memos, and memos and memos, to question and examine biases, assumptions and perspectives, which exposes the analysis to rigorous scrutiny (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Urquhart, 2013). According to Minas et al. (2018), a way of doing focused coding is to capture the essence of line-by-line coding and organising these by topics to make sense of emergent patterns. Charmaz (2006) notes that focused coding is not a linear process, which was true for my research. For example, after analysing the initial six refugee interviews, I created a memo (reproduced below) articulating what displacement meant. I explored the hidden meanings within the data and the analysis, questioning other potential meanings of this concept.

September 23, 2023

Making meaning of displacement is done through the process of reflection. One looks back to make sense of the experience and associate meaning with it. At the time of the displacement, it appears that the participants are primarily seeking safety in the place they have gone to. A

specific condition in this code comes from the only participant who arrived here as a child – she reads about a documented history of her people. She calls it ‘seeking refuge’ now because there is a term to which she can associate the experience. At the time, ‘seeking refuge’ meant going along with her parents to a new place. The experience is filtered through the memories of a child now turned adult. Photos from that time (which she used in the interview) serve as a marker of time and experience, documenting her displaced childhood. Photos serve as a repository of life events which are somewhat clouded in memory. Persecution of some kind is the precursor to displacement. Participants do not use the word displacement however, but rather, seeking refuge, or claiming refugee status.

The CGT methodology employs advanced analytical techniques that progressively refine raw data into theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2014a). Memos analysed connections between initial and focused codes, as well as relationships between codes in the identity construction process for refugee participants. The analysis produced 65 memos across all participant groups, identifying data gaps that informed further data collection. Figure 3.1 illustrates the progression from initial codes to focused codes and emergent categories. This analytical process relies on ‘theoretical sampling’, which entails seeking data to develop emergent concepts through abductive reasoning (Berthelsen et al., 2018; Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Abduction enables researchers to make conceptual leaps while maintaining empirical grounding, with Locke et al. (2008) conceptualising it as two sides of the same coin – conjecture that simultaneously enables innovation.

In practice, abductive reasoning emerges when researchers encounter puzzling observations that existing categories or explanations cannot adequately address (Themelis et al., 2023). This process involves temporarily stepping back from the data, considering multiple possible theoretical explanations, returning to the data to check these explanations, and selecting the most compelling theoretical account (Charmaz, 2014a; Rodriguez-Labajos et al., 2021). Rather than forcing data into predetermined frameworks, abduction enables researchers to develop fresh, contextually grounded theoretical insights (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). In my research, abductive reasoning proved particularly valuable when analysing refugee participants’ seemingly contradictory relationships with identifying as refugees. Initial inductive coding could not adequately capture this complexity. Through abductive reasoning, I considered multiple possible explanations: Was this contradiction reflecting different temporal contexts? Was it strategic identity performance? Or was it something else entirely? Through memoing

and abductive reasoning, the emerging theory on refugee participants' identity constructions took shape. My second memo on displacement (reproduced below) was integrated with other memos pertinent to identity constructions. Integrating memos (Step 3 in Figure 3.1) facilitates the understanding of theoretical links among categories (Charmaz, 2014a). This integration revealed insights such as the 'refugee' identity being inherited or found (Step 4 in Figure 3.1), which contributed to conceptualising the insider-outsider continuum as the site of identity construction. Mead's (1932) concepts of emergence and temporality proved valuable in understanding identity construction as a dynamic process through the continuum. As Charmaz (2014a) notes, abductive reasoning leads to specific theoretical formulations that can be further developed through additional data collection or re-examination of existing data. The conceptual 'leap' in my research regarding identity construction was that participants seemed to be holding multiple versions of selves across time and space. While this leap was initially a conjecture, something common in CGT according to Charmaz (2014a), further theoretical sampling provided empirical grounding.

September 10, 2024

Displacement is not place bound as I had assumed earlier. Also, while persecution of some sort instigates displacement, as noted earlier, those born in camp environments are not subject to displacement by persecution. Rather, they are born into displacement. Growing up in a place where one has no home or no country that truly owns them – this is one of the experiences. It does not entail physically moving for these participants. This meaning of displacement then infers that the 'refugee' identity is inherited by those born in camps but not entirely owned. They appear to see themselves as nationals of a country they have never lived in. Being a refugee in this type of displacement is a given state of being but not internalised as part of oneself. Language, culture, history, traditions of parents' COO are deemed as identity aspects.

Displacement is also the experience of finding refuge in second (in some cases, more than second) countries, or seeking asylum in New Zealand. It is the act of physically moving for those who flee COO, such as walking for 12 days with no food, sleeping in the wilderness, etc. In these cases, the 'refugee' identity is found in the process of seeking asylum. Displacement encompasses various experiences. It means *living* (in a country or countries) *with refugee status* or *being in the process of seeking refugee status*. This concept subsumes experiences of flight, where applicable, which instigates the experience of *not having state protection*. State in this sense, as found in later data, was the countries of origin of participants' parents/family. This is what makes the distinction between the concept as a place versus experience – these participants

identify with parents'/family's country of origin. Displacement was found to be time bound according to the data, ranging from 6 months to up to 24 years.

Theoretical sampling involves collecting relevant data to refine and develop emerging theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014a; Levitt, 2021). Charmaz (2014a) explains that this process seeks data pertinent to emerging theory development, elaborating and refining the categories comprising the theory. For example, the emerging theory on identity constructions for refugee participants was missing insights on what displacement meant for those who did not migrate or physically relocate after fleeing their country or origin and therefore on how identity construction process transpired in these circumstances. Three later participants provided significant insights on this phenomenon, through an analytical link with the meaning of displacement, another emergent concept. This expanded understanding revealed displacement as an *experience* rather than mere physical relocation, as illustrated in the above memo. This evolution in understanding displacement illustrates abductive reasoning in action. The initially puzzling observation that some participants identified strongly with countries they had never physically inhabited required moving beyond descriptive coding towards a theoretical explanation that could account for this apparent contradiction. The abductive leap – conceptualising displacement as an experience rather than merely physical relocation – inspired a more comprehensive explanatory framework that accommodated the full range of participant experiences while opening new analytical pathways.

While some concepts were theoretically sampled, opportunities for theoretical sampling were limited for refugee participants. For instance, I needed more data on why working for social impact was meaningful to refugee participants. When a community leader was looking for potential participants, they could not locate any who were engaged in social impact work. However, the interviews that resulted from this round of participant recruitment yielded valuable data for other emergent constructs, such as the meaning(s) of displacement. Nonetheless, these theoretical sampling limitations represent some methodological constraints discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis. To help address these challenges, I conducted theoretical sampling within existing data – a legitimate approach within CGT (e.g., Charmaz, 2014a; Conlon et al., 2020) that still enabled conceptual development.

In grounded theory, sampling can occur within the data itself (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data collection is based on concepts emerging from the evolving

narrative (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical sampling can therefore occur in subsequent interviews within the same population, within existing data, or through other data sources (Charmaz, 2014a; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The goal is to search for data properties that further develop emerging categories (Conlon et al., 2020). Charmaz and Thornberg (2021, p. 309) describe this as “pursuing the iterative process and thoroughly checking the constructed categories against data.” Theoretical sampling aims to develop concepts and theory rather than merely gathering more data or representing all variations, achieved through new data collection within existing datasets guided by emerging theoretical insights documented through memoing (Birks et al., 2019; Conlon et al., 2020).

The purpose of theoretical sampling and controlling data relevant to emergent concepts is to achieve theoretical saturation – the point where no new properties or dimensions of concepts emerge from analysis (Charmaz, 2014a; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). In CGT specifically, saturation represents a subjective and interpretive judgement made by the researcher, manifested through constant comparisons between categories and recoding earlier data, if needed, to ensure no new leads emerge (Charmaz, 2014a). Theoretical saturation differs from data saturation by focusing on saturating theoretical constructs rather than merely noting the absence of new data (Conlon et al., 2020). According to Charmaz (2014a), saturation criteria depend on study aims, topic nature, and data quality. Saturation is claimed but difficult to prove definitively (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical memos serve as repositories for theory development and analytical thinking (Conlon et al., 2020), forming the basis for theory generation (Charmaz, 2006) by integrating emergent concepts and grounding them in data (Charmaz, 2014a; Conlon et al., 2020).

Three theoretical memos analysed the emergent constructs of evolving work meanings, identity meanings and constructions, and work integration. Appendix E presents an illustrative example of a theoretical memo produced in this research. Table 3.7 demonstrates the process of moving from initial line-by-line codes to concepts for theoretical development, as reflected in the theoretical memos. A mind-mapping process, as depicted in Figure 3.2, was useful in visualising relationships between the emergent concepts. This mind-mapping process helped in the development of a conceptual framework, explored in Chapter 6. In the next section, I discuss some critical rigour considerations for this research, followed by a chapter conclusion.

Table 3.7

Example of the process of theoretical development

Some examples of line-by-line codes	Focused code	Category	Concept for theoretical development
Refugee participants			Navigating the insider-outsider continuum (the site of identity construction)
“We all are humans ... same colour blood” Living for good of others Doing work for social good Having love for humanity	Interconnectedness	Identity anchors	
Living in interdependent ecosystem Valuing community support Community akin to family	Relationships		
Understanding self through history Preserving culture (through photos) for children Ancestral connections embedded in culture	Sociocultural heritage		
Applying for/seeking refugee status recognition “The letters from UNHCR to allow us to be refugees” Not having citizenship to any country	Being recognised as a refugee	Refugeehood	
Being hunted and shot at “Being nothing” Living inside a cage Being invisible – non-recognition as a refugee	Being nothing/not human		
Being exploited by local(s)/ employers Hiding from police/immigration Imprisonment/separation from family	Living in perpetual danger		
M&Ms and PWPs			
Non-bias or generalisations Discarding refugee label “Seeing the person in front of you”	Seeing the person behind the label	Changing the narratives	
Creating lasting change Reducing preferential treatment tendencies Identifying self-reliance mechanisms	Discarding victimhood		
Instilling refugee-background individuals’ belief in self Identifying/discovering skills for non-refugee jobs	Advocating identity beyond refugeehood		

Figure 3.2

Photo of mind-mapping process during data analysis



3.6 Research rigour

To maintain alignment with Charmaz’s (2006) CGT methodology, I employed Charmaz and Thornberg’s (2021) framework to evaluate research rigour. This framework comprises four components – credibility, resonance, usefulness, and originality – all related to researcher reflexivity. These components and their relevance to this research are analysed individually below.

Enhancing research credibility involves acknowledging the researcher’s role and influence in the research process (Berger, 2015; Dodgson, 2019). This transparency enables readers to assess findings’ trustworthiness. Nagel et al. (2015) argue that credibility in CGT should encompass not only findings’ trustworthiness but also the research process itself. In field notes and memos, I documented my worldviews and their influence on data analysis, correcting assumptions through data comparison, as illustrated in the field note and memo examples

reproduced above. Additionally, transparency regarding theoretical sampling limitations demonstrates how theoretical concepts were developed.

Resonance, the second component, suggests that research findings should echo participants' experiences and broader audience understanding. This can be achieved through rich descriptions, emotional evocation, and potential impact on people's lives (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). My research aims to generate practical implications, developed through reflexivity regarding preconceived assumptions, power dynamics, and emotional reactions. According to Moralli (2024) and Priya (2019), this enables researchers to gain insights resonating with participants' lived realities. Such empathetic understanding allows construction of concepts capturing participants' experiences, providing resonance and meaning to others in similar situations (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Charmaz (2014a) notes that grounded theories should resonate with research participants or those in similar situations.

While Charmaz (2006, 2014a) does not explicitly suggest sharing the generated theory with study populations, I leaned on CGT's methodological flexibility to present a key research output – the conceptual model corresponding to the identity and meaning of work nexus – to a refugee-background community leader, who was not a refugee interviewee but had intimate knowledge of the refugee experience. I selected this leader for three strategic reasons – his instrumental role in helping me build community relationships and trust from the outset; his work in the community focusing on advocacy and policy change; and his unique social position at the intersection of academic knowledge and lived experience. The model resonated strongly with this community leader, particularly the identity constructs of anchors, refugeehood, and place identity, and the insider-outsider continuum as a site of identity navigation. He related these concepts to personal anecdotes and reflected on how the identity-work meaning nexus mirrored not only his experience but that of many refugee-background individuals he knew who pursue community and social impact work despite qualifications in other fields. He also recognised the potential implications of my findings regarding how M&Ms might create pathways for more meaningful work integration for resettled communities in New Zealand. This community leader's feedback exemplifies Charmaz's (2014a) emphasis on resonance as a quality criterion, demonstrating how the co-constructed theoretical framework captures significant aspects of my participants' lived experiences while maintaining relevance to the broader resettlement context in New Zealand.

Apramian et al. (2017) critique the notion of resonance as potentially limiting the scope and impact of CGT research, arguing that focusing too narrowly on resonance with participants' experiences may neglect the broader social, political and historical contexts that shape them. While acknowledging this perspective, I recognise that some research, including mine, necessarily has limited scope and may not resonate with all refugees, as I highlight in the last chapter in this thesis. Nevertheless, since context is integral to both CGT and the translocational positionality analytical lens, this research has analysed (as the findings reveal) the influence of broader sociopolitical contexts on refugees' identities.

Research should have practical implications and be useful for the intended audience (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Usefulness can be demonstrated through the ability of the findings to inform policy, practice, or future research, and the potential for the research to contribute to social change. By engaging in a dialogic and collaborative research process, reflexive researchers can co-construct knowledge that has practical implications for participants' lives (Moralli, 2024; Priya, 2019). Timonen et al. (2018) challenge the idea that usefulness should be a primary criterion for evaluating the quality of CGT research. They argue that an overemphasis on practical utility may compromise the theoretical depth and complexity of the findings and suggest that usefulness should be balanced with other criteria, such as theoretical sophistication and methodological rigor. I align with Timonen et al.'s (2018) perspective. This research produces a theory that may be useful for resettlement outcomes management at the micro-level (individual), for refugee-background individuals; and at the meso-level (organisational) for employers and resettlement services organisations. While the theoretical contributions may not immediately translate into resettlement policy changes, implications for refugee-background individuals' work integration processes and outcomes pertinent to employer and resettlement services providers are noted in the last chapter of this thesis.

The final component in Charmaz and Thornberg's (2021) framework, originality, posits that research should offer new insights, conceptualisations, or theoretical understandings of the studied phenomenon. Konecki (2011) expands this concept to include methodological innovations, arguing researchers should creatively adapt grounded theory methods to specific research contexts, potentially developing new data collection and analysis techniques. In this research, I have employed translocational positionality as an analytical lens alongside established CGT analysis tools. To my knowledge, this represents a unique analytical approach. Furthermore, new insights on the identity-work meaning nexus were generated in this study.

Researcher reflexivity can lead to originality in research by enabling researchers to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, explore alternative interpretations, and develop novel insights (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). By remaining open to participants' diverse perspectives and experiences, reflexive researchers can move beyond established theories and disciplinary boundaries to construct innovative concepts and frameworks (Moralli, 2024; Priya, 2019). Walsh et al. (2015) note that the pressure to produce original findings in CGT research may sometimes lead to a lack of critical engagement with existing literature and theories. As previously noted, my immersion in the resettlement sector and refugee-background communities helped to provide in-depth knowledge of resettled life in New Zealand. However, during analysis, I carefully prevented personal experiences from clouding data interpretations, as discussed in Section 3.2 on reflexivity. Since this research substantiates identity constructions and work meanings for refugees, engagement with existing identity theories informed initial interview parameters. While writing memos, considerable time was devoted to understanding literature and refining analysis. Finally, theoretical contributions from this research represent original scholarship through a new framework conceptualising identity and work for refugees, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

3.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has established the philosophical foundations of the research as a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology. It introduced the analytical framework of translocational positionality as an innovative methodological tool employed alongside CGT, a methodology gaining prominence in refugee studies. Following an examination of ethical considerations specific to research with refugee-background communities, the chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the data collection methods – narrative interviews and photo elicitation – selected for their effectiveness in capturing nuanced experiences. The data analysis section delineated the systematic application of initial and focused coding, constant comparison, memoing, abductive reasoning, theoretical sampling, and conceptual categorisation, while acknowledging theoretical sampling constraints. The chapter concluded with a rigorous evaluation of research quality using criteria specific to the CGT methodology. The subsequent chapter presents an in-depth analysis of findings derived from refugee participants, illuminating their lived experiences and identity constructions.

Chapter 4 Findings: Refugee participants

4.0 Chapter overview

This study explores the complex identity constructions of refugees through their migration journeys. Twenty-two participants shared narratives of their lives in their country of origin (COO) (where applicable), displacement experiences, journeys to New Zealand, and subsequent life transitions. Findings are presented alongside photos that participants used to narrate their stories. Direct quotations from participants, who are identified using pseudonyms, are utilised to illustrate some of the findings. Through the application of Anthias's (2002, 2008, 2009) translocational positionality framework, this research explores how refugees construct their identities throughout multiple phases of migration, and how these identities influence their perceptions of work, belonging, and identity.

The findings presented in this chapter are organised into five interconnected sections. First, the migration journey is conceptualised as a three-phase process consisting of coming into being, displacement, and resettlement. Second, the chapter analyses three identity constructs - anchors, refugeehood, and place. Third, the insider-outsider position navigations pertinent to refugees' identity constructions are explored. Fourth, resources utilised throughout migration journeys are summarised. Finally, the constructions of work meanings throughout these journeys are explored, followed by a chapter conclusion.

4.1 The migration journey

The migration journey provides the contextual framework within which refugee participants' experiences of identity construction, resourcefulness, and work meanings unfold. Analysis of participant narratives revealed three distinct yet interrelated phases – coming into being, displacement, and resettlement.

4.1.1 The coming into being phase

The coming into being phase represents the formative period (childhood to approximately age 21). It establishes foundational elements that persist throughout the migration journey. This phase is temporally bound but not necessarily place-bound. The term 'coming into being' reflects the developmental nature of these years, typically ranging from early childhood to

when most participants described entering adulthood. The cultural, economic, political and social contexts of this phase proved influential in both instigating displacement (the second phase, discussed shortly) and shaping initial identity formations that persisted throughout participants' journeys. For example, Karam spent his formative years in his COO. In his narrative, the concept of service to his community was a defining element of his migration journey. Utilising the photo reproduced in Figure 4.1, he explained the deep emotional connection with serving the community that began in his formative years:

I worked at this school, it is run by [a religious organisation], so it's like a Foundation. I served here for seven years. I think 400 to 500, so many children during the seven years studied over there and I serve them actually.

Figure 4.1

Participant photo #1: The school where Karam taught in his COO, perceiving his work as service



For eight participants, including Karam, this phase occurred in their COO. Five participants described relatively comfortable upbringings with access to education and work opportunities before displacement in early adulthood. Four of these grew up in Pakistan and one in Afghanistan. The other three participants who respectively grew up in Colombia, Myanmar

and Somalia, experienced insecurity and persecution in their formative years, with two facing ongoing violent conflicts.

4.1.2 Displacement phase

Displacement encompasses both a lived experience and legal conditions. As an experience, it involves the material, psychological and social realities of forced migration. As a legal condition, it manifests in distinct ways – statelessness (the absence of protection of a country); refugee status (formal recognition of displacement under international law and policies); and asylum-seeking (the process of pursuing such recognition). This phase includes experiences of flight, finding refuge in second or more countries, or seeking protection in New Zealand. Displacement varied dramatically in duration across participants, from six months to 24 years, and occurred at different life stages. Four participants experienced displacement during their late teenage years in settings ranging from a Sudanese refugee camp to urban settings in Malaysia and Thailand. Six participants spent most of their early developmental years in displacement settings, with three born in refugee camps in Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Yemen, respectively; one in an urban displacement setting in Uganda; and two in camps in Kenya and Sudan, respectively. Four participants experienced a combination of coming into being, displacement, and resettlement phases. Despite the varied locations, all participants described precarious living conditions with limited opportunities and restrictions imposed by host countries. Many compared camp life to imprisonment, yet all performed work roles in displacement, often in informal sectors or illegally.

4.1.3 Resettlement phase

Resettlement, the third phase of the migration journey as conceptualised in this thesis, represents a transformative transition (in terms of economic and legal precarity and physical safety) rather than simply the final phase in the migration journey. Formally defined under the frameworks of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it involves permanent relocation to a third country – in the context of this thesis, New Zealand – that has agreed to grant individuals a legal status and a pathway to citizenship. This process marks a pivotal shift from the legal precarity of displacement towards greater security, albeit not without its own challenges. For those who arrived through official UNHCR channels, resettlement was predetermined, while for those who sought asylum directly within New Zealand's borders it commenced only after refugee status determination. Beyond the legal status stabilisation process, resettlement encompasses the multifaceted process of economic

participation (education, work), establishing physical security (health care, housing) and social integration (community, cultural navigation), alongside individuals' processing of the psychological impacts of their displacement phase experiences. Resettlement durations ranged from one to 20 years, yet, notably, 18 participants indicated they remained unsettled in New Zealand, suggesting resettlement is not necessarily the final phase of migration and one that can often materialise as a protracted phase that for some participants never culminates in feeling settled.

The migration journey proved to be non-linear, with phases often occurring in parallel. Some participants experienced their coming into being entirely in displaced contexts or within combined phases of displacement and resettlement. Others sought refuge directly in New Zealand, experiencing displacement. They were deemed to be displaced as they arrived in New Zealand as asylum seekers and experienced economic and legal precarity, (c) overt threats to physical safety, and uncertainty, which were characteristic of the displacement experience, as discussed earlier. Additionally, during the two years it took for legal status determination, they were not allowed to be paid for work and struggled to have a place to stay. At the same time, they initiated some aspects of their resettlement experience, such as making new connections in the New Zealand society and performing volunteer work, akin to experiences of participants in displacement.

This complex, non-linear journey provides the essential context for understanding the identity constructions discussed in the following sections. Further experiences embedded in the migration journey come to light as this chapter progresses. The concepts of identity constructs, insider-outsider continuum, resourcefulness, and the meanings of work were influenced by the migration journey as the context-providing framework. Identity constructions of refugee participants were found to be contextualised to the migration journey. This finding is further explored in the next section.

4.2 Identity constructs

Refugee participants' identity constructions are deeply contextualised within their migration journeys. Analysis revealed three primary identity constructs – identity anchors, refugeehood, and place identity – each playing a significant role in how participants understood themselves throughout their journeys.

4.2.1 Identity anchors

Identity anchors represent the fundamental sources of self-definition articulated by participants. Rather than simply stating identifying labels, participants explained why their chosen identities held meaning for them. The term ‘anchor’ is used to describe participants’ self-definitions because the elements noted in Table 4.1 served as foundational points that ground and stabilised identity throughout the migration journey. The anchor metaphor resonates with the migration context, suggesting something that provides stability amidst movement and change. Through rigorous analysis of participant narratives, six categories of identity anchors emerged – interconnectedness, language, morality, relationships, sociocultural heritage, and spirituality. In Table 4.1, definitions of these concepts are provided alongside illustrative exemplars from the data. These six categories of identity anchors were the most common sources of self-definition articulated by participants. When participants spoke of themselves, the ‘self’ was described in relation to one or more the six identity anchors, as noted in some examples in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Identity anchors as described by refugee participants

Concept	Definition and properties	Excerpts from data
Interconnectedness	Identity meanings associated with perceived connections with the rest of the world. Identity is synonymous with being a human. Universalism of personhood, person as one integral part in overall life and life beings, all humans are created equal, shared humanity, connection with the universe, environment.	“I am a woman; I am a mother. I am a professional. But overall, I’m a human being. I think nowadays we have a lot of humans and not so many human beings. Don’t give up and be a human being.” (Mira) <i>(also Relationships)</i>
Language	I speak therefore I am. Language is a defining element of self – the person starts to speak a dialect, mother tongue, and meanings of the world are embedded in language. Language is the means through which names and their meanings originate. Selfhood is entangled with cultural/ethnic naming conventions, name meanings and origins, family or clan associations, oral/written language, dialect variations, language preservation.	“We are Somali. No, we’re not calling ourselves Ethiopian. Because Ethiopian they speak Amharic, and we do not speak Amharic. So how can we become like Ethiopia? If you speak Somali, you are Somali.” (Jahed)

Morality	Identity marked by ethics, traits and values that pre-exist/are embedded in the personhood; are part of personality. The personhood comprises ethics and values that guide behaviour, belief systems on good versus bad, right versus wrong, knowledge obtained through being human. Ethics and values pre-exist and are not influenced by spirituality, although some values may resonate with spirituality as the person develops and understands spirituality.	“I’m like a person with altruism, or altruistic person. I want to make a change ... I was like that from early childhood, I wouldn’t say that [religion] was a contributing, but that was just like, how you are, what kind of person you are.” (Akram)
Relationships	Meaning of self is relational; relationships with others defines who one is. Participants described themselves in terms of their familial roles (son, father, mother, etc.), friends, or local/religious/significant community groups, family status. The self exists in relation to others.	“I remember it was like 1983 ... it will never go away from me; that’s part of my identity. That’s who I am, growing in a big family, family ties, family connections.” (Bakhit)
Sociocultural heritage	Self is embedded in the sociocultural heritage, including country of origin, which is the place where heritage originates. It represents culture, one’s COO and ethnicity. Additionally, identity meaning resides in one’s history – be it history of COO, of the ethnic group of people, or one’s communal upbringing. The personhood is made up of collective memory, shared experiences and history, historical narratives, traditional knowledge, ancestral connections, traditions and customs, social practices, cultural knowledge.	“Ethiopia was never colonised ... but even though that we’re never colonised or enslaved, the connotation of Black people being enslaved, I’m ... kind of put in that pocket of people who have to wear the negative aspects of history.” (Solan) <i>(also Interconnectedness)</i>
Spirituality	Identity is anchored in relation to a higher power and the selfhood is understood through, and is inseparable from, the divine. Identities are intertwined with religion. The self is perceived through a deep connection with a higher power, exemplified through organised religion or non-religious but spiritual practices, universalism of world religions, making the world a better place for the benefit of all.	“I’m a kind person ... I try to be a genuine Christian, true believer ... once you become a Christian, I strongly believe I have no identity, Christ is my identity.” (John)

Although five participants in this cohort were female, their gender identity was not reported as being more influential in their self-definition than the familial roles associated with gender. This finding reveals an important distinction in how the relationships anchor operates in gendered contexts. For example, in Table 4.1, Mira stated her identity as a woman, followed

by her being a mother. In her narrative, her identity emphasis was on being a mother, in the context of the relationships anchor. Being a mother, and a sole parent, were salient in her migration journey experiences, such as making decisions about work based on her children's needs. Similarly, another female participant who also was a single mother reflected on her role as a mother and provider for her family, and less on being a woman.

These findings suggest that gender operated primarily through the relationships anchor rather than as a distinct identity construct for the female participants. This appears to be particularly evident among female participants who are single mothers; they must inhabit both provider and caregiver roles simultaneously, rather than more traditionally gendered roles. In contrast to the single mothers, Ahlam's experience as both a mother and a wife demonstrates how the relationships anchor functions in a different family structure. Ahlam's work in New Zealand was a way of, among other things, finding belonging in the resettlement society. Her work was also a pathway to reduce discrimination and othering so that her daughter could grow up in a society where she felt accepted. Ahlam's narrative demonstrates how the relationships anchor directs and gives meaning to work through familial responsibilities, with gender shaping but not superseding these relationship-based identity constructions. Thus, the relationships anchor subsumes gendered identities while simultaneously being influenced by gendered experiences of family responsibility.

These anchors were formative during the coming into being phase and served as stabilising elements throughout migration journeys. For example, Fawaz described his formative high school years as the beginning of his journey, demonstrating how the relationships anchor manifested in his early work:

In high school, I was the person to always try to stand on their own feet ... the first job that I work, I taught Microsoft Office, [which] I learned by myself through Google and then taught [it] to other people ... My students were people who worked in an office ... and [fellow] students in high school. So, my journey started from that time, I was passionate about technology, and about how I can be helpful for the community.

Identity anchors evolved throughout migration, acquiring new meanings and emotional valences. Interconnectedness exemplifies this transformation – foundational community

interdependence in one's COO became active efforts to combat discrimination in resettlement, as Solan describes:

There [meaning his COO], we have the support of the community ... like you depend on each other ... Everyone worked together for the betterment of one another ... [In New Zealand] it's like Black people, African people, they're always late ... I fit into the stereotype ... You wear that pressure or break that stereotype, in order for you to be a normal human being.

The excerpt demonstrates how migration contexts reshape the meaning and experience of identity anchors. Solan's articulation of having to combat stereotypes to "be a normal human being" reveals how interconnectedness shifts from a natural resource to a contested terrain where one's basic humanity requires active defence.

Basma's experience illustrates how identity anchors can transcend physical places. Despite being born and raised in refugee camps in Yemen and Indonesia without experiencing Somalia directly, she strongly identifies as Somali. Her identity as a Somali came from learning about her culture while in displacement from her mother and other Somalis in camp. Her example demonstrates that national identity cannot always be associated with a geographic place in which one grew up in. This identification occurs through the salience of her sociocultural heritage:

We never saw our country, we were born there, in camp ... You know Kakuma? [I responded, "Yes."] It's like there ... but in Yemen. So, we grew up there, it was a challenge ... We came to Indonesia by boat, we stayed in a place, it was like a jail ... I learned my culture in Indonesia. I feel I'm Somali, that is how I feel.

It was found that participants held onto these identity anchors throughout their migration journeys. The anchors became a stabilising element in the journey. In displacement, identity anchors were influential in guiding life and work decisions. The refugee and asylum-seeker communities in displacement were 'fellow' people, denoting the bonds and relationships formed in displacement.

The composition of participants' communities changed during the migration journey, primarily due to the divergent places that participants lived in. Whereas in the coming into being phase,

community consisted of neighbours, local villagers, and ethnic or religious groups, in displacement, communities were essentially composed of other displaced people. An example from Karam is utilised to illustrate the continuance of identity anchors from the coming into being phase. Karam’s religious values espouse serving humanity, and he practised these values in his COO as a child and in his early adulthood working life (see sub-section 4.1.1 above). In displacement, despite not being able to work and provide for his family, Karam continued to volunteer, keeping intact the identity anchors of relationships (through community) and spirituality. Combined, the two identity anchors guided this aspect of his displacement. Referring to a photo from his displacement in Thailand (reproduced in Figure 4.2), Karam explained:

I [was] not earning [for] my family but that time I did some volunteer job. So, I tried to provide some assistance to my fellow refugees and asylum seekers the best way I [could] for them. This picture reminds me about volunteer work, which I did back in Thailand. So, we offered, as a community – the Muslim youth – offered [our] volunteer assistance for medical clinics [that an international humanitarian organisation provided] for the refugees and asylum seekers.

Figure 4.2

Participant photo #2: Karam volunteering for other refugees in displacement



In resettlement, community constituents expanded to include other refugee-background individuals, friends and family left behind in their COO or transit countries, and local non-refugee societies, all entangled with participants' sense of selfhood. What this revealed is that the anchors of relationships and interconnectedness remained intact, despite evolving community constituents. In resettlement, despite these community ties, a handful of participants described ongoing instability resultant from not feeling settled, perpetuated by persistent trauma and prolonged experiences of outsider-ness (discussed in more detail in Section 4.3). Two examples are used to illustrate the divergent meanings associated with resettlement, revealing that the migration journey can be an ongoing process and an influencing element on identity construction.

Rafi has lived in New Zealand for over 20 years and had worked, inter alia, in management positions, as a board chairperson, and an advisor to the government. Yet, he described feeling unsettled because of continuing difficulties:

I've been refugee life all my life ... because of very deep trauma, I still am suffering ... when I came to New Zealand, I was dreaming that after all that I faced, a lot of challenges ... I thought I will be settled easily, beautiful country, get on with my life, that's it. I came here, everything become upside down. It's not easy.

Having spent as much time in New Zealand as Rafi, Bernard describes feeling settled because of what resettlement denoted for him:

Resettlement ... it really depends on the individual ... For me, I grew up in an environment where I was willing to be somewhere and start my life afresh ... My goal now, as I say that I'm on top of my Maslow's hierarchy of things ... before I retire, I just want maybe half [of the house mortgage] be paid. And I would like very much to see my kids completing their degrees or have a job.

The kind of life that Rafi desired appears to have been found in Bernard's case. Bernard describes being at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (e.g., Maslow, 1943), at self-actualisation, with his future intentions being only to retire and see his children grow up and have their own careers. Thus, the migration journey is complex and perhaps feeling settled takes a lot of time for some, like Bernard, while it remains an unachievable feat for someone

like Rafi. Both participants also articulated aspects of their identity in these examples. Bernard's future goals align with the relationships anchor – his family and their ongoing stability of living in New Zealand. The concept of being a refugee – termed 'refugeehood' in this study – that Rafi articulated was an identity construct that most participants described, according to contexts such as place and phase of the migration journey. Place became an important identity construct for participants, particularly in the context of their refugeehood. Both these aspects are discussed next.

4.2.2 Refugeehood and place

Throughout participants' narratives, refugeehood and place emerged as distinct yet interconnected identity constructs, each evolving in response to their migration experiences and contexts. This sub-section explores how these two constructs interact to shape refugees' self-definitions throughout their journeys. Refugeehood represents participants' experiences of what being a refugee meant throughout different contexts of their journeys, while place denotes specific geographical spaces such as COO, transit countries, or New Zealand.

Fifteen participants in this study spent significant periods in transit countries before resettlement in New Zealand, with most living as either camp or urban refugees. The average time spent in these countries was approximately 13 years, though three participants (Bakhit, Basma, and Jahed) spent over 20 years in camp environments. Table 4.2 summarises the 15 participants' migration journeys, including countries of transit and types of refuge. Participants' transit experiences were predominantly shaped by their legal status in these countries. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, governments generally classified refugees as illegal immigrants (e.g., Imelda, 2024; Qarssifi, 2022; Tuitjer & Batréau, 2019), while in Ethiopia, Kenya and Pakistan, participants faced various forms of non-acceptance from locals.

4.2.2.1 Refugeehood

The participants' accounts revealed refugeehood as having multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings that evolved throughout their migration journeys. Participants' pre-displacement identities were primarily defined by their identity anchors, with most being unfamiliar with the refugee identity before displacement. While participants knew that they could seek refuge somewhere, they only realised the various meanings associated with being a refugee through the process of displacement. Those born in displacement grew up inheriting these meanings, which further illuminates refugee participants' navigations of insider-outsider positions.

Table 4.2*Refugee participants' migration journeys – places and duration*

Participant	Country of origin	Countries of transit	Type of refuge	No. of years
Adrian	Ethiopia	Sudan	Camp/Urban	14
Ahlam	Iraq	Pakistan	Urban	12
Bakhit	Sudan	Ethiopia	Camp	11
		Kenya	3 camps	11
Basma	Somalia (born in a Yemeni camp)	Yemen	Camp	14
		Indonesia	Camp	10
Bernard	Burundi	Rwanda	Urban	23
		Kenya	Urban	7
Caleb	Myanmar	Malaysia	Urban	6 months
Hamza	Pakistan	Thailand	Urban	6
Idris	Somalia	Malaysia	Urban	6
Jahed	Somalia (born in an Ethiopian camp)	Ethiopia	Camp	22
Karam	Pakistan	Thailand	Urban	9
Mehar	Myanmar (born in a Thai camp)	Thailand	Camp	14
Nadira	Somalia	Yemen	Camp	6
		Malaysia	Urban	6
Nomi	Pakistan	Thailand	Urban	6
Rafi	Somalia	Ethiopia	Camp	4
		Sudan	Urban	11
Thet	Myanmar	Malaysia	Camp	2

Note: Bakhit was resettled to the United States where he lived for seven years because he and wife and children got separated when he went to work in Sudan, and he was presumed dead. He kept looking for them while in the United States. At the time of his interview, Bakhit had lived in New Zealand for eight years.

The legal status of ‘refugee’ functioned as both protection and constraint in most participants’ lives. Bernard’s description of needing “letters from UNHCR to *allow* [emphasis added] us to be refugees” illustrates how refugee identity for him was an externally bestowed legal category rather than a self-determined one. However, although the status is externally bestowed, most participants saw it a necessary identity to assume. Ahlam’s experience demonstrates the active engagement required to obtain legal refugee status. She recounted, using the photo reproduced in Figure 4.3, being imprisoned with her mother and sister after participating in protests outside a UNHCR office in Pakistan over 30 years ago, demanding to be recognised as refugees.

Figure 4.3

Participant photo #3: Protest for refugee status recognition participated in by Ahlam



Ahlam's experience demonstrates how individuals must actively engage with, and sometimes challenge, the very institutions that control refugee status determination, while still conforming to the institutional expectation of vulnerability. The very need to protest for recognition reveals an inherent vulnerability. Ahlam and her family lacked institutional protection and felt compelled to publicly demand rights that would be granted under international refugee law. Their protest emerged from a position of systemic precarity and legal invisibility. Paradoxically, the act of protesting creates additional vulnerability through risk exposure. By participating in public demonstrations outside the UNHCR office, Ahlam and her family made themselves visible to authorities who subsequently imprisoned them. Ahlam's case thus reveals how vulnerability is not merely an inherent condition; it can also be actively produced through interactions with oppressive power structures.

Once the globally constructed refugee identity was translated into legal status, this new classification both enabled and restricted opportunities. Legal status offered potential resettlement and basic protections while imposing significant limitations. Most participants found work in transit countries because of their refugee status, but their legal classification often resulted in exploitation (cheap labour, long work hours, remaining unpaid for long periods). On one hand, participants had no choice but to adopt the refugee identity because without it they were seen as 'nothing' due to being illegal, undocumented, and subject to deportation, exploitation, imprisonment and violence. In this context, the legally recognised

status of refugee, despite its constraints, became preferable to the alternative of complete non-recognition.

Furthermore, such non-recognition gave rise to non-acceptance in transit contexts, arising from both legal frameworks and host society members, resulting in participants feeling not settled. Despite most participants eventually gaining formal refugee status, the social exclusion and legal limitations imposed by transit countries created a persistent sense of impermanence and unbelonging. Furthermore, because of being caught in the in-between spaces of being ‘nothing’ and being a ‘refugee’, participants experienced significant precarity. This liminal position between complete non-recognition and partial protection left them vulnerable to changing political circumstances, shifting institutional priorities, and ongoing socioeconomic instability, reinforcing how global refugee constructions and legal categories directly shaped their lived experiences of insecurity and non-settlement.

4.2.2.2 Place identity

Place identity emerged as an identity construct intertwined with refugeehood through experiences of non-settlement and precarity. While these experiences transpired largely in displacement for most participants, some experienced precarity and feeling not settled while still in their COO, before physical displacement occurred. Nomi, a practising Christian in Pakistan,¹ articulated that his homeland was not a place where he could freely express his identity:

I’m a born Christian. So, I feel like this [New Zealand] is my country. That’s why I don’t understand refugee ... because in Pakistan, I used to feel that it was not my country ... Whatever was in my heart I could not do over there – meaning if I wanted to do something in Pakistan, I could not do it, especially as a Muslim country.

While the previous sub-section highlighted how precarity was associated with being seen as ‘nothing’ within global refugee frameworks, Nomi’s experience reveals that precarious living conditions and feelings of non-settlement can begin in one’s COO. His life was under threat due to religious persecution, creating conditions of both precarity and non-settlement within his homeland itself. This demonstrates that these experiences are not exclusive to the

¹ The persecution of Pakistani Christians is well documented (e.g., Ashraf, 2021; Pio & Syed, 2016).

displacement phase but can also characterise refugeehood even before the physical act of flight occurs.

Place identity was found to be complex and contradictory. Adrian, who has lived in New Zealand for over 20 years and works in the resettlement sector, continues to identify as a refugee. His identity salience of refugeehood was underscored by feeling separated from his culture, home, mother, and a homeland, and is thus ‘still sailing’, not having reached the place he can call home. Adrian's unresolved relationship with place – feeling neither fully connected to his homeland nor truly ‘home’ in New Zealand – is what maintains refugeehood as an identity marker, regardless of his two decades of residence and meaningful work in the resettlement sector. In contrast, Nomi feels settled because New Zealand “is my country” while Pakistan “was not my country” due to religious persecution. The act of fleeing inevitably renders the situation unalterable, transforming their relationship with place in profound ways.

An even more distinct experience of place identity emerged among participants born in refugee camps, who had never physically experienced their parents’ COO. For participants like Basma and Jahed, place identity became associated with imagining a past and a homeland never physically encountered. Through descriptions provided by family members and other co-nationals – about the place, its customs, culture, language and history – these participants constructed mental images of their ancestral homeland. This imaginative process facilitated identification with a place never actually lived in. In resettlement, some participants even travelled ‘back to their roots’, visiting their COO to find themselves and crystallise their imagined place identities. Both the imagined place and physical journey to one’s COO also brought to light that place identity provided meaning for some identity anchors, such as language and sociocultural heritage.

The three identity constructs developed here – identity anchors, refugeehood, and place – are therefore interrelated, creating complex constructions of identity. The interrelationship between refugeehood and place identity reveals how refugee participants construct meaning from physical, imagined, and remembered places, demonstrating the complex ways these identity constructs provide both stability and adaptation throughout the migration journey. These identity-formation processes materialise through the navigation of insider-outsider positions, explored in the following section.

4.3 Constructions of identity through the insider-outsider continuum

The insider-outsider continuum represents a dynamic process of negotiating social positions that are context-dependent and central to refugee participants' identity constructions. These position navigations are influenced by the phases of migration journey and the identity constructs of anchors, refugeehood, and place.

Participants navigated complex insider-outsider positions throughout their migration journey. It was found that when participants were 'tapping into or stepping out of' one or more identity constructs (anchors, refugeehood, place), they were engaging in dynamic processes of identity construction through these insider-outsider navigations. An 'insider' position occurred when participants embraced and utilised one or more identity anchors to reinforce or construct a sense of self and the meanings of work during their journeys. Additionally, a deliberate stepping 'outside' of certain identity constructs represented an important identity-formation process, which allowed participants to temporarily detach from specific identity constructs. This process created the space to redefine themselves in response to evolving environments, which were context-specific, which is explained using examples from the data below. Thus, there was no single meaning of an insider or outsider. These experiences reveal the complexities associated with constructing identity for refugee-background individuals. Insider-outsider locations were found to be instrumental in participants constructing a sense of self in various social locations, and meanings associated with work. The latter will be further explored in Section 4.5.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, I had attributed my use of the term 'refugee-background individuals' to the majority of my participants no longer identifying as refugees as defined by the UNHCR and international legal frameworks. The insider-outsider continuum allowed participants to position themselves flexibly – as refugees or refugee-background individuals, as New Zealanders, or as nationals of their COO, often simultaneously holding multiple positions. For example, association with one's COO in addition to identification as a New Zealander is enabled through the refugeehood identity construct. Bernard's story illustrates refugeehood as the connecting element between two places he identifies with. Even though he discounted his refugeehood, the implicit meaning in his story is the bridging that refugeehood provided. In the following excerpt, Bernard occupies two identity constructs – place and refugeehood. For him, refugeehood was a liminal space between two places that are now connected:

In 2009, we got our citizenship. I told my managers that I have to celebrate. And she said, “Why do you have to celebrate your citizenship?” I told her ... for me it’s a big deal. It is the first time in my life to be called a citizen of a country. At 38 years old, I was called a citizen of New Zealand, a place where people gave me the right to be one of them ... So being called a refugee or being called a citizen? I’m proud of being a citizen. And I know I have a place where I come from ... It’s okay to say where, to be proud to know [your country of] origin.

In the previous section, it was demonstrated that identity anchors evolved with new meanings. As participants moved through the different journey phases, they experienced transformations in how their established anchors functioned in their lives. These insights were attributed to multiple social locations along the insider-outsider continuum. These new meanings within relatively stable identity anchors were enabled by participants inhabiting all three identity constructs – anchors, refugeehood, and place – at the same time and sometimes in conflicting ways. Mehar’s experiences typify this finding.

Growing up in a refugee camp in Thailand, surrounded by other Burmese refugees and learning basic English, Mehar felt life was a bit freer, even if it was like living “in a cage”. During this phase, her identity anchors of relationships and language were prominent. Everyone around her spoke Burmese, and as the youngest family member, she could study and help in her parents’ shop without major responsibilities. In resettlement, however, everything changed. She became solely responsible for helping her family navigate the English language in daily life. This shift transformed her language anchor from a source of self-concept into a source of emotional strain, deepening her sense of alienation stemming from her refugeehood as a student in New Zealand and of estrangement from any place she could call her homeland:

Thailand is not our country, not my country ... My parents are originally from Myanmar ... I was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. But it wasn’t easy for us because we are refugee, and we lived in ... it’s like a cage, where only Burmese lived ... I studied year nine here [New Zealand]. It was difficult because I don’t know how to communicate ... I was really alone. I cry and pray every day, every night, to get a friend to be able to speak Burmese and for people to understand the language. Now I have to take so many responsibilities ... to stand out for my family ... I feel like I’m walking in the dark ... because this is not my country.

Mehar's experiences show that holding multiple social locations along the continuum can be draining, and some identity sources, though highly desired, remain unfulfilled, such as place failing to provide the sense of homeland she seeks. Refugeehood in resettlement created stresses on Mehar's identity anchor of language, giving it a new meaning compared to her coming into being phase. Furthermore, refugeehood in Thailand held a different meaning – living in a cage but also having a sense of community in the camp.

Identity thus proved layered and contextual, dependent on life stage and personal significance. Bakhit's narrative illustrates how these layers initiate movements along the insider-outsider continuum. After discovering his family had been unexpectedly resettled to New Zealand, Bakhit, who had spent over 20 years in refugee camps, was confronted with a critical identity tension. To move from the war-torn asylum country and gain resources to find his family, he needed access to the US-administered Lost Boys of Sudan programme (see International Rescue Committee, 2014). His acknowledgement, "I'm not a lost boy, that could be a problem. I cannot fit into that programme", explicitly positions him as an outsider to this specific form of refugeehood, which represents a layered refugee identity. Yet to maintain his insider connection to his primary identity anchor (relationships), Bakhit strategically constructed an insider identity to the 'Lost Boy' form of refugeehood when he was advised, "America is coming to take about 1000 refugees ... write a very good story." With help from a writer, he crafted a narrative that rendered him legible to the Lost Boys programme gatekeepers – a tactical performance of identity that demonstrates how refugees navigate simultaneous insider-outsider positions. This example represents both an agentic response to structural constraints and a demonstration of identity not as a fixed state but as an active, strategic negotiation shaped by contextual demands and personal priorities.

The insider-outsider experiences emerged even within social locations where one would expect to find insider-ness. In the previous section, it was noted that Adrian and Nomi experienced outsider-ness created by the place – homeland or not homeland, respectively. However, the nuanced experience of Nomi illuminates the intricate relationship between the identity constructs and insider-outsider positions. Negotiating insider-ness with his spirituality identity anchor in resettlement establishes pre-displacement as an outsider-creating context. For some participants, additional paradoxical meanings developed in resettlement. For example, Adrian's prolonged outsider experiences in New Zealand, despite living here for 26 years, led him to attribute refugeehood synonymous with being uprooted and not feeling rooted again.

This participant noted that home may no longer exist because he may now be an outsider in his COO if he returned. Identifying as a refugee is his way of coming to terms with the likelihood of remaining an outsider for the rest of his life, and being reconciled to living in New Zealand, a place that is not his homeland. These examples illustrate not only outsider experiences in seemingly insider social locations, transpiring not only in host societies but also in one's COO, but also that outsider-ness can be a prolonged state of being, regardless of an associated place. This state of being arises from experiences of separation from a salient identity anchor, which in Adrian's case, was his sociocultural heritage.

Negotiations as an outsider, insider, or a hybrid of both is a dynamic process and is dependent on the context and the individual's response to it. When the context was life-threatening, participants left the outsider-creating context. When it was not life-threatening, the negotiated position was a hybrid one. Bakhit's work within a refugee camp (see Figure 4.4) became dangerous due to his Christianity. Despite being an insider as a fellow African in a camp, outsider-ness was created by predominantly Muslim parents suspecting he was converting their children to Christianity. Similarly, Ahlam experienced outsider-ness within the Muslim community in New Zealand due to her Western upbringing and flexibility in religious and cultural practices. Negotiations of insider-outsider positions in paradoxical contexts inevitably led to participants assuming hybrid positions, being at once insiders as well as outsiders of an identity construct, thereby demonstrating fluidity in movement along the continuum.

Moreover, outsider-ness can be an accepted state when there are no pathways available to the participants to create insider spaces. Being an outsider in these circumstances results from hegemonic social structures that surround participants. It is in the meaning of 'not being nothing' that refugeehood was embraced to an extent. For example, Jahed, who had never lived in Somalia, strongly identified with the country. He is wearing a wristband featuring the colours of the Somali flag in the photo reproduced in Figure 4.5 to *remind* him of a place he has never lived in. Jahed's identification with Somalia is rooted in his native language, persisting through both displacement and resettlement. When growing up in a camp in Ethiopia, refugeehood emerged specifically through language functioning as an identity marker: "But we [Somalis and Ethiopians are] separate, because we are refugee. We're not [speaking] in Ethiopian." In this context, refugeehood became an identity manifested when viewing oneself through the outsider position of a language-defined identity.

Association with refugee identity proved temporal for most participants. Many embraced New Zealand identity in resettlement, as Nadira expressed: “The New Zealand Government give me the power. I’m Kiwi now, yeah [*pausing to cry quietly*]. I’m Kiwi and I want to do good things in this country.” These participants relegated refugeehood to the past – to pre-displacement phases or transit country experiences where refugee identification was vital for protection and basic needs. In resettlement, insider positions as New Zealanders emerged as more salient, highlighting the fluid movements along the continuum and participants’ agency in negotiating positions to find congruence with salient identities.

Figure 4.4

*Participant photo #4:
Bakhit teaching in a refugee camp*

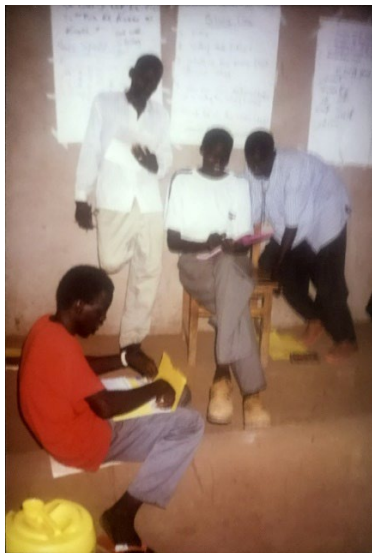


Figure 4.5

Participant photo #5: Jahed shows his wristband featuring the colours of the Somali flag



The insider-outsider continuum thus reveals the contextual nature of identity construction through recurrent negotiations. Some outsider positions remained non-negotiable due to social structures or factors beyond participants’ control, particularly during displacement and in sociopolitical contexts in transit countries. The paradoxical experiences of occupying multiple social locations demonstrate fluidity along the continuum, influenced by participants’ identity anchors. Ultimately, these negotiated positions aim at authenticity through insider alignment with salient identities, enabled by agency, risk-taking, and hope. These dynamic negotiations along the insider-outsider continuum illuminate how refugees actively construct their identities through strategic positioning in response to changing contexts, demonstrating both the constraints of structural forces and the potent agency exercised in identity formation. In the next section, the analysis focuses on other resources that participants utilised in their journeys.

4.4 Being resourceful: Strategies for negotiating challenges

Resourcefulness emerged as a critical concept in understanding how refugees navigate complex migration journeys and work environments. Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology, with its emphasis on participant actions, revealed how refugees utilised various resources to achieve desired outcomes and overcome challenges throughout their migration experience. The analysis identified multiple resource components that participants employed, including affective (belonging, commitment, passion), economic (finance, savings, wages), personal (abilities, knowledge, skills), physical (natural resources), social (family, friends, community relationships, work networks), and psychological (hope, mindsets, patience). While resourcefulness proved effective for many challenges within participants' control – such as accessing work opportunities, confronting discrimination, and developing new skills – it had limitations when confronting structural power imbalances or life-stage constraints that lie beyond individual agency.

4.4.1 Manifestations of resourcefulness

Participants demonstrated diverse manifestations of resourcefulness in negotiating insider-outsider positions, securing employment, and deriving meaning from work. For some participants, such as Bakhit and Fawaz who began utilising available resources for entrepreneurial endeavours before age 10, resourcefulness appeared as an inherent personal trait directed towards helping others or fulfilling personal needs. For others, resourcefulness developed as a necessary adaptation during the migration journey that was essential for survival, finding meaningful work, and in some cases achieving family reunification. This study identified four interconnected strategies of resourcefulness – exercising agency, demonstrating self-efficacy, finding alternative pathways, and remaining undeterred. These strategies utilised various combinations of personal, social, psychological, and natural resources, while maintaining distinct characteristics that differentiate them conceptually. In the following paragraphs, the concepts that make up being resourceful are described. Illustrative examples/quotes and sub-properties for each strategy are provided in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

'Being resourceful' strategies and illustrative examples

Strategy	Sub-properties	Participant example/quote
Exercising agency	Being adaptable – seizing opportunities	Bernard's case worker found him work as a cleaner in a New Zealand hotel, leaving him feeling scared. Despite initial fear about hotel cleaning work, Bernard embraced the opportunity after guidance from a cousin: "I just did the work and a few months later because of my knowledge and my understanding, my openness I became as supervisor."
	Being adaptable – creating opportunities	Being self-taught throughout her coming into being phase, Basma decided to teach herself various languages in the second country of asylum – Indonesia. "There's a lot, thousands of people there. So, you can see Somali, Iraqis and Syrian, Afghani, Myanmar, Bangladesh. Pakistanis. There's Ethiopian, Eritrean." She described 'hanging out' with other people to learn languages from the diverse refugee communities around her. Through self-learning, she was able to work as a volunteer interpreter at humanitarian organisations around her camp, because "there's all the people who cannot speak a word".
	Exercising autonomy	Hamza described how he and his family moved to Thailand as a place of asylum, enabled by their economic resources in their COO. "So, it took us around two weeks to find a place to stay ... And then after a couple of months, the rest of my family also moved to Thailand. What we've done is that we sold everything that we had. And then we thought that it's [going to] last us for next five years, because we weren't rich, but we were like, upper-middle-class family. So, we [had] a lot of resources."
Demonstrating self-efficacy	Learning new skills	Nomi: "I am a professional painter. I learned painting in Thailand. My job in Pakistan was in government but in Thailand I could not work. In Thailand there was this Indian guy. He asked me if I knew painting and I said no, and he told me learn it. And I asked him, where do I learn it? And he said, watch YouTube videos and he gave me a painting job for [a] three-bedroom house. And he said paint. [Whatever way] you can paint, just do it. It was my first time. But slowly, slowly, slowly, I learned through YouTube videos, by myself. I'm still doing it, been 10 years' experience ... In New Zealand ... I've learned lots more skill in painting."
	Building confidence, developing self-belief	Karam: "As a person I personally feel that because I faced many challenges in my past life and I work hard I struggle a lot I came out from that shell and I have ability to do anything in the future ... So I want to start the business from the smallest level [and] grow that business ... start my own shop and then maybe I start up my own brand or something like that. So am confident I can do these kinds of things because of my past life."
	Learning from mistakes	Rashid: "I think the mistake come from two sides, one from me, the other one from the people expecting to hire me. My mistake is I easily give up ... that's already happened. You have to accept it. But always inside myself, I always think how to change, every night when I sleep, I say, do something."

Finding alternative pathways	Repurposing resources	Ahlam – the pilot participant – was the only one who had worked solely in New Zealand. She grew up and was educated in New Zealand, holding bachelor’s and master’s degrees and having worked in ‘mainstream’ jobs. She works for a not-for-profit organisation she created and does ad hoc consulting through her marketing business. Feeling like she did not belong in the corporate sector but desiring to utilise her marketing skills, education, and passion for diversity, Ahlam’s not-for-profit is a way to re-purpose her resources. Her work aims to educate people about New Zealand’s cultural diversity through magazines (see Figure 4.6), which serve as “some sort of platform where we share different cultures”.
	Finding other solutions	Caleb noted that two years of school in New Zealand “didn’t really work for me, school doesn’t really teach me how to speak or learn English. So, I’ve got to find my way.” He described learning English by hanging out with English-speaking friends, listening to the radio, reading the Bible in his native language, and then reading the same passages from an English translation. He started conversing with others in English despite not being fluent and took six years to learn the language in his own way.
	Being hopeful and patient	Idris works in New Zealand as an interpreter while finishing his double degree. He commented: “I’m a poor person; I don’t have money right now. Even this money, this translation, I only got a few dollars, and I still pay the rent, pay the shopping, utility, sending money back to my wife. I’m not saying I’m broke, I can still survive. But like once [I finish] studying, then maybe I can a good job, a good salary, a good life. That’s what I’m thinking about. My long dream.”
Remaining undeterred	Using tenacity and resilience, having goals	Mira: “I come from a really rough childhood ... I had to be very strong and keep on if I wanted to keep staying alive. So, I learned how to fight everything and then everything becomes easier, and you become tough. I consider myself a very resilient, empathic person. I consider myself a woman of goals. Through my whole life I’ve given myself goals.”
	Tapping into social support – family, community, managers, PWPs	Thet noted that his managers encouraged him to take up a leadership role and provided support and guidance. Idris’s career advisor helped him pursue degrees according to his passion. Bernard’s manager provided a scholarship for him to attain a degree so he could carry on social work. Hamza: “[Two refugee community members] had a huge impact in my life. And they’ve been people who’ve been supporting me, and my parents, and now that I’m married, my partner – all very supportive.”
	Taking risks	Jamal: “Some people they didn’t like [working there], because they are allergic ... but you have choice. I take the risk, it’s good for me. Because I want to have the experience.”
	Subjecting self to structural/systemic power imbalances	Akram practised social work in Pakistan but was qualified in and practiced medicine. In resettlement, he learnt that to continue practising social work, he had to complete a social practice degree. He overcame this structural barrier by doing what was needed (six years of studying alongside full-time paid work) to re-enter the social worker profession. He commented: “To achieve that one [continue practising social work] ... they [New Zealand] need qualification, okay, I will do the qualification.”

Figure 4.6

Participant photo #6: Ahlam's not-for-profit publishes magazines to educate people about cultural diversity



4.4.1.1 Exercising agency

Exercising agency constitutes a fundamental strategy within the broader concept of resourcefulness. This strategy encompasses several sub-tactics, including adaptability, seizing emerging opportunities, and creating opportunities when none exist. While resourcefulness generally involves proactive self-initiated efforts, seizing opportunities represents a reactive response to environmental conditions. In resettlement contexts, participants frequently adopted this approach due to significant barriers to employment entry, particularly the requirement for 'New Zealand experience' that many cited as a primary obstacle. Participants described accepting whatever work roles became available to gain this crucial local experience.

The research reveals that participants predominantly utilised their own social networks or relied on themselves to find work. In some circumstances, participants created their own opportunities by identifying workspaces they could fill using their resources. These individuals proactively positioned themselves in specific workplaces or within social networks to demonstrate their skills, abilities and knowledge, often through informal or volunteer work or

internships, which subsequently led to paid employment offers. Some participants, such as Karam and Hamza, also exercised autonomy in making choices about what work to pursue in resettlement, guided by identity constructs, or in deciding where to flee when leaving their COO. This concept of agency extends even to work that may not be inherently meaningful but still falls within the boundaries of overcoming challenges and achieving desired outcomes.

4.4.1.2 Demonstrating self-efficacy

When confronted with unfamiliar work environments, participants demonstrated remarkable abilities to navigate challenges and thrive. The second mechanism – demonstrating self-efficacy – involved developing belief and confidence in one’s abilities to accomplish tasks and overcome challenges. Self-doubt frequently preceded the development of self-efficacy, with most participants initially questioning their capabilities or mental strength to develop necessary skills. For some, encouragement from friends and family facilitated the development of self-efficacy, while for others, it required taking a leap of faith into uncertain territory.

Most participants frequently reported developing the ability to learn skills and to learn from mistakes. For most participants, self-efficacy initially developed in transit countries where they worked in roles requiring skills and abilities they had not previously acquired or utilised. This process continued and evolved during resettlement. Each new, uncharted territory expanded participants’ understandings of their own potential, extending beyond the immediate context of meaningful work to encompass the broader pursuit of desired skills and knowledge. The development of skills beyond those required for meaningful work emerged as a consistent finding across participants. For some, like Nadira and Rafi, venturing into uncharted territory through self-efficacy built confidence that proved valuable in navigating other migration-related challenges, while for others, self-efficacy represented a pre-existing personal trait that they leveraged throughout their migration journey.

4.4.1.3 Finding alternative pathways

Finding alternative pathways emerged as the third strategy in resourcefulness, typically employed when participants encountered barriers or challenges. This approach involved circumventing obstacles by repurposing available resources or developing novel solutions to problems. The concept incorporates psychological resources such as hope and resilience, with patience serving as a characteristic feature that creates space for hope to flourish. For example, Basma observed that lacking hope was more devastating than lacking housing: “[Being]

hopeless is worse than homeless. Because when you don't have hope, it's mean you're done ... if you don't have a home, but you have hope, that's everything.” This perspective enabled her to learn English alongside Bahasa in Indonesia so that, despite employment restrictions, she could volunteer as an interpreter for humanitarian organisations in her displacement context. A few participants noted that learning to be resilient was embedded in their way of life in their COO, while others developed resilience on their migration journeys.

The pursuit of alternative pathways frequently relied on support from social networks, family, community members, and sometimes potential employers. In resettlement contexts, managers and pathways-to-work providers (PWPs) supported some participants in finding employment or identifying unrealised skills and talents. Several participants secured work because managers created opportunities for them. Mira's manager offered an internship that converted to paid work, while Hamza received mentorship that enabled him to establish his own business. Jamal and Jahed found their first jobs through a PWP. In refugee camp settings, some participants received support from UNHCR or similar agencies to pursue meaningful work.

Remaining true to one's passion or meaning of work enables the pursuit of alternative pathways, distinguishing this strategy from creating opportunities. When facing challenges, participants developed solutions that allowed them to maintain their chosen work paths, even when these solutions required modifying their work approaches or investing additional time and effort. For some participants like Ahlam, passion for their work underscores the act of finding alternative pathways. Ultimately, these alternative pathways enable individuals to express their authentic selves in their work environments.

4.4.1.4 Remaining undeterred

The final resourcefulness strategy of remaining undeterred involves finding inner strength to pursue goals and persevere through challenges, supported by psychological resources of resilience and tenacity. Social support, particularly from family members, played a crucial role in enabling individuals to maintain focus on achieving their objectives. This social support encompassed both emotional dimensions – encouragement, understanding, and care – and material or instrumental assistance, such as community fundraising or family members providing financial support. Some participants took significant risks to remain undeterred, more commonly in transit countries than in resettlement contexts. Working in countries where they lacked legal resident status was a risk taken by most participants in transit situations.

Inherent to this concept is the recognition that certain actions are necessary to achieve desired goals. While this may involve extraordinary effort, it sometimes means subjecting oneself to demands arising from structural power imbalances within the system. The experiences of Akram and Rashid provide nuanced perspectives on remaining undeterred. Akram's example is noted in Table 4.3. In addition to his determination, Akram received emotional and financial support from his wife, enabling him to study while working full-time. He also leveraged his passion for and sense of belonging to his community to maintain his resolve. In contrast, Rashid's experience highlighted how systemic barriers can undermine consistent determined efforts. He described limited agency when dealing with employers whom he believed failed to acknowledge him as a person. Despite multiple efforts, which he acknowledges have not been entirely consistent, he remains unable to work in his desired profession.

Rashid's situation is partly attributed to limited networking, an activity he chooses not to engage in based on religious and cultural values that discourage socialising with colleagues outside work hours. Despite having equal passion for their respective work roles, these participants experienced distinctly different outcomes. Akram successfully utilised his personal, psychological and social resources to return to social work practice, while Rashid relied primarily on his New Zealand qualifications to seek entry into his desired field. Networks did not significantly contribute to Akram's success in re-engaging with his preferred social work role, but family support and strong community commitment proved influential. Rashid depended primarily on personal resources while adhering firmly to his principles. His experience demonstrates the limitations of resourcefulness – some challenges remain beyond individual control, particularly in accessing meaningful work. Nevertheless, Rashid continues to push himself to achieve better work outcomes, exemplifying his learning-from-mistakes ethic noted in Table 4.3. This tension between individual resourcefulness and structural constraints demonstrates the limits of agency in navigating migration and work contexts, revealing how refugees must sometimes adapt to power imbalances while maintaining their pursuit of meaningful goals.

Resourcefulness encompasses the utilisation of various resources in work and migration endeavours. Affective resources were implicit in most strategies discussed but became particularly evident in the experiences of Akram and Rashid. This analysis reveals how refugees employ diverse resourcefulness strategies to navigate complex challenges, while acknowledging the structural limitations that sometimes constrain individual agency. The

concept provides a framework for understanding how refugees negotiate insider-outsider positions, find meaningful work, and construct identities in new contexts, while highlighting both the power and limitations of individual resourcefulness in the face of systemic barriers. In the next section, meanings associated with work roles participants engaged in are explored.

4.5 The meaning of work

The meaning of work for refugee participants is intrinsically connected to their identity construction throughout their migration journey. Most participants associated meanings of work congruent with salient identity markers. Through work, participants sought to help themselves, their families, and others feel like they belong, to replace outsider-ness with inclusivity, to understand others who suffer, and to be themselves. To understand what work means for refugees, it is imperative to acknowledge meanings given to work throughout their journeys and who the work was performed for.

4.5.1 Background and dimensions of work meanings

The migration journey of refugee participants can be conceptualised in distinct phases that shape their relationship to work. Two participants' narratives began with the work they performed as children. Both originated from villages where communal living and interdependence were the norm, providing insight into early forms of work articulated in participant narratives. Twenty participants worked during either the coming into being phase alone or in the merged displacement phase. Roles performed for community or family in the coming into being or merged phases were mainly unpaid. In resettlement, nine participants worked in private enterprises either as paid employees or as entrepreneurs, nine worked in roles that impact the wider society, and four were employed in the resettled community sector, while two volunteered in the resettled community. All nine participants who worked for wider societal impact had previously worked in the resettled community sector. Some participants like Ahlam and Hamza wore dual hats, such as a private enterprise work role alongside social impact work.

Four interconnected themes emerge from the data that reveal the meaning of work for refugee participants – being oneself and to be more, working for survival, working for family, and working for communities, with a sub-theme of working for social impact.

4.5.2 Being oneself and to be more

‘Being oneself’ refers to expressing authentic identity at work, while ‘to be more’ involves, although not always, transcending refugee stereotypes and limitations through enhanced performance and achievement. These concepts are interdependent – refugeehood creates the need ‘to be more’, while work environments determine whether one can ‘be oneself’. Being oneself begins in the coming into being phase and is characterised by how the personhood develops. Participants experienced understanding of self through communal living, cultural values, family roles and status, personal traits and values, religion, and work performed in community and family settings. For example, Karam explained that his religious community was known throughout the world for their services to humanity. In the coming into being phase pre-displacement, the salience of Karam’s religious identity influenced meanings of work for him as a community volunteer in childhood and later when he was serving the children in his local and religious communities through his work in education.

In cases where the displacement and coming into being phases were fused, ‘to be more’ emerged. In essence, refugeehood creates the need to be more. Being oneself at work enables one to be more than what one was. Hence, the two are interdependent. Some participants such as Idris and Nadira experienced foundational elements of ‘to be more’, such as pushing themselves, developing and learning new skills, rising above challenges in displacement work contexts. This concept gained momentum and became more pronounced in resettlement. ‘To be more’ first surfaced as pushing oneself, getting out of one’s old self to do and achieve more. For a few participants, like Thet, work meant an ongoing process of self-development, not associated with refugeehood. His narrative focused on his desire to keep pushing himself and to be more: “Myself, you know, I come from refugee ... I start from beginning, zero, to up here ... Oh, I’m proud by myself, know? ... but I need to be more ... and go out from myself.” A photo of Thet’s workplace is reproduced in Figure 4.7.

For others, ‘to be more’ also meant to engage in practices to counter negative perceptions of being a refugee. It ‘meant utilising extra effort and placing pressure on oneself to fit in and prove self-worth. In being oneself at work, refugee participants also sought acceptance of being different and through acceptance, belonging. When being oneself was not possible, participants tried to be more than that self. One way to achieve this was to create or find meaningful work.

Figure 4.7

Participant photo #7: The's workplace



that simultaneously produced belonging. For example, Ahlam eventually left the workplaces where she felt discriminated against. As someone who resettled in New Zealand as a child, Ahlam felt integration and social inclusion still had not been achieved in her life. Continuing to feel like an outsider in adulthood because she felt judged and unable to be herself, she left the corporate world and started working in the not-for-profit sector, where she could be herself:

I get along better within the nonprofit area ... It's like you ... connect with people of similar kind ... similar stories ... you learn to find your identity when you get into the sector ... so you find yourself and you find other people with similar stories, we connect more, when you can be yourself a bit more and you feel like you're not judged.

Another strategy employed by participants was to find work which reduced the burden and emotional labour of trying to fit in. These situations led to finding alternative work that was not preferable but also was not undesired. Some participants found belonging not only through inclusion but through the active reduction of exclusionary factors. Furthermore, the meaning of such work emerged specifically from the absence of emotional labour exerted in trying to

fit in. Alternative work became meaningful when these participants no longer needed to exhaust themselves by conforming to expectations of workplace actors. For example, Rafi engaged in extra efforts to prove himself in a managerial role. He spent extra hours learning how to manage locals, learning New Zealand employment laws, and seeking help from his Kiwi friends. However, for Rafi, 'to be more' placed extra, unnecessary pressure on his life and he eventually left that work role, finding alternative paid work, which was below a managerial role, in order to be more truly himself.

'To be more' also entailed countering discrimination and racism, not just in the workplace but also in society. Some refugee participants like Akram and Solan countered discrimination through subtlety. Others were more obvious in their activism actions. To illustrate, Mira placed pressure on herself to prove her worth to New Zealanders. Her activism against discrimination was subtle. She highlighted that 'to be more' was pertinent to working extra hard to earn locals' respect and having "to meet all these expectations and be really extreme with yourself ... had to really fight and earn their respect with tears of blood." To be more also meant to advocate for equal opportunities at work in a more overt way and pave the way for the future. Bernard challenged workplace discrimination with like-minded co-workers and used his position to challenge senior management:

I've been on secondment twice, as a manager. It doesn't mean that I'm not capable ... but you can see the environment is not favourable for person like me ... That's why I was one of the founding members ... [of] a community within our employment, where we are meeting on a monthly basis to talk about how we can support each other ... Because all the managers, they are one ethnic group, my aim was not just to be a manager, but to fight that kind of thinking ... So I'm proud that if I walk out tomorrow, there will be a group of people who will be supporting each other and they can probably be [making] decisions as well.

When positioned as outsiders in resettlement work environments, participants strategically accessed their salient identity anchors (in Bernard's case, interconnectedness through emphasising a shared humanity over his otherness) alongside refugeehood or place to counter experiences of othering. This strategic navigation allowed them to simultaneously occupy both insider and outsider positions along the continuum, demonstrating the complex interplay between identity constructs. 'Being oneself and to be more' was also necessary to working for survival and to work for family, themes discussed next.

4.5.3 Working for survival

The theme of working for survival represents a crucial dimension of work meaning that evolves throughout the migration journey. Survival entailed provision of basic needs such as food and shelter, as well as psychological wellbeing. In their COO, survival work for most participants manifested through communal interdependence, wherein resources were collectively pooled among family and community members to meet basic physiological and psychological needs. This form of subsistence labour reflected a holistic approach to ‘just living’. Conversely, in displacement contexts, the notion of survival underwent a significant transformation. Work became predominantly instrumental – a means to an economic end in protracted circumstances characterised by resource scarcity and precarity. For participants in the merged phases of coming into being and displacement, and those in displacement-alone settings, work entailed vulnerability to exploitation, particularly in countries where refugees were deemed unwelcome. This exploitation reflects how displacement reconfigures survival work as detached from previous work identities and roles. Instead, work became oriented towards financial sustenance, either for self or for dependents, which in turn helped procure temporary shelter and safety.

In resettlement, working for survival became peripheral to an extent because of diminishing concerns for safety and the right to remain in the country. Working for survival was an act of agency in resettlement, as well as in displacement. The meaning of working for survival evolved from displacement to resettlement. Exploitative work practices were not experienced in New Zealand, and participants could choose to work in any job to prove themselves. More importantly, most participants in resettlement desired to live by their values of earning one’s own keep, even though earning a living was not needed due to the availability of state welfare. This is a key property for the evolved meaning of working for survival and makes resettlement survival work distinct from displacement survival work. Working for survival entailed establishing oneself as self-sufficient and then turning attention to what one might do in the next work role. Linking being independent to his personal and cultural values, Adrian noted:

I start evening at six o’clock, and then I’ll finish at about midnight. When I go home, I’m wet like a fish ... main kitchen you wash everything ... I was so happy because at least I start to make my own money. We never grew up with social welfare system, we don’t know that. Our principle is you work; you eat your own bread. If not, maybe you go on the street and beg. And I say there’s no in between.

Another reason for undertaking survival work in resettlement was to maintain one's psychological wellbeing. Participants were used to a life of working for a living, and staying at home while being dependent on state welfare negatively impacted their wellbeing. A final characteristic of this theme was that working for survival in resettlement and displacement also became interlaced with working for family, as some elements of survival aimed to meet family needs. However, in resettlement, working for survival eventually became less prominent as working for family became salient, revealing the evolving nature of this dimension.

4.5.4 Working for family

The theme of working for family represents a core aspect of work meaning that is deeply connected to identity construction. Both family and a sense of community were interwoven with refugee participants' identities from the coming into being phase through displacement. Family included immediate and extended family members. Work was performed to meet family needs beyond financial ones. The meaning of this work materialises through the saliency of the identity anchor of relationships.

This theme commenced in the coming into being phase, and in the merged displacement phase. One's family is an inherent part of oneself, as noted earlier. Work performed for family was seen not only as work but as a duty and a significant role. Women participants also worked for family, in both traditional ways, such as being family carers, and through paid work roles, as family providers in the coming into being phase and in the merged displacement and/or resettlement phase. Working for family therefore was not a gendered experience. Displacement instigated the evolution of this theme to include safety, survival, and togetherness. Working for one's family's survival (to provide for needs) was discussed in the earlier theme of working for survival; here, safety and togetherness are paramount. Whereas survival work pertains to financial needs, working for family includes other needs such as safety and togetherness, and the family's (psychological) wellbeing. For example, in displacement, Hamza was earning enough money to move his family to an apartment for their safety and psychological wellbeing:

We were isolated at home ... Every day is day is the same, waking up, working, eating dinner, staying home ... You can't go outside because there's a chance that immigration or police will catch you. So, for a year, every day we are repeating this whole cycle for one year. We were taking care of ourselves that was not an issue. After a year, I was fed up, can't take this anymore.

We were isolated ... not going out. We started looking for some luxury apartments where there is a gym, swimming pool, study. We went there.

In resettlement, working for family evolved into future-proofing – ensuring long-term security impossible during displacement. This manifested diversely – Jamal balanced current family support in Somalia with degree completion and sponsorship goals, and Nomi developed a franchise enabling his wife’s career while maintaining family time. Both examples demonstrate future-proofing as a meaning of work in resettlement, influenced by all three identity constructs of anchors, refugeehood, and place.

Working for family entails a deep connectedness between participants’ sense of self, exemplified through sense of responsibility, duty, and providing for significant others in their lives. Communities were found to also be significant others for refugee participants.

4.5.5 Working for communities

The dimension of working for communities encompassed three distinct sets of communities that evolved throughout the migration journey. In the coming into being phase, local communities (geographical, religious, other social ties) were meaningful in work performed. During displacement, those local communities no longer existed for those who experienced coming into being in their COO, so other displaced communities were adopted into selfhood. Those coming into being in displacement knew only the displaced community around them. To some participants, these adopted displaced communities were also perceived as family members. In resettlement, as noted in Section 4.2 on identity anchors, communities further evolved to include local and national refugee communities, friends and family from the displacement and the coming into being phases, and the local/national/global communities that participants (intend to) serve through work.

Community connection was integral to participants’ identity formation during the coming into being phase, including when this phase coincided with displacement or resettlement. Participants performed work for local communities – ethnic communities, neighbours, religious groups, and village/communal groups – and perceived this work as inseparable from their sense of self. Rather than viewing their community work as having external impact, participants experienced it as an extension of their identity because community membership was embedded within their self-concept. Three participants exemplified this integration,

describing their community-impacting work as part of who they were rather than something they did for others.

This pattern of linking identity with community work characterised both participants in the coming into being phase and those born in camp environments. In displacement contexts, working for communities took on additional significance as participants sought belonging within displaced communities. Participants recognised that their refugee status meant their identities were not readily accepted in their new environments. Maintaining connections with other displaced communities – also shaped by shared refugeehood – became a means of preserving their sense of self. The interdependent nature of community living remained central to participants' work experiences across both the coming into being phase and displacement contexts. This reveals how community work functioned as both identity expression and identity preservation for participants working with other refugees in displacement settings.

Additionally, for some participants, working for displaced communities meant that they were aided and empowered by themselves. This conceptual property emerged from the analysis when juxtaposing experiences described by participants pre-displacement. Work performed for communities was a way of life in the coming into being phase and seen as a part of self. In the context of displacement, there was no such sense of community. Rather, participants worked in various ways to aid and, in a few cases, empower other displaced community members. In essence, they attempted to re-create interdependent living in displacement. For some participants, bonds forged with displaced community members remained strong and resulted in community members becoming like family. In displacement then, the identity constructs of morality and relationships, refugeehood, and place interrelate to create the meaning of working for other refugees, demonstrating the multilocality of identity.

To illustrate, Hamza's work became a way to empower other refugees who were being exploited by Thai employers. He setup an organisation which provided a pathway for fellow refugees to earn money for survival. Hamza's work provided a sense of achievement, being settled, and belonging in displacement. The community around him was, in his words, his family (see Figure 4.8). Hamza's identity salience as a "family man" deeply influenced what work meant to him in displacement. Tying his identity as a family man with his work, Hamza stated:

[Hamza] ... is a loving husband, loving son. [Hamza] is a family man. So, who is my family? My immediate family and my fellow community members. They're all my family ... we are one family, and family means everything to me ... Yeah, I'm a family man ... I still consider those people [refugee communities in displacement] as part of my whānau [Māori word for family], as part of my family.

Figure 4.8

Participant photo #8: Hamza's 'family' in Thailand



In resettlement, working for communities evolves yet again because communities change, and the identity construct of place comes into prominence, alongside the other two. Refugee-background individuals or people from the same ethnicity or COO become one set of community members – community group one (resettled ethnic/refugee communities). Those left behind in the COO and in displacement settings remain embedded in participants' identities and form the second set of community members – community group two (left-behind communities). The third and final community group are those within the resettlement country and beyond (wider New Zealand and/or global society). Working for group one (resettled ethnic/refugee communities) is an extension of oneself, as is working for community group two (left behind communities). Interdependent living is re-created with group one, adding to the meaning of being oneself in resettlement. The evolved meaning of group one is that

participants are part of a community that is in the minority in resettlement, thus in addition to interdependency and being self, working in this community means to advocate for the community's needs, to guide others working with this community, and to assist the community.

Sometimes working in community group one entails placing the community needs ahead of economic gain. To illustrate, Bakhit was different from other participants who either went to a developing country before resettlement or resettled directly in New Zealand. He is well-educated and has more human capital than other participants because of his varied work experiences in displacement and resettlement in the United States. In New Zealand, he had worked outside the resettlement sector and emphasised that he had a choice:

I don't do it as a job. I do it as a lifetime commitment ... Will my job make sense to people? ... Is there any impact? Because I can quit the resettlement sector, I can go back to corporate because I used to work there before, I can get well paid.

Participants who no longer identify as refugees still engage with that identity when working within refugee communities in New Zealand. This engagement with refugeehood becomes necessary for such work, but they simultaneously maintain personal distance from the refugee label, achievable through movement along the insider-outsider continuum. Caleb exemplified this dynamic, stating:

I don't see myself as a refugee anymore. But I am former refugee of course ... I don't see myself as a refugee anymore. Because what I told myself is that every house, every job that I complete, I say to myself, yes, I've done something for this country, always. Every house, when I sign it off, yes, I've done something good for this country, I'm proud of it. So, the thing is that you have to show the people how you want them to see you.

Despite distancing himself from refugeehood in his business, Caleb simultaneously assumes this identity to fulfil his role as community president. The latter position would be inaccessible without an insider connection to refugeehood. Moreover, working for his community, through his identity salience of relationships, is a meaningful endeavour which necessitates insider-ness with refugeehood. Paradoxically, Caleb's effectiveness in this role is enhanced by his simultaneous identification as a non-refugee – positioning himself as an example of achievement through hard work rather than being defined by refugeehood. This case illustrates

the complex nature of insider-outsider navigations, characterised by temporal shifts and apparent contradictions, in both identity and work meaning constructions. Furthermore, the role of resourcefulness becomes apparent in Caleb's statement that "you have to show people how you want them to see you", a clear demonstration of agency in negotiating these social positions along the continuum.

Working for community group two (left-behind communities) evolves due to survivor guilt and measuring deservedness, both stemming from participants' refugeehood. The intention is to provide hope to those left behind through financial or other aid, and, where possible, sponsorship for resettlement. In some cases, participants also advocate for these groups through their work. A boundary for work with this group is that those being helped are not physically present in the resettlement country. Most participants expressed guilt and sadness for the people left behind. These are insider-outsider experiences through a distinct perspective. Participants know what it feels like to live in a country where life is perilous. They also know the pain and hardships associated with living in displacement, particularly in countries where refugees are subject to exploitation and harm in the host country. These make participants insiders to the experiences of those left behind. Some participants like Adrian and Hamza expressed their unworthiness to be resettled because other people were perceived to have experienced relatively more trauma and hardship, indicating they saw deservedness as something that could be measured. Measuring deservedness positions participants as outsiders of deservedness, seeing themselves as unworthy compared to those who remain displaced, while they continue to be insiders because of their shared persecution and displacement experiences. For example, Nomi stated that he earns money so that he can support displaced friends in Thailand. The community bonds continue, and Nomi was working to fulfil the needs of those who remain in a precarious place.

4.5.5.1 Working for social impact

Working for social impact represents a distinct sub-theme of working for communities that emerges specifically in the resettlement context. Working for social impact is aimed at community group three (wider New Zealand and/or global society) – people that are not related, through bonds or similar experiences, to refugee participants. A boundary for this concept is that the meaning of such work emerged only in resettlement. In resettlement, the meaning of such work relates to personal fulfilment, to making an impact in others' lives, to giving back, and to giving without expecting anything in return. These properties set such work apart from

communal living (community group one), which was entwined with interdependence, and community group two, which is associated with survivor guilt and measuring deservedness which fuel the desire to provide aid/help.

Working for social impact is embedded in participants' identity anchor of interconnectedness, revealing intertwined relations with the concept of being oneself and to be more. The significance of such work ties in with being more – going beyond what is seen as self (which is inherent to community groups one and two). Additionally, refugeehood as an identity construct influences this meaning of work dimension. The motivations for social impact spring from self-reflections on one's journey and a renewed meaning of humanity within the interconnectedness anchor, which results from the experiences embedded in refugeehood. For example, John works with the intellectually disabled because he developed a passion to help people with difficulties. He explained: "I had different goals. But when I go through all these troubles, these circumstances ... in Pakistan, the only thing was my status, my car, my study, or things. But life is more than that ... the picture got clearer for me."

One aspect of social impact work – social inclusion – is an intended outcome for those that may be minority groups in New Zealand, such as migrants, and people with disabilities and mental health issues. Working with these groups reinforces a sense of belonging. Participants utilised their own (painful) resettlement experiences and identity anchors as motivation for such work. For Solan, work was a way of providing social inclusivity for those perceived as 'different' in dominant society. Prior to working in the resettlement sector, Solan worked with the intellectually disabled, noting social inclusion connected with being oneself at work:

I've always wanted to work with people ... like mental health and intellectual disability ... I've kind of realised that ... [the] people who never judge you and are coming from a place of genuine inquisition, or wanting to understand you and wanting to know why you look different, or wanting to know why you do certain things, are people who have intellectual disability or suffer from mental health. Those people deal with you as a person, not as someone who's from Africa, India ... or whatever it may be ... so they don't really have that sort of the lens that the world sees you with ... And so I find comfort in that, to work with people who see me for who I am ... what I bring to that space is my genuine self, authentic self.

Another aspect of social impact work is aimed at communities in New Zealand and/or globally. Participants' narratives reveal identity anchors of interconnectedness and spirituality providing

the guiding values of a shared humanity, and a desire to serve the local or global societies. These values, interlaced with participants' migration journeys, influenced what work meant to them. It was found that the work could be deeply personal, and in some cases, an extension of oneself, while simultaneously intended for others. Some participants utilised aspects of their journeys to find work meanings in resettlement and future endeavours. Others demonstrated that the work meanings developed pre-resettlement could be continued in resettlement, even if the work performed is different. To illustrate, Akram was practising medicine for free in his COO because his patients were poor. In resettlement, he undertook a difficult six-year journey of working full-time while simultaneously pursuing a social practice degree so that he could continue the not-for-profit work he started in Pakistan. Ten years later, his not-for-profit organisation, now registered in New Zealand, provides food to the poor and vulnerable in his neighbourhood who are distinct from the resettled community and not necessarily considered to represent minority groups in New Zealand (see Figure 4.9). Basma's work in resettlement is meaningful, meanwhile, because of her displacement-related experiences as a volunteer in humanitarian organisations where she witnessed people's suffering. Listening to other refugees' stories, though challenging, created the impetus for a future goal to pursue a legal degree and help people globally.

Figure 4.9

Participant photo #9: Food distributed to the local community by Akram's not-for-profit organisation



In summary, most participants derived work meanings according to salient identity constructs. Anchors were revealed to be the primary influencers of work meaning. Throughout the migration journey, work was performed for family, the benefit of others, or to play their part in a larger community, linking participants' identities with their work roles. Furthermore,

refugeehood as an identity construct also provided meanings of work in the working for community, working for family, and survival concepts. Work engaged the participants' emotions and influenced their outlook in life. Having achieved financial security through a stable job, *material gain* was not a primary source of meaning for those who worked for their family's benefit as well as for community. Most participants did not link the work they did to what is commonly seen as a career or profession. Meanings of work evolved throughout their migration journeys. Some meanings became more pronounced in resettlement, such as being oneself and to be more, while the other four work meaning dimensions retained core elements while also taking on evolved meanings. Meanings of work evolved according to divergent displacement and resettlement contexts and the needs of self, family, and communities in these contexts.

4.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented findings from refugee participants in five main sections. The first section explored the three phases of the migration journey found in this study. This analysis demonstrates the complex, non-linear nature of the migration journey encompassing coming into being, displacement, and resettlement phases. The identity-formation process involves negotiating three primary constructs – identity anchors (interconnectedness, language, morality, relationships, sociocultural heritage, and spirituality), refugeehood, and place, which were analysed in the second section. The findings reveal how identity anchors formed during the coming into being phase persist as stabilising elements throughout migration, even as community constituents in the three groups change across different phases. Refugeehood and place introduce complexities and paradoxes, with refugee status simultaneously enabling protection and imposing restrictions. In the resettlement phase, many participants transition from refugee to New Zealand identities, though experiences of resettlement varied dramatically.

The three identity-formation constructs inform dynamic navigations along an insider-outsider continuum, discussed in the third section, that is context-dependent and fluid. The insider-outsider continuum illuminates how refugees negotiate complex social positions, often simultaneously holding multiple identities, depending on the context. These negotiations require significant agency, particularly when confronting outsider positions created by hegemonic social structures. Understanding these identity constructions provides critical

insights into refugees' experiences of belonging, selfhood, and work throughout their migration journeys.

The fourth section analysed how participants utilised affective, natural, personal, psychological and social resources to navigate migration journeys and finding work. Four strategies of demonstrating self-efficacy, exercising agency, finding alternative pathways, and remaining undeterred were analysed. It was revealed that refugee participants engaged in various resourcefulness tactics to navigate migration and work access challenges. These strategies were often guided by participants' identity anchors. Despite being resourceful, hegemonic structures presented themselves as inhibitors for participants, which in some cases required subjecting oneself to the power imbalances inherent in these structures.

In the fifth section, meanings of work were revealed to be influenced by participants' identity constructs. In sum, dimensions of work meanings were being oneself and to be more, working for survival, working for families, and working for communities. The nature of participants' communities evolved throughout the migration journey, influencing the evolving meanings they associated with community work. Notions of career and materialistic gain were not found to be meaningful for any participant in this study. Some participants chose to utilise their skills in community work, which does not lead to accumulation of economic capital. Additionally, work was invariably seen as an extension of oneself where participants expressed who they were or found healing. By exploring the refugee journey from the coming into being phase through displacement and resettlement, the findings reveal an intricate relationship between identity and work and the influential role played by the contexts surrounding participants. In the next chapter, I explore findings from the other two participant cohorts, the managers and mentors, and the pathways-to-work providers.

Chapter 5 Findings: Managers and mentors, and pathways-to-work providers

5.0 Chapter overview

This chapter analyses the findings from two significant participant cohorts involved in refugee-background individuals' work integration – managers and mentors (M&Ms) and pathways-to-work providers (PWPs). The chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section explores the underlying motives that drive these cohorts in their efforts to support refugee-background individuals' integration into workplace environments. The second section analyses the concept of work integration itself, exploring why participants considered it important and identifying five key dimensions that emerged from the data. Throughout, the analysis remains contextually situated within the resettlement work framework.

Work in this chapter included apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, internships, part- or full-time paid roles, and volunteering. The experiences described by managers predominantly occurred within physical workplace settings, while mentors' accounts primarily involved face-to-face or online interactions with refugee-background individuals. The eight PWPs delivered support to refugee-background clients either on an individual basis or through structured classroom or workshop formats. Within the M&Ms cohort, nine participants functioned as direct line managers of refugee-background employees, while one provided mentorship focused on securing paid work in a specific profession, and another offered entrepreneurship mentoring. PWPs refer to refugee-background individuals as 'clients', while the M&Ms cohort use the terms 'employees' or 'mentees'.

The analysis is enriched with illustrative participant quotes, with individuals being identified as Manager #1, Mentor #1, PWP #1, and so forth, with numberings reflecting interview chronology. The managerial participants had extensive experience working with refugee-background individuals, averaging just over 11 years, with the most experienced having worked in this capacity for more than 20 years. In contrast, mentors averaged approximately two years of experience. The managers represented diverse sectors – four from private enterprises, three from the resettlement sector, and one each from public service and social enterprise. Both mentors operated within the private sector – one as a volunteer mentor and the

other providing entrepreneurship mentoring through a private enterprise. Among the PWPs, two were government contractors specifically tasked with placing refugee-background clients into paid employment, while others received funding from various sources, including government. These providers supported clients towards employment for an average of just under nine months, with periods ranging from three to 12 months. PWPs in this study assisted only those refugee-background clients who had obtained legal refugee status and thus were eligible to live and work in New Zealand.

5.1 Motives

This section explores the motivations that drove M&Ms and PWPs to engage in refugee-background individuals' workplace integration. These underlying motives fundamentally shaped the work integration strategies employed by both participant cohorts.

The analysis revealed five distinct motivational categories – economic value, empathy, job or organisational requirement, moral imperative, and personal fulfilment. These were identified through careful attention to participants' explanations for their engagement in the work integration strategies, which are discussed later in this chapter. For M&Ms, an underlying commonality was that most had previously worked with refugee-background individuals in other roles, developing sensitivity to their unique challenges. Some of these prior experiences predated their current managerial or mentorship roles. Those with previous experience managing refugee-background employees often described motivations spanning both their prior and current roles. Importantly, these motivations were predominantly personal in nature, except when assisting refugee-background individuals constituted a formal role requirement (as with PWPs) or an organisational one (as with managers working in the resettlement sector). In Table 5.1, these motives are defined and exemplars from the data are provided.

In many instances, participants identified multiple motivations, such as combined economic value and moral imperative, or empathy alongside personal fulfilment. Nearly all PWPs were primarily motivated by job requirements inherent in their service provider roles. An exception was PWP #5, who conducted workshops for aspiring entrepreneurs and was motivated by personal experiences of vulnerability (empathy) like those of refugee-background clients, despite not having been a refugee herself. While she participated in an ongoing programme supporting refugee-background entrepreneurs and could have delegated workshop facilitation to team members, she found personal fulfilment in conducting these sessions herself. Personal

fulfilment was the most common reason that M&Ms and PWP's cited for helping refugee-background individuals integrate at work. For PWP's, despite it being a role requirement, it may be that over time the participants found the work personally satisfying. At least two participants noted that they wanted to help others because it was a missing aspect in their lives, which led to their work with refugee-background individuals in the first place.

Table 5.1

Motives of M&Ms and PWP's for refugee-background individuals' work integration, with data exemplars

Motive	Description	Exemplar excerpts from the data	Cohort and number relevant for
Economic value	Seeing wastage of human resources (refugee-background individuals) that could contribute to the economy and not be an economic drain through benefits if refugee-background individuals were employed	<p>“It blows my mind because, we haven’t employed anybody in my team in the last two years that hasn’t been from outside the country. You know, that’s the level of need we have for [profession], and then you have a workforce, potentially good experience, at least a seismic experience we could be utilising. So, it’s frustrating.” (Mentor #1)</p> <p>“They have stepped down from, say, a lawyer back in Afghanistan to being having to be a cleaner. I think it it’s an awful thing. I think they all suffer the depression of that. And that’s why we want to help them because it’s such a waste.” (PWP #1)</p>	Three managers, two mentors, five PWP's (10)
Empathy	Placing self in refugee-background individuals' shoes due to own experiences of migration or a family member or close friend of refugee-background	<p>“One of the reasons that I started [social enterprise] is that I moved [overseas] when I was younger, and I couldn’t speak the language, couldn’t find a job and it was like one of the darkest times of my life. I saw myself as a smart, capable person, and I couldn’t even get a job making coffee. And so that was part of the reason that I really connected with stories of people struggling to find work, when you’re walking around, you’re so desperate for an opportunity. And you see all these doors slamming in your face. I’ve been there myself, and so I really understood that.” (Manager #1)</p>	Eight managers, one mentor, two PWP's (11)

Job or organisation requirement	The role requires supporting refugee-background individuals, no personal attachment; the organisation's needs are to employ refugee-background individuals for certain roles	"The other programme is the business startup, for which we also deliver workshops. And one on one support. And as far as I know, we are the only organisation in New Zealand that delivers that type of service." (PWP #4)	Two managers, one mentor, seven PWPs (10)
Moral imperative	Helping refugee-background individuals is the right thing to do, seeing it as a humanitarian duty, or using a 'pity' perspective	"So, it's sad, but we do what we can and give them the opportunities, I see that we're supporting them to do work, and earn some extra money, even if it's just money to top up the benefit ... they'll be in low paid jobs, like factory jobs, a lot of them [have] been high powered people in their own country. So, if we can find something that they can do for themselves until they get the English language skills up, some might go on and do University once they reach a certain level and get better jobs ... they've been living in a country with all its problems, and suddenly they're out here without any planning, you know, they didn't plan to come to New Zealand, suddenly, they had to leave, they just suddenly got uprooted, straight here." (PWP #6)	Three managers, five PWPs (8)
Personal fulfilment	Working with or assisting refugee-background individuals brings a sense of fulfilment, connection with refugee-background individuals that is deeply personal, such as friendship	"Since 1998 my husband has been working at [organisation]. And there were a lot of Burmese, Cambodians, Vietnamese working there. Some of them are refugees. So, since 2000 they started inviting my husband, my family to their houses for parties, birthdays, their new year celebrations. And then we started being family friends with them. And since they know my door, they started knocking [for work]. In 2001 I started to hire Burmese and Cambodians [to organisation], they are refugees." (Manager #3)	Seven managers, six PWPs (13)

From the managerial perspective, fulfilment materialised when refugee-background employees achieved workplace success, as Manager #7 succinctly expressed: "When you succeed, it's my success." While mentors made fewer explicit references to personal fulfilment from their roles, their narratives conveyed genuine passion for supporting refugee-background mentees' workplace integration. Seven of the eight managers citing empathetic motivations had

themselves experienced migration to New Zealand or other countries, with migration experience emerging as the most significant factor influencing empathetic motivation. Their personal experiences and associated challenges directly informed their integration efforts with refugee-background individuals. One locally born manager who had not personally migrated was nevertheless closely connected to refugeehood through immediate family members. In her case, empathy stemmed from deep embeddedness in the journeys and challenges of these family members. Additionally, one mentor employed human-centred design principles in his approach, with empathy functioning as a foundational element of his mentoring programme. He emphasised that his mentoring process began with understanding the individual at the centre of complex social processes and structures, thus cultivating empathy as an integral component of the mentoring relationship.

Economic value and job or organisation requirements constituted the next most prevalent motivational categories. As previously noted, the PWP's contributed significantly to the motive of job or organisation requirement. Three managers worked in the resettlement sector, where providing services to refugee communities constituted a core organisational function. To meet community needs, these managers necessarily worked with refugee-background individuals. Additionally, one mentor was the CEO of an organisation focused on mentoring (non-refugee) entrepreneurs in Auckland, suggesting that organisational philosophy influenced his motivational framework. Supporting refugee-background individuals' employment and entrepreneurial endeavours was widely perceived as economically beneficial, with advantages articulated in terms of utilising otherwise untapped skills. Several participants expressed frustration regarding talented refugee-background individuals being unable to secure employment commensurate with their abilities and thus being prevented from contributing optimally to the economy. Another economic motivation involved reducing welfare system dependency, a discourse frequently associated with refugeehood, which will be further explored in subsequent sections.

Finally, moral motivation stemmed from perceiving support as 'the right thing to do', a view seemingly grounded in narratives of pity. The eight participants citing moral obligations typically positioned themselves as helpers to individuals struggling within New Zealand society. As demonstrated in the quote from PWP #6 in Table 5.1, participants subscribing to this motivation expressed sympathy regarding the challenging circumstances of refugee-background individuals, often perceived as originating from problematic countries. Some

nuance emerged within this category, with several participants oscillating between moral imperatives intertwined with economic considerations and finding personal fulfilment through morally aligned work. Essentially, these participants viewed morally right actions as simultaneously addressing economic concerns and providing personal satisfaction.

These diverse motivations underpinned the work integration strategies employed by both participant cohorts. The following section explores why participants considered refugee-background individual integration beneficial and examines the multifaceted nature of the integration process.

5.2 Work integration

In this section, the concept of work integration is explained. Participants' perspectives on why refugee-background individuals should be integrated in the New Zealand society through work are also explored. Several practices were articulated by both participant cohorts that were aimed at fostering work integration for refugee-background individuals. These strategies of work integration are discussed using examples from the data.

Work integration emerged as both a multistakeholder endeavour and a multifaceted process through which refugee-background individuals gain access to and establish themselves within workplace environments. Both M&Ms and PWPs emphasised that effective integration requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including themselves and the organisational structures they operated within (employment and resettlement service-providing organisations). From most participants' perspective, refugee-background individuals' role in this process primarily involved adaptation to the New Zealand workplace requirements and familiarisation with local workplace etiquette. Government policies and resettlement frameworks were additionally highlighted as significant factors restraining work integration.

Participants identified several important reasons for promoting work integration, distinct from their personal motivations discussed in the previous section. These reasons reflected participants' observations of how refugee-background individuals responded to integration challenges during their professional interactions. Some managers and PWPs noted that refugee-background individuals experienced re-traumatisation when unable to access or engage in meaningful work after resettlement. This re-traumatisation stemmed from inadequate preparation regarding post-resettlement expectations and challenges. When workplace

integration difficulties arose, refugee-background individuals reportedly experienced renewed trauma associated with the recognition that normalcy might remain permanently elusive. Furthermore, continued outsider experiences, particularly when unable to access employment opportunities, contributed to feelings of exclusion from the resettlement society.

Most PWP's observed that workplace integration difficulties perpetuated language barriers, confining refugee-background clients to employment within their own communities or isolated work roles. Limited English proficiency also restricted self-sufficiency in daily activities, necessitating interpreter support for essential interactions such as medical appointments. Several participants noted negative impacts on self-esteem, particularly for individuals who had previously been family breadwinners but now could not adequately fulfil this role in resettlement. Continued workplace non-integration also reportedly exacerbated psychological issues. PWP #1 illustrated this with a particularly challenging case:

[There is] one chap up who is a doctor and has been driving buses forever. And he was just so frustrated. In the end, he got quite aggressive. And it was hard to work with him because he was getting so aggressive. That's how frustrated he was ... the more frustrated you get, the harder it gets to get a job because it comes out in interviews, and you don't present yourself the best way.

Conversely, managers described positive outcomes when refugee-background employees successfully integrated, rebuilding their lives and working diligently to secure better futures for their children. In these instances, employment provided refugee-background individuals with a sense of settlement within New Zealand society. Some managers such as Manager #7 and Manager #8 observed that well-integrated refugee-background employees eventually established their own businesses or advanced to senior roles in other organisations – an insight further explored in sub-section 5.2.4 below. Additionally, some managers perceived that successful workplace integration progressively influenced broader societal perceptions of refugee-background individuals. Manager #8, with 15 years of experience working with refugee-background individuals in New Zealand, described this as “an evolution of thought about former refugees in the workplace”. While acknowledging improvements in workplace engagement, these managers emphasised the need for continued progress in this area.

The analysis identified five key dimensions of work integration that illuminate how greater progress could be achieved – access to work, capabilities development, changing narratives, finding meaning in work, and social and cultural integration facilitation. Each dimension encompasses specific strategies and mechanisms employed by M&Ms and PWPs to support refugee-background individuals' integration into workplace environments, and they are described individually below.

5.2.1 Access to work

The first dimension of work integration centres on facilitating entry into suitable employment. As Manager #2 articulated:

I think it's both sides. Employers need education, but at the same time, refugees need to be better prepared [by those resettling them]. So, if both sides are better prepared, then they're better matched as well. I think there will always be barriers, but how much can we reduce them and stop the re-traumatisation from happening?

This perspective reflects a consistent theme among both M&Ms and PWPs – successful work integration requires a multistakeholder engagement. Access to work involves helping refugee-background individuals find work aligned with their skills while overcoming obstacles including language barriers, credential recognition issues, and discrimination. Failure to secure meaningful and sustainable work can re-traumatise refugee-background individuals and perpetuate limiting narratives. Two primary strategies emerged – reducing controllable barriers and providing individualised attention.

5.2.1.1 Reducing controllable barriers

Some managers challenged presumptions about Western qualifications during recruitment. Manager #6 exemplified this approach:

I was born here ... it doesn't really matter; I'm just another person. It drives me insane that we're arrogant enough to think Kiwi qualifications are superior ... quite frankly, they're not superior. And why is the Western way necessarily the best way?

Mentors, meanwhile, focused on helping refugee-background mentees navigate legal requirements including business regulations, employment contracts, and qualification assessments, because they deemed these were necessary steps.

Several managers implemented more flexible assessment criteria, prioritising attitude and eagerness over specific skills, or emphasising practical capabilities over English fluency in contexts where work was predominantly manual. Language barriers were addressed through non-verbal communication, native-language instructions, and gradual English-language introduction through daily conversations.

PWPs positioned refugee-background clients as valuable human capital to potential employers, emphasising their legal right to live and work in New Zealand and portraying them as potentially superior employees compared to local candidates. PWP #1, who supports clients including engineers and doctors, illustrated this approach:

So perhaps they in some ways have more drive than your average Kiwi, more desire. And that's something we translate when we're talking to employers that this is such a wonderful attribute to have, as an employee, someone who's determined to work so hard, to do well, and won't be having days off [*laughs*] and not turning up because they've had too many drinks the night before. No, they're not going to be like that [*laughs*].

5.2.1.2 Providing individualised attention

The second mechanism operated both before and after securing employment, and involved solutions tailored to each refugee-background individual's unique circumstances. Some participants described perceiving individuals as distinct entities with specific needs and challenges. A fundamental aspect of this approach was recognising that challenges faced by refugee-background individuals rarely stemmed from a single factor but instead represented an accumulation of interrelated issues throughout their migration journeys.

Managers identified various factors, including motivations for work, task-related learning, and personal requirements like flexible scheduling or prayer facilities in the workplace. PWPs discovered that standard practices like curriculum vitae assistance had limited effectiveness without deeper understanding of clients' motivations and constraints, which could lead to more sustainable solutions. PWP #8 illustrated this through helping a former biologist find suitable work. By investing time to understand the client's preferences, this participant discovered the client's primary motivation was working within the resettlement community rather than pursuing her previous career.

While access to work represents the initial phase of the work integration process, sustainable outcomes require refugee-background individuals to thrive in and maintain employment. The development of capabilities emerged as a critical factor in achieving this sustainability.

5.2.2 Capabilities development

Both participant cohorts employed capabilities development strategies to enhance refugee-background individuals' work integration. This dimension encompasses knowledge transfer, professional development, and training provision, built upon the recognition that refugee-background individuals possess inherent abilities, attitudes and skills that can facilitate work integration when further developed. A fundamental aspect of capabilities development is the recognition of refugee-background individuals' inherent agency and power of choice. Agency emerged prominently in the M&Ms data through two elements of autonomy (demonstrated through choice) and adaptability in diverse circumstances. Despite exercising agency and redefining themselves as residents, refugee-background individuals inevitably exist within a society where prevailing discourses position them as others.

The study revealed that balancing power dynamics was a nuanced and delicate process for these cohorts. When participants successfully reduced perceived power differentials between themselves and their employees/mentees/clients, and intentionally created opportunities for mutual empowerment, these efforts fostered an environment where genuine capacity-building could flourish. As one business mentor described it, he was "taking them on a journey", equipping refugee-background individuals with skills to identify their own solutions and make independent decisions. Thus, capabilities development extended beyond formal qualifications and work experience to encompass broader aspects of agency and empowerment. While PWP's acknowledged their limited influence on policy and potential employers, they nevertheless described efforts to build refugee-background clients' capabilities despite these structural constraints. This delicate balance between providing support and fostering independence represents a key challenge in capabilities development. M&Ms and PWP's employed four interdependent mechanisms, discussed next, aimed at reducing perceived dependence on both resettlement society and welfare systems.

5.2.2.1 *Creating a sense of achievement*

M&Ms facilitated capability development by creating opportunities for refugee-background individuals to experience success, highlighting that many already possessed the necessary skills

but struggled to recognise or mobilise them. Mentors focused on enabling long-term autonomy within brief timeframes. Manager #1 described the impact:

And then being in a space where you're really challenged, but there's really clear goals, achievement is really concrete. And just being able to show yourself that you can work in this completely new environment, in a different language, acquire these skills, and then be recognised by your colleagues ... makes people feel like they can do anything ... [They are] more likely to seek out other opportunities, because they believe that they're worthwhile ... because they've done something really hard ... and they've succeeded.

PWPs similarly strove to empower clients, viewing their roles primarily as guides. However, their empowerment techniques were inevitably shaped by both the type and duration of support provided. Despite best intentions, some PWPs inadvertently fostered dependencies. For example, PWP #4's team conducted native-language workshops on business set-up, but the subsequent individualised support involved handling English communications with authorities on their clients' behalf. This approach reveals the tension between securing immediate outcomes and fostering long-term independence. These behaviours of the PWPs typically resulted from barriers clients could not independently overcome or, in some instances, from PWPs prioritising problem-solving on behalf of their clients over empowering them to learn how to problem-solve for themselves.

5.2.2.2 Providing reassurance

This second mechanism in capabilities development entails facilitating situations where refugee-background individuals could demonstrate their abilities, and offering appropriate reassurance proved influential in building capabilities. Most participants recognised refugee-background individuals' capacity to navigate barriers, though not all barriers were manageable. The data revealed instances where refugee-background individuals successfully overcame language challenges to achieve desired outcomes and managed new responsibilities, such as becoming first-time managers. Similarly, mentors observed refugee-background mentees overcoming challenges through creativity and agency, reaching out to mentors primarily for reassurance rather than solutions. Being visibly present during employees' first attempts at new tasks or reminding refugee-background individuals of their progress throughout their migration journeys proved effective in providing reassurance. Critical to this mechanism was acknowledging refugee-background individuals' inherent abilities while limiting support to

subtle demonstrations of encouragement. PWP #8 illustrated this approach by describing accompanying a client to a job interview without speaking on their behalf, allowing the client to succeed through their own motivation and body language despite language limitations, noting: “This was the first time I heard an employer say, ‘When would you like to start?’!”

5.2.2.3 Rebuilding confidence

Rebuilding confidence, the third mechanism, was measured through achievement. Conceptually, this mechanism extended beyond mere empowerment to encompass continuous encouragement across various endeavours. Unlike specific goal-setting, this encouragement often materialised through a phased approach. As Manager #5 explained: “And then after that, where they see themselves become a little more confident, and I say to them, you’re already done this, why don’t you try that.” This mechanism aimed to assist with broader resettlement challenges, extending beyond work integration to encompass developing refugee-background individuals’ self-efficacy in navigating all aspects of their resettlement journey.

Rebuilding confidence through encouragement was particularly important for refugee-background individuals who, influenced by prevalent pejorative discourses and structural barriers, began to believe they could not find suitable work in New Zealand, lacked appropriate qualifications and would remain workplace outsiders. Additionally, some refugee-background individuals believed they could not work again because of being out of the workforce for protracted periods. These internalisations frequently led to self-doubt. While persistent structural barriers may contribute to the reality of inaccessibility to desired work, M&Ms attempted to address this challenge by fostering self-belief and encouraging perseverance. Mentor #1, who mentors highly qualified professionals, described this approach:

[Refugee-background individuals experience] a kind of acceptance that [their] degree isn’t recognised here ... ‘I won’t be able to work here’ ... It’s not a reason at all ... the first step is usually enforcing the belief that you’re a professional. You’ve got five to 10 years [of experience], we have a skills shortlist, you will be able to find work. You just need to work on the soft skills ... And it will come.

PWPs acknowledged the limitations of skills recognition practices, observing that some qualifications and skills did not easily translate into the New Zealand context. Nonetheless,

skills affirmation was deemed essential for instilling self-belief alongside practical task-specific learning. As PWP #5 stated:

I don't think in 12 weeks' time, everybody's going to start the business. But I can assure you that all of them are confident and believe in themselves. They may not do it today, they may say, 'I have to ... get this certificate first.' Or, 'I have to learn driving first.' At least they've identified the next step ... They may do it in three or six months, or they may not. But at least they know what [they're] good at. They're confident in themselves.

5.2.2.4 Facilitating socialisation

The final mechanism involved facilitating socialisation into the New Zealand work culture, serving as a crucial precursor to enabling long-term employment tenure and preventing workplace problems. Mentors built socialisation capabilities through coaching and mentoring, while PWPs engaged in interview coaching, workplace self-presentation guidance, and clarification of New Zealand workplace expectations. Without proper socialisation, according to participants, employees and mentees risked failure, despite having job competence. Manager #2 noted that employers often fail to recognise that refugee-background individuals typically know how to perform the job, just not within a New Zealand context. Similarly, Mentor #2 observed:

Most of my time is spent on [helping] them understand the landscape of New Zealand, how business is done ... So, the skill set of doing the job is probably one of the least important things that we have to worry about. It's everything else that's wrapped around, because New Zealand, as we know, has high regulations on everything ... And that is something they struggle to comprehend and appreciate. Or, or it could be one of the things that they get overwhelmed with.

Building capabilities for refugee-background individuals' work integration thus involves interconnected strategies that were employed by both M&Ms and PWPs. These approaches work in concert to empower refugee-background individuals while acknowledging their agency and addressing structural barriers. The interplay between capabilities development and changing the narratives, discussed next, creates a compelling framework for sustainable integration into the workforce.

5.2.3 Changing the narratives

The strategy of changing narratives was employed by both participant cohorts with dual objectives – to facilitate refugee-background individuals’ workplace integration and influence their identity constructions. The relationship between work integration and identity emerged as a significant insight within this strategy. Fundamentally, this approach involved enabling refugee-background individuals to develop or prioritise identities beyond refugeehood. Participants from both cohorts suggested that while refugeehood constituted integral components of refugee-background individuals’ journeys, it often constrained their employment prospects. Additionally, changing the narratives involved discarding victimhood associations with refugeehood and recognising the individual behind the label.

The fundamental objective of changing narratives is to enable refugee-background individuals to develop identities beyond the constraints of refugeehood. Mentor #2 articulated this critical insight through the example of a mentee who had lived in New Zealand for 16 years yet remained limited by their internalised refugee identity:

So even though she’s been here since she was 16 that stigma is still sticking to her. Like, am I worthy enough? How do I break through this market? How would I be perceived? I don’t look like everyone else. So those are the mental blocks we have to work through ... And what happens is because of that, she just focuses on her community. Because these are the people that I know, these are the people that accept me, I’m only going to sell to this small group of people.

This example illustrates how refugeehood narratives can become deeply internalised by refugee-background individuals, constraining business growth, skills development, and broader integration into New Zealand society.

Table 5.2 presents a comprehensive analysis of the narratives surrounding refugee-background individuals at work, illustrating the tension between how M&Ms and PWPs perceive refugee-background individuals, how they believe refugee-background individuals perceive themselves, and how the broader society view this population. Refugee-background individuals were recognised as highly skilled and talented by the M&Ms and PWPs who worked closely with them. At the same time, those M&Ms and PWPs were aware of refugees being systemically undervalued in the broader labour market. This disconnect is amplified by

Table 5.2

Prevalent narratives of refugees at work as articulated by M&Ms and PWPs

Narrative themes	Definition	M&Ms' perspectives	PWPs' perspectives	Perceived perspectives of refugees	Perceived society/(potential) employers' perspectives
Challenges at work	Specific difficulties encountered in employment pathways and work integration processes	"It's not all rosy. Every now and again, there are really challenging situations. Because people are complex, people are different, regardless of what group you're working with." (Manager #1)	"Lack of understanding of the local workplace practices and business environment creates challenges and problems." (PWP #4)	"Some adopt victimhood narrative while others resist it which creates problems and tensions at work." (Manager #6)	"Some employers use language barriers to justify relatively lower wage rate or non-permanent contracts and don't want to invest in language training for employees." (PWP #3)
Motivation and agency	Perceptions of refugees' initiative, self-determination, and capacity to act independently	"Some of these people that I work with have got brilliant skills, brilliant talent, and they're motivated, and they have the grit and the attitude." (Mentor #2)	There were mixed views from PWP participants. Some saw refugees as hardworking, independent people; others saw a lack of motivation to network, and get a job.	"[Client's] motivation for working was very contagious." (PWP #8)	"Potential employers of refugees see them as motivated, hardworking, willing to learn, or not interested in work." (PWP #2)
Refugee identity at work	How refugeehood is navigated and disclosed at work	"Seen and treated as a human and as any other employee; disclosure not required." (Manager #8)	"Disclosed refugee identity both a barrier and a strength for clients at work." (PWP #1)	"Refugees gradually reveal their stories and the past." (Manager #5)	"Refugees are stereotyped as poor, vulnerable people by society." (Manager #2)
Skills and capabilities	Recognition of skills and capabilities of refugees arising from working with refugees (not recognition from qualifications' vetting organisations)	"Highly skilled workforce that remains underutilised in New Zealand. I focus on their skills and attitudes, and they possess transferrable skills to many jobs." (Manager #9)	"Capable, talented, highly creative people." (PWP #5)	"Refugees doubt, a lot of doubt, usually a sense of defeat, frustration, and acceptance that [their] degree won't be recognised here, they won't be allowed to work." (Mentor #1)	"Refugees are viewed as unskilled labour." (PWP #7)

Narrative themes	Definition	M&Ms' perspectives	PWPs' perspectives	Perceived perspectives of refugees	Perceived society/(potential) employers' perspectives
System barriers	Structural and institutional obstacles that impede refugees' employment	"Employers are willing ... but the problem is the government system ... they set up obstacles for [refugees] to be a victim." (Manager #7)	"Dependent on benefits." (PWP #4)	"Entrepreneurship regulatory requirements too difficult for refugees." (Mentor #2)	"Welfare system keeping refugees dependent on the system, limiting their potential." (PWP #6)
Value and contribution at work	Perceptions of what refugees bring to workplaces beyond skills	"I'm actually the fortunate one ... By bringing different cultures, I'm really fortunate, I have people from three different continents in my team, so, that, brings so much richness in terms of internal conversations." (Manager #2)	"Recognise potential but see it as constrained due to workplace barriers such as perceived discrimination." (PWP #2)	"All our refugee employees are working hard to make a new life." (Manager #4)	"Potential employers see refugees as an opportunity for cheap labour." (PWP #6)

structural barriers, particularly the welfare system, which is portrayed paradoxically as both essential support and a mechanism that fosters dependency. Some PWPs emphasised some of their clients' reliance on welfare systems and limited motivation to seek long-term employment. Various factors were identified by these PWPs, including ongoing trauma, health issues, and welfare system structures that fail to incentivise independence. These findings must be contextualised to PWPs' perceptions of their refugee-background clients specifically seeking employment assistance, implying some work motivation. Language emerged as a critical barrier that ostensibly justified marginalisation regardless of actual capabilities at work from the PWPs' perspectives.

The refugee identity was a contested terrain, with refugees striving to maintain a sense of self that was not primarily defined by refugeehood. New Zealand society, meanwhile, was perceived to impose diminished identities on them. Refugees were seen as being poor, victims, and vulnerable individuals lacking resilience, qualifications, and relevant experience. Most M&M participants viewed refugee-background employees no differently than any other employee, noting that challenges encountered were not specific to refugeehood but represented general employment issues. Some managers worked with refugee-background employees without prior knowledge of their journeys and were respectful of their employees' decision to disclose their past or keep it to themselves. Mentors worked with refugee-background mentees because of disclosed refugeehood. The findings also reveal prevalent host society perceptions associated with refugeehood and some PWPs' tendencies to align with these discourses. Throughout these perspectives runs a consistent thread where refugees' actual capabilities remain obscured behind competing narratives about their agency, identity, place and value in the context of work in New Zealand. Thus, both participant cohorts attempted to create new narratives or counter existing ones through three mechanisms – creating an identity beyond refugeehood, discarding victimhood, and seeing the person behind the label, which are discussed individually below.

5.2.3.1 Creating an identity beyond refugeehood

Managers became aware of glass ceilings affecting progression and remuneration. Their efforts aimed to help employees, and sometimes themselves, discover previously unacknowledged talents and skills to break through these limitations. This mechanism focused on recognising and developing additional skills alongside acknowledging those gained through their refugee experiences. Manager #8 described this realisation:

It's a blessing and a curse, right? So, you've been employed in the NGO [non-governmental organisation] sector, valued for your social capital ... I recognised that was a barrier ... because they then saw their value as just their life experience ... Actually, you're so much more than that, right? You're still growing ... your refugee journey was in the past ... and you don't want to be a former refugee forever ... You know, this is an identity about growing forward.

PWPs tried to contribute to societal discourses pertaining to refugeehood by countering potential employers' prejudices regarding refugee-background individuals as cheap or unskilled labour. PWP #6 described intervening to prevent exploitation:

We get people asking for quotes to do things, but a lot of them are expecting, because they're refugees, they won't cost anything. And that's like, nah, that's not okay, we want our people to earn what everybody else earns ... We don't want them just earning ... \$10 an hour sort of thing, just because they're refugees ... Some people have that expectation that they'll [former refugees] be really, really cheap, because they come from these countries, and they need money.

5.2.3.2 Discarding victimhood

The second mechanism involved discarding associations of victimhood with refugeehood. Managers addressed situations where employees expected preferential treatment due to their refugee status, such as assuming contract renewal or requesting cash payments for overtime. Managers countered these isolated incidents by emphasising legal requirements and workplace policies, recognising that such expectations often stemmed from unfamiliarity with New Zealand's employment laws. Another approach to discarding victimhood involved addressing perceived welfare system dependence, a concern primarily raised by PWPs. Some participants observed that the welfare system's structure inadvertently created prolonged dependence, as benefit reductions being tied to employment income discouraged refugee-background individuals from pursuing full economic participation. Rather than providing transitional support during the path to self-sufficiency, the system's design sometimes perpetuated welfare reliance. Echoing concerns shared by other participants, PWP #5, who supported aspiring entrepreneurs, noted: "They are really capable ... really talented. I know few of them are doing contract jobs. But they keep telling me, 'If I do this, my benefit will be reduced.' The government is trying to make them dependent." Work integration fails when refugee-background individuals remain dependent on welfare. While PWPs could not change national welfare policies, they encouraged clients to pursue work.

5.2.3.3 Seeing the person behind the label

The final mechanism involved seeing the person behind the label as a human being, an employee or mentee. This approach required M&Ms to remain unbiased and avoid generalisations, and to prevent past negative experiences stopping them from working with refugee-background individuals. PWPs created opportunities for clients and potential employers to meet, such as networking events or career fairs. Work placements provided another avenue for such connections, with some of PWP #2's placement clients securing permanent positions or leveraging employer references. Some participants provided cultural advice to potential employers while PWP #8 noted that some employers refused direct interaction with refugee-background applicants, requiring service providers to serve as intermediaries. From PWPs' perspective, work placements effectively changed employer perceptions of refugee-background individuals.

These findings illustrate how narrative changes can lead to practical work integration outcomes instead of reinforcing limiting identities. With the dual objectives of work integration and identity influence, changing the narratives represented a critical strategy for participants. They acknowledged that isolated efforts at their level could achieved only limited impact, emphasising the need for broader societal perception changes to create meaningful transformation.

5.2.4 Finding the meaning in work

The fourth dimension of work integration focuses on how meaningful work contributes significantly to refugee-background individuals' sense of identity, dignity, purpose, and psychological wellbeing in the resettlement context, revealing the connection between work integration and identity construction. This section analyses how M&Ms and PWPs perceived refugee-background individuals' engagement with their integrated work roles, their agency, and resourcefulness. Two mechanisms emerged from the analysis – the 'stepping stone' and choosing what is meaningful work.

5.2.4.1 The stepping stone

Within capabilities development, the concept of reinventing oneself through capability-building emerged as significant. PWP #8 helped clients recognise resettlement as an opportunity for reinvention:

I think it's also very important to our clients to realise that maybe they couldn't be what they would like to be [in their COO]. It's not a pressure here that you have to follow the career that you study in your home country, no, you can reinvent yourself. Follow your dreams.

Similarly, other providers assisted clients in pursuing work they desired pre-resettlement or had discovered during resettlement. Transitioning emerged as a method of reinvention, describing how refugee-background individuals accepted any work opportunity, re-learned workplace practices and/or new skills, and moved into roles that represented a natural progression from these learnings. Through transition work, refugee-background individuals redefined work's meaning for themselves. One manager termed such work a 'stepping stone', suggesting some refugee-background individuals undertook transitional roles in preparation for more-desired future positions.

This stepping-stone concept reveals how reinvention occurs through deliberate transitional work. The metaphor embedded in the concept – stepping stones help someone cross a river by providing safe points to step on – illustrates how refugee-background individuals look backwards to where they have come from and forwards to where they are going. The stepping-stone work provides a temporal connection, linking past work experiences with possibilities for future work aspirations while incorporating present learning and skill development.

This temporal connection creates what I term 'provisional meaning' – a temporary but purposeful significance that sustains refugee-background individuals during work transitions. This provisional meaning differs from permanent work satisfaction because it explicitly anticipates change and growth (by looking forwards to where one is going). Rather than seeking fulfilment in the current work role itself, refugee-background individuals derive meaning from how their present work prepares them for future opportunities. Through this process, stepping-stone work becomes the means through which self-reinvention occurs, transforming both how refugee-background individuals see themselves and how they understand work's purpose in their lives.

Some managers identified resettlement sector work as the stepping stones for refugee-background individuals, though private enterprise roles served this function as well. Managers encountered situations where employees needed work experience to advance to positions in different organisations. Stepping-stone work was facilitated by M&Ms' awareness of the skills,

abilities and goals of their employees or mentees, and their own willingness to provide opportunities, even if employees might eventually leave to work in another organisation. From PWP's perspective, understanding individual needs enabled stepping-stone work. These providers assisted clients in pursuing alternative paths related to previous roles. Clients demonstrated the willingness to learn, ask questions, follow instructions, maintain self-motivation, and be punctual. Participants acknowledged there were insurmountable obstacles to reclaiming certain careers, particularly in highly skilled professions like medicine and surgery. Nevertheless, stepping-stone work provided work meaning and a pathway to constructing new identities.

M&Ms and PWPs facilitated stepping-stone work through three complementary mechanisms – giving opportunities, identifying talent for growth, and repurposing work. The first mechanism involved managers recruiting refugee-background employees based primarily on their willingness to learn, while acknowledging skills gained through refugee experiences. Manager #7 exemplified this approach:

I had one employee who wanted to work in the youth area. I said, let me find a way how I [can] fit her in the organisation. I brought her as a youth development coordinator, and then she worked with us for two years and a half ... [I] engaged her in my network because from my point of view – for someone who has that kind of qualification, why she doesn't have the opportunity I have?

This approach demonstrates how managers created entry points that could serve as foundations for career progression.

The second mechanism involved identifying talent for growth, where managers recognised specific skills that facilitated career advancement, sometimes providing development programmes despite risking employee departure. This strategy acknowledged refugee-background individuals' untapped potential while creating pathways towards more fulfilling roles. However, not all employees accepted these opportunities, with some prioritising job stability over career advancement, demonstrating agency in determining their career paths. This selective engagement with growth opportunities reveals how refugee-background individuals actively negotiate their relationship with stepping-stone work, rather than passively accepting any advancement opportunity.

The third mechanism, repurposing work, involved providing opportunities in different roles from previous positions, allowing refugee-background individuals to apply existing skills in new contexts. Managers helped employees learn workplace expectations in real settings, worked alongside them, provided oversight, and assigned responsibilities that served as stepping stones. Some repurposed work enabled refugee-background individuals to reclaim former professions after gaining confidence and local experience. In other instances, repurposed work applied previous skills in new contexts, expanding refugee-background individuals' self-efficacy. Manager #9 illustrated this approach by recruiting a lawyer (who had not practised for years) as a project manager, who eventually returned to legal practice after rebuilding their professional confidence. Similarly, PWP #2 highlighted successful repurposing of agricultural skills:

And we have had a couple sent there [name of workplace] for work placement as gardeners ... So they did all sorts of jobs, looking after the plants plot, planting, repotting, talking to customers, and stayed there as full-time gardeners, and they have both farming experiences from their home country.

Through these three mechanisms, the stepping-stone concept materialised as a temporal connection between the past and the future, adding provisional meaning to current work roles. It involves finding meaning in present circumstances and results from the support of M&Ms and PWPs. This concept reveals the intricate relationship between the meaning of work and work integration. The findings also revealed participants' perceptions of what refugee-background individuals chose as meaningful work.

5.2.4.2 Choosing what is meaningful work

Most PWP participants observed that refugee-background clients often made choices about what work was meaningful before engaging in specific roles, a finding limited to these participants only. Several patterns emerged, which are noted in Table 5.3, with illustrative quotes.

The examples and quotes in Table 5.3 show that choices precede work pursuit. Additionally, they reveal that some PWPs perceived that refugee-background clients derived meanings first and foremost from the emotional rewards provided by the people in their work environments,

Table 5.3

PWPs' perceptions of what refugee-background clients chose as meaningful work

Patterns	Description	Illustrative quotes
Working for family needs	Most PWPs noted that refugee-background individuals worked primarily to support their families. Some worked part-time alongside studies, while others left paid work to care for family members. Some PWPs highlighted that working for family needs among their clients extended beyond earning income. Remaining in the resettlement country for family wellbeing constituted a form of working for family while paid employment enabled living arrangements.	“But [client’s] a little bit flat, a little bit depressed, because he’ll never reach that [professional status] again. He’s older as well. So, he’s now looking at self-employment ... he’s now thinking it’ll be his kids that will benefit. He’d love to go back to [his COO], but he won’t, because he’s staying here for his kids, he doesn’t want them to live in that sort of environment.” (PWP #6)
Community-focused work	Some participants observed that refugee-background individuals chose to work within their own communities. PWP #8 described a client who was a biologist but opted for community-focused work. The client’s journey through a refugee camp to resettlement motivated this community-oriented career choice. While PWP #8 did not fully understand why persecution and in-camp suffering led to this career change, PWP6, speaking about observations of her clients, suggested potential healing that refugee-background individuals may derive from such work.	“It’s not just about the [classes], it’s that social contact, and helping each other. They work together ... support each other. The women really seem to bond very closely ... I guess the post-traumatic stress of what’s happened, they’re still in stress ... Sometimes they say to me to this is the only time [when at work] I don’t think about my problems.” (PWP #6)
Self-employment aspirations	Some PWPs noted that refugee-background individuals often desired self-employment, regardless of mainstream employment accessibility. PWP #5 described a woman entrepreneur who pursued self-employment despite having paid employment. Beyond entrepreneurship, PWPs noted that refugee-background individuals sought enjoyable work. PWP #2 placed a client in a role where they performed well, but the employer determined the work was not enjoyable for the client. Eventually, the client moved to a more personally fulfilling position. PWPs’ experiences reveal that refugee-background individuals apply available skills to more personally meaningful endeavours.	“The drives [for entrepreneurship] are different, some have to support family, some don’t have a job, some, some have skills, <i>most of them</i> [emphasis added] have something that they want to do. Or like a side hustle.” (PWP #5)

which tend to be other refugee-background individuals. However, four PWP participants articulated concerns that working exclusively within one’s community hindered integration

with locals. PWP #3 stated that community-focused work, such as halal meat processing, limited clients' English proficiency and self-sufficiency. Similarly, PWP #4, who was supporting refugee entrepreneurs, highlighted that business concepts often focused narrowly on serving one's own community, such as ethnic restaurants or imported clothing. Failure to incorporate local customers' needs contributed to business failures. Activation of community identity aspects may motivate community-focused work, but, as some participants noted, such work can impede integration with the broader local community.

This section demonstrates that refugee-background individuals often construct meanings of work before they actually take up and perform specific work roles. Meanings guided role choices, even when PWPs as advisors disagreed with their clients' decisions. It highlights PWPs' perceptions of refugee-background clients' agency in managing work choices and deriving meaning from them. It also emphasises their agency in making meaning-guided choices. Thus, work integration influenced the meanings refugee-background individuals assign to their work roles. The workplace as a site of social and cultural integration emerged as the final dimension of work integration.

5.2.5 Social and cultural integration facilitation

Specific to workplace settings, the social and cultural integration strategy involved utilising the workplace as a crucial site for broader integration between refugee-background individuals and two distinct groups – local New Zealanders and other migrant employee groups. Managers focused on creating environments where refugee-background individuals could build relationships with these groups and mutual cultural learning could occur.

5.2.5.1 *Building relationships*

To enable workplace relationship-building, managers emphasised creating comfortable work environments where employees could be authentic, feel safe, and communicate openly with managers. This involved maintaining open dialogue, remaining approachable, and providing support. Some managers proactively assisted employees with work-related problems while ensuring they felt heard and valued. Manager #5 created an environment where she “opened her arms to everyone who walked into her team”, helping them progress, succeed, and “feel more comfortable being here”. Despite language barriers in some cases, managers facilitated open dialogue and relationship-building. Relationships were also strengthened by providing support beyond workplace boundaries. These practices built trust with refugee-background

individuals. Some managers described participating in social events and family gatherings or assisting with personal challenges. While some managers maintained strictly professional relationships, others developed combined professional and personal connections. At least three managers considered refugee-background employees as friends, providing support during workplace struggles even when such support transgressed senior management norms. Manager #4 explained: “We’re not allowed to work on the lines. But I can’t do that, I can’t just stand back and watch. I help them ... in any way possible.”

5.2.5.2 Mutual cultural learning

Cultural understanding emerged as another significant factor in fostering social and cultural integration. Managers and mentors sought to learn about refugee-background individuals’ diverse cultures, practices, religions, and associated behaviours. Some managers prioritised cultural awareness programmes, while others emphasised, beyond learning about diverse cultures, responding to individual needs. This approach transcended diversity efforts to include addressing specific individual needs within the workplace. Participants highlighted the importance of recognising the uniqueness of each journey. Furthermore, they acknowledged that refugee-background individuals possess varying skills and talents while having differing needs and representing diverse cultures. Understanding refugee-background individuals as heterogeneous individuals enabled M&Ms to encourage employee individuality. Creating accommodations suited to employees/mentees facilitated inclusion in both workplace and mentoring contexts. Manager #2 explained:

Cultural awareness isn’t about becoming an expert in all cultures, no one will ever be that. It’s about seeing the person that’s in front of you. Because for me, the risk also is if you want to be culturally appropriate, then you generalise people from a specific culture ... So, it’s about getting to know your staff member.

Standard organisational policies and processes, including performance improvement or socialisation, often proved ineffective without careful attention to refugee-background individuals’ diverse backgrounds. Managers with five or more years of experience working with refugee-background individuals demonstrated greater sensitivity to this phenomenon compared to the less experienced ones. The latter group realised retrospectively after process failures that individual cultural attention was important. This finding further illuminated the role of relationships and open dialogue with refugee-background individuals in influencing

inclusion practices. For illustration, Manager #3 noted learning over time how to train people from different nationalities and cultures using individualised approaches:

I have a good experience myself to learn different culture, different nationality. Definitely know, like, I can train this person. But in different ways. Like, I'm sorry to say this, if they are Burmese, so like I'm thinking first, which way is easier for me to show them and to give them the instructions ... and for Cambodians I have different approaches.

Conversely, one mentor realised, after a mentee underwent an improvement plan, that similar issues affected multiple individuals from the same culture in his workplace. This realisation highlighted (the individuals') differing cultural understandings and expectations that were misinterpreted by the workplace actors as behavioural problems. The underlying issue was insufficient clarity regarding role performance expectations. The mentor indicated this area was under exploration in his workplace to better incorporate cultural understandings into workplace practices. While PWP participants acknowledged refugee-background individual heterogeneity, no findings demonstrated specific behaviours integrating cultural and religious needs into work pathway initiatives.

Social and cultural integration in the workplace was perceived as initiating broader integration of refugee-background individuals into New Zealand society, while simultaneously enabling local and other migrant employee groups to learn about refugee-background individuals' diversity. Additionally, social and cultural integration complemented capabilities building, with refugee-background individuals becoming aware of New Zealand cultural differences. A key insight revealed was that some managers recognised the potential ineffectiveness of generic employment practices when working with refugee-background individuals. This recognition of individual cultural needs within standardised workplace structures demonstrates how social and cultural integration serves as both an outcome of successful work integration and a foundation for broader identity reconstruction in resettlement.

5.3 Chapter conclusion

M&Ms and PWPs engaged in work integration practices for refugee-background individuals to foster belonging, generate psychological benefits, support life rebuilding, and improve societal perceptions. Their efforts were driven by economic value, empathy, job requirements, moral imperatives, and personal fulfilment.

Five dimensions of work integration emerged from the analysis. First, reducing controllable barriers and providing individualised attention facilitated work access opportunities. Second, capabilities building involved balancing power and agency to create a sense of achievement, offer reassurance, rebuild confidence, and socialise refugee-background individuals into the New Zealand work culture. Third, changing the narratives countered pejorative discourses negatively impacting refugee-background individuals' identities while promoting work integration. Mechanisms included creating an identity beyond refugeehood, discarding victimhood associations, and recognising the individual behind the label. Fourth, enabling meaningful work through the stepping-stone concept was found to facilitate self-reinvention and help refugee-background individuals find meaning in their roles. Crucially, meanings associated with work were found to precede work pursuit. Finally, social and cultural integration facilitation involved relationship-building and understanding individual cultural needs in the workplace, potentially influencing non-supportive and generic workplace practices.

The next chapter synthesises findings from both this chapter and Chapter 4. It presents a theory and corresponding model on how refugees construct identities and meanings of work, and how work integration influences these constructions. The proposed theory and model are discussed in relation to existing scholarship.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.0 Chapter overview

This research explores the research question – *How are refugees' identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?* The answer to this question is that refugees' identities are constructed through the interplay of three constructs of anchors, refugeehood and place identity within the context of the migration journey, through the insider-outsider continuum as an identity navigation site. The continuum allows refugees to hold simultaneous identity positions at any one time, positions that can change as the journey unfolds. This identity construction process influences how meanings of work are constructed, leading to a bidirectional relationship between meaning of work and identity across time and space.

One of the research objectives was to develop a comprehensive theory that elucidates this complex process. This chapter synthesises findings from the research while exploring the intersections between refugees' experiences and the perspectives of managers and mentors (M&Ms) and pathways-to-work providers (PWPs). The theoretical contributions are analysed through the lens of Anthias's (2002, 2008, 2009) concept of translocational positionality, incorporating insights from relevant literature on refugees' migration journeys, identity formation, and the meanings associated with work.

This discussion chapter demonstrates this theory in action by exploring two dimensions. First, I establish the theoretical foundation of the nexus between identity and the meaning of work constructions and present a corresponding conceptual model (see Figure 6.1). I also explore the dynamism and temporal complexity that enables this bidirectional relationship across past, present, and future orientations. Secondly, I analyse a relational work integration process and present a framework (see Figure 6.2) that represents the theory's practical applications in supporting refugee-background individuals' work integration. Throughout the chapter, I weave together findings from refugee participants, M&Ms and PWPs.

6.1 A grounded theory on the bidirectional identity-work meaning construction

In this section, a new theory on refugees' identity and meanings of work constructions is proposed. The theory indicates how the meaning of work influences, and is reinforced by, refugees' identity constructs. The discussion integrates my findings on identity and meaning of work constructions with relevant literature to position the proposed theory as a theoretical contribution. The migration journey, which provides the context within which the theory unfolds, is discussed first. The identity constructs of anchors, refugeehood, and place are intertwined with meanings of work findings to demonstrate the proposed bidirectional relationship. Meanings of work were found to encompass working for community, family and survival, and being oneself to be more. The insider-outsider continuum that enables the bidirectional relationship to materialise is then discussed, which leads to the penultimate sub-section presenting a conceptual model (Figure 6.1). The final sub-section highlights the temporal complexities inherent in the theory. Each sub-section progressively builds on the other to add depth to the proposed theory.

First, I articulate the theory's conceptual underpinnings. My research employed Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology to explore refugees' identity construction in the contexts of work and their migration journey. To complement this methodological approach, I drew on Sandberg and Alvesson's (2021, p. 502) typology of enacting theory, which articulates "how phenomena are continuously produced and reproduced: that is, the processes through which they emerge, evolve, reoccur, change and decline over time." Together, these perspectives enabled an exploration of both the process of theory development and the dynamic nature of the phenomenon under study – the evolving relationship between refugees' meaning of work and their identity construction throughout the migration journey.

This thesis proposes a theory on a bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work constructions throughout refugees' migration journeys, wherein identity constructs actively shape work meanings, while work meanings simultaneously influence identity formation. Existing scholarship tends to explore how work experiences influence identity (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Morrice, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018), often conflating identity with work into the work-identity construct (e.g., Dutton et al., 2010; Meister et al., 2014; Rothausen et al.,

2017; Willott & Stevenson, 2013). My findings demonstrate that identity constructs actively shape work choices and meanings, while these meanings simultaneously reinforce and reshape identity constructs, in an ongoing process where identity and meanings of work evolve and interact continuously over time. This bidirectional relationship elucidates what Sandberg and Alvesson (2021, p. 503) term “a different processual logic” by showing how identity and work meaning construction operate as mutually reinforcing processes rather than sequential influences. Their bidirectional relationship, underscored by temporal complexity, becomes clearer as this section progresses and examples from the data are used to ground the theory. By extending the conceptual boundaries of what constitutes work, my study has uncovered nuanced understandings of how identity and the meaning of work are related.

In the forward direction of this bidirectional relationship, identity constructs determine work choices and meanings. For example, Akram’s interconnectedness anchor led him to seek community-focused work in his country of origin (COO) (identity → work meaning). In the reverse direction, meaningful work experiences from such work reshape identity constructs. When Akram’s community work reinforced and deepened his sense of shared humanity, he pursued work in the community in New Zealand (work meaning → identity). This creates a continuous cycle where identity and work meaning mutually reinforce and transform each other throughout the migration journey, emphasising active construction.

The bidirectional relationship theory specifically extends existing scholarship in three key ways. First, current meaningful work literature (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010) typically positions identity as an outcome of meaningful work experiences. My theory demonstrates that identity constructs serve as precursors to work meanings, actively shaping what work is perceived to be meaningful before it is even undertaken. Second, it extends identity theories (e.g., Burke & Stets, 2023; Foucault, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) by revealing how refugees simultaneously hold multiple, paradoxical identity positions rather than resolving conflicts through middle-ground compromises. Third, it introduces the affective dimension largely missing from meaningful work scholarship, showing how emotional pathways from identity constructs create work meanings beyond cognitive assessments of job characteristics. This bidirectional relationship operates within the unique context of the migration journey, discussed next, where disruptions to social structures make identity constructs more salient as work meaning drivers, while work meanings also become important for identity formation.

6.1.1 The migration journey context

According to Charmaz (2014a, p. 232), theory in CGT evolves “from specifics and move[s] to general statements while situating them in the context of their construction”. The migration journey in this research provides the context within which the bidirectional nexus between identity and the meaning of work transpires. The migration journey was conceptualised into three distinct yet interconnected phases – coming into being, displacement, and resettlement. Notably, most of my refugee participants expressed a lack of feeling settled in New Zealand, suggesting that resettlement is not the end of the journey but rather an ongoing process.

While BenEzer and Zetter (2014) argue that pre-flight experiences instigate the migration journey, my thesis builds on this foundation to include formative years in the coming into being phase. This phase, which I define as the years from childhood to early adulthood, offers valuable insights for understanding refugees’ identities. Some participants described having led ‘normal’ settled lives in their COO before displacement. Exploring this phase also revealed assumptions about limited economic resources among refugee populations that merit reconsideration. Some participants had sufficient resources to relocate directly or fund education, supporting existing research (e.g., Chang, 2022; Fawaz et al., 2022) that highlights social class distinctions within refugee populations. The economic resources available to some refugee participants influenced their migration pathways, with those having greater financial means obtaining legal visas for transit countries, while others traversed neighbouring countries utilising humanitarian or community support.

While valuable scholarship exists on refugees’ identity constructions, there appears to be an opportunity for a holistic framework integrating identity construction across migration journeys. Although a comprehensive framework spanning the entire migration journey remains to be developed, to the best of my knowledge, some scholars (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Bergquist et al., 2019; Dagg & Hauggard, 2016; Terzioglu, 2023; Tomlison & Egan, 2002) have explored important aspects of refugees’ identities. These studies tend to focus either on displacement (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Terzioglu, 2023) or resettlement (e.g., Bergquist et al., 2019; Dagg & Hauggard, 2016; Tomlison & Egan, 2002), suggesting potential for integrated approaches as advocated by scholars like Shahimi et al. (2024). Additionally, refugees are sometimes positioned as new beings with limited attention to their lives lived before displacement (Vigil & Abidi, 2018).

Finding that structural factors strongly influenced identity and integration experiences for expatriates and refugees, Szkudlarek et al. (2021) articulated the need for theoretical frameworks that incorporate contextual influences which shape refugees' (and expatriates') experiences. The migration journey in the present study provides such context, encapsulating the physical transnational movements, the international and political regulations that govern these movements and the rights to stay, and embedded experiences in the physical movements. Thus, the three phases highlight not only the temporal characteristics of the migration journey but also the spatial.

My proposed theory is explained starting with what I term 'identity anchors', which pay attention to refugees as beings that existed prior to the emergence of refugeehood and place identity, the other two identity concepts. These constructs, discussed next with examples from the data, function as both stable reference points and dynamic influences that guide refugees' work decisions and meaning-making processes throughout their migration journeys.

6.1.2 Identity anchors as foundational elements

Building on the bidirectional relationship introduced earlier, identity anchors reveal one of the specific mechanisms through which this process operates. These anchors demonstrate how deeply embedded aspects of the self both guide work decisions and are reinforced through meaningful work engagement. My research revealed six identity anchors that serve as foundational elements of both identity and work meaning constructions across all phases of the migration journey. These anchors represent deep aspects of self-concept that transcend specific social positions and provide stability, but also evolve, throughout the migration journey. In later sub-sections, I further explore how this stable dynamism materialises.

The identity anchors concept positions identity as beyond mere sociodemographic characteristics, addressing limitations in current refugee identity scholarship. B. G. Adams (2021) noted that the literature on non-Western identity perspectives is limited. Western identity concepts dominate refugee studies (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Baranik et al., 2018; Morrice, 2011; Taghavi et al., 2024). I note that within both Western and non-Western bodies of scholarship, there is diversity. My framing of the concepts in this section, and in the rest of this thesis, does not intend to position identity and the meaning of work conceptualisations as dichotomies between the Western and non-Western. The use of non-Western terminology in this thesis acknowledges the diverse space between both ends of the spectrum.

6.1.2.1 *Interconnectedness*

Interconnectedness emerges as an identity anchor that extends beyond current conceptualisations of self-other relationships. Drawing on African *ubuntu* perspectives (Naude, 2021) and concepts of universal humanity (Yin, 2018), this anchor treats the social and the self as inevitably intertwined. Unlike symbolic interactionism's 'Me' and 'I' distinction that maintains self and other separation (e.g., Mead, 1967), interconnectedness encompasses experiences with others and the universe as integral to the self-concept. Gaillard and Hughes (2014) note that in African contexts one's humanity is affirmed through recognition of others' humanity, emphasising connectedness as central to identity construction. Almost all participants in my study, including non-Africans, held shared humanity as fundamental to their sense of self, making this anchor a powerful influence on work meanings throughout their migration journeys.

This anchor demonstrates the bidirectional identity and work meaning relationship through two manifestations. First, interconnectedness directly shaped participants' work choices towards social impact and community service. Akram exemplified this connection: "Lots of my efforts are for the human being, because human beings are the same ... A human being is a human being, we all got a red blood, we all have the same feelings." His interconnectedness anchor determined work choices in community and social impact domains across coming into being and resettlement phases, while this meaningful work reinforced his sense of shared humanity.

Second, interconnectedness guided workplace responses to discrimination through the being oneself to be more an element of the meaning of work. This materialised in two ways due to evolving meanings of interconnectedness, showing that anchors, while providing stability, can also be dynamic. Some participants became 'tempered radicals', whom Griffiths et al. (2023, p. 1159) describe as individuals who temper "their self-identity and their public identity" by staying committed to the organisation they work for as well as the cause through which they desire to bring about (social) change. My participants' subtle activism was guided by beliefs in human equality to challenge discriminatory treatment. Others pushed themselves to excel and exceed workplace expectations, driven by their interconnectedness anchor's emphasis on human equality – essentially working harder to prove their worth despite unfair treatment. While this excelling represented positive self-development akin to expressing one's full potential, as noted in Lips-Wiersma and Wright's (2012) meaningful work framework, it often

stemmed from unrealistic expectations of how refugees should behave at work, a finding supported by Ortlieb and Ressi (2022).

This complex dynamic illustrates how identity anchors provide both proactive work meaning guidance and responses to structural constraints, with these workplace efforts – either as activist or excellence-driven – further strengthening the salience of participants’ interconnectedness throughout their migration journey. Interconnectedness emphasises the shared humanity that transcends cultural boundaries. Language as an anchor, discussed next, reveals how specific cultural expressions become embedded in identity.

6.1.2.2 Language

Language as an identity anchor encompasses cultural and ethnic naming conventions, names, and oral languages. Research demonstrates language as integral to identity construction across diverse contexts. The Mapuche, Indigenous inhabitants of south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina including parts of Patagonia, express identity through names and family ties (Gibbons et al., 2021). Other examples include accent-based stigmatisation in South Korea among North Korean refugees (e.g., Park, 2022) and language as identity markers for diasporic communities (e.g., Sideri, 2012). This body of scholarship establishes language as more than a communication tool, showing how it functions as identity repository carrying cultural knowledge, community connections, and ancestral heritage. Despite calls for research on language’s role in refugee identity formation (e.g., Kayaalp, 2022), its connection to work meanings across refugees’ migration journeys remains unexplored.

In the current study, the language anchor demonstrated cultural significance through naming practices that embed community history into individual identity. Bakhit explained how names in his tribal tradition carry deep meaning:

I come from a tribe where our names have impact and have meanings. Sometimes, they give you a name, before you’re born ... It could be for any event that has affected the community ... [like] somebody highly respected [has died] ... or associated with a year of drought or flood, a year of good harvest or of hunger, a year of war or of peace ... My name is a version of a marae [a Māori term for a place of communal gathering].

Bakhit's example also illustrates how language anchors connect individuals to collective memory and cultural practices, even when separated from their homeland.

The bidirectional identity and work meaning relationship operates through language. Participants' language anchors directly influenced work choices, particularly towards interpretation and cultural bridge-building roles. Idris exemplified this connection. His multilingual abilities and connection to Somali heritage drove his work as an interpreter, first in Malaysian displacement contexts serving diaspora communities, then in New Zealand with resettled Somali communities. This work choice maintained his connection to both his COO and diaspora communities while simultaneously reinforcing his language anchor through daily use of heritage languages and cultural navigation. His interpreting work strengthened his identity as a cultural bridge, demonstrating how work aligned with language anchors reinforces this aspect of identity throughout the migration journey. Where language provides the symbolic structure for expressing identity, the morality anchor, which is discussed next, shapes how these expressions manifest in action and decision-making across migration contexts.

6.1.2.3 Morality

Morality encompassed both inherent ethical orientations and values learned through experience and guided by spirituality, a separate anchor discussed below. According to van Zomeren et al. (2018), moral beliefs constitute ethical convictions, rights, and values. In non-Western identity conceptualisations, such as those of Yin (2018), morality represents a person's ethical development. According to Setiya (2022), morality entails acting in a virtuous manner, which may result in actions performed as duty or obligation. In my study, morality emerged as both a concept inherent to one's being as well as what one learnt through experience and spirituality. The discernment between right and wrong materialises in social connections and experiences. Mead's (1967) concept of 'Me' and 'I' is relevant in the morality anchor, as actions reflect how others perceive the self. Several participants articulated morality guiding their actions in the coming into being phase. In displacement, morality became more prominent, despite the hardships and precarious living most were subject to. For example, Hamza, a refugee participant, noted that he would educate fellow refugees without charging fees because "you never sell knowledge ... I told them that I would never take a penny from you guys to teach you anything." His moral anchor directly determined his work choice to provide free education to fellow refugees, while his teaching work reinforced his identity as an ethical person committed to knowledge-sharing. This demonstrates how moral anchors guide work decisions even under

precarious conditions, with meaningful moral work strengthening Hamza's ethical identity. The reciprocal process shows how moral anchors guide work decisions under challenging conditions *and* how these decisions, once enacted through meaningful work, recursively strengthen the moral dimension of identity.

Working for social impact in resettlement, a sub-theme of working for communities (see subsection 4.5.5.1), was linked with morality and refugeehood. Wehrle et al. (2024) identified serving others as a meaningful work role, drawing on Lips-Wiersma and Wright's (2012) framework, in which this is considered a key dimension of meaningful work. Wehrle et al.'s (2024) study further revealed that their participants viewed serving others as a future-focused career aspiration. While Wehrle et al.'s (2024) research established the importance of serving others in meaningful work, their participants were primarily aspirational in their orientation towards social impact rather than actively engaged in such work, differing from my study's context. Participants in the present research who pursued social impact work in resettlement drew upon both morality and their refugeehood, specifically leveraging their lived experiences of vulnerability during the migration journey to inform their commitment to serving others in similar circumstances.

In addition to highlighting the affective component of the meaning of work, the resettlement social impact work reveals refugees mobilising multiple identity constructs to create the meanings of such work, which in turn reinforce their identity constructs, as shown in Hamza's example. These findings suggest that my participants held a strong ideological value of work, a concept that Fournier et al. (2020, p. 129) defined as "the individual's belief in the importance of work in human existence". My participants viewed work not merely as economic necessity but as fundamental to human existence, moral obligation, and identity formation. Their elevation of work to a vehicle for meaning-making and community contribution reflects their deep beliefs that work is central to what it means to be human. Morality provides ethical principles that determine right action. The relationships anchor, discussed next, reveals how these principles become embodied in specific interpersonal bonds and community connections throughout the migration journey.

6.1.2.4 Relationships

The relationships anchor extends beyond traditional role identity theory to encompass collectivity and interdependence. Collective cultures and interdependence have been utilised

interchangeably in several studies (e.g., Naude, 2021; Sugimura et al. 2021). However, aspects of collectivist cultures are not the only element in non-Western identity philosophies (e.g., Gibbons et al., 2021; Naude, 2021; Tseung-Wong, 2021). According to Sugimura et al. (2021), interdependence in East Asian societies is understood as the self being connected with others through dependence and commitment, group harmony, and being attuned to other people's emotions. In this vein, the relationships anchor operates beyond role identity theory where identities are viewed as internalised roles, and the self is conceptualised as a multidimensional configuration of role identities (Stryker, 2008). Multiple identities tied to individuals' various social roles and their salience influences behaviour (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The notion of interdependence and community living in my study evolves the role identity perspective to denote undistinguishable community members whose roles are intertwined such that the individual and others are rendered as one. Feldman (2015) found that the biggest lament of camp refugees was a loss of community relationships and familiar customs of sociality, which inevitably came from communal living. This depth of connection was illustrated by Adrian, a refugee participant in my study, who described leaving both fellow displaced persons and local host community members in his country of asylum as an experience comparable to the death of a loved one.

The empirical findings from my study demonstrate how this theoretical understanding of interdependence manifests in practice through the relationships anchor. Participants of both genders consistently chose work that served family needs, maintained community connections, or built future security for loved ones, such as providing for their children's education. The relationships anchor extended beyond traditional family provider roles to influence almost all work decisions, with participants' identity salience of family guiding them through both structural barriers and those attributed to refugeehood. This pattern contrasts with the findings of Wachter and Shaw (2025), whose study of resettled refugees in the United States revealed significant gender disparities in employment outcomes, educational attainment, and overall well-being, with women experiencing systematically worse outcomes despite facing similar or greater family responsibilities. The absence of such gendered disparities in my study suggests that the relationships anchor may provide a motivational framework that operates differently across contexts, sustaining refugees' persistence in pursuing meaningful work despite substantial barriers. This family-centered approach to work decisions reflects a broader phenomenon in refugee resettlement that merits closer consideration through the lens of identity anchors.

Working for one's family in resettlement has been well established in scholarship that centres refugeehood as the driving explanation (e.g., Fedrigo et al., 2023; Stebleton, 2012; Wehrle et al., 2024; Yalim & Critelli, 2023), creating opportunities to explore how this dynamic operates through the analytical lens of identity anchors. Looking after sick family members or putting family needs such as child care have been perceived as barriers to work in resettlement (e.g., Pietka-Nykaza, 2015). In my study, these types of work were deemed meaningful by participants, because they aligned with their self-concepts. These work choices also reveal that meanings assigned to work are affective as well as cognitive. While some research (e.g., Campion, 2018; de Jong, 2019) has shown that community-focused work limits career advancement, my research reveals that such work provides meaning through human bonds. This work choice continuously reinforced participants' sense of self as embedded in community, demonstrating the bidirectional relationship between relationship anchors and meaningful work. The relationships anchor's focus on interpersonal connections extends naturally to the broader collective dimension captured in sociocultural heritage, which is discussed next.

6.1.2.5 Sociocultural heritage

Sociocultural heritage encompasses both present cultural practices and collective memory passed down through generations. Research shows how ethnic groups construct identities through collective history of resistance and transnationalism; examples include the Garifuna ethnic group in Belize (e.g., Gibbons et al., 2012) and ethnic and racial histories in the Caribbean influencing cultural practices (e.g., Jessop, 2021). What these few studies demonstrate is the tangled nature of history, referred to as 'collective memory' in my study. At least six of my participants described learning about themselves from the collective memories of their familial and social connections, as well as historical accounts of their COO. Social and cultural practices are temporally situated in both history *and* the present, despite physical separation from the places where these practices held significance. Those participants who were parents tried to pass on cultural knowledge and practices to their children in New Zealand, because these remained ingrained in their sense of self. This anchor represents both historical knowledge and evolving cultural practices that remain ingrained despite physical separation from places of origin.

The identity and meaning of work bidirectional relationship manifests through cultural preservation work. Ahlam's magazine production demonstrates how her sociocultural heritage

anchor guided her work choice towards cultural storytelling and community representation. She presents stories of her own culture and of other minority communities in New Zealand, which shows how this anchor influenced her to create work that preserves and shares collective memory. This cultural work reinforced her identity as a cultural bridge and community storyteller, while also shaping collective memory. Her example illustrates how sociocultural heritage anchors drive work choices that maintain cultural connections while evolving through new contexts. Sociocultural heritage and spirituality represent complementary dimensions of transcendent connection. While sociocultural heritage anchors refugees in collective memory and cultural practices, the spirituality anchor, which is discussed next, provides frameworks for understanding meaning and purpose.

6.1.2.6 Spirituality

Spirituality extends beyond social identity theory's group categorisations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to encompass individual spiritual development regardless of organisational religious affiliation. Fleischmann and Verkuyten (2021, p. 164) reinforce this, observing that "the gradual development of an inner sense of who you are (a religious person) is something other than the recognition by oneself and others of what you are as a member of a particular [religious] category or group". Social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) tends to dichotomise the personhood and groups, but spirituality as an identity anchor operates differently. Participants expressed diverse spiritual identities – some through Christianity and Islam; others, like Mira, through personal spirituality without organised religion, demonstrating that spirituality exists outside social identity theory's boundaries. Spirituality differs from morality by pertaining specifically to beliefs in higher power(s) rather than ethical orientations. While spiritual beliefs may mobilise moral actions, morality is not an antecedent to spirituality. Yin's (2018) concept of spiritual awakening as sensitivity, defined as affective resources empowering deep bonds with others, appeared in my study through the interconnectedness and relationships anchors rather than through spirituality. Several participants attributed their migration journeys to higher-power guidance, viewing their arrival in New Zealand as divine protection.

The bidirectional relationship of identity and meaning of work manifests across this spiritual spectrum through both organised and personal spiritual expressions. John, persecuted as a Christian in Pakistan, believed his spiritual anchor guided his work in New Zealand towards pastoral roles and translating the Bible for Pakistani communities. His spirituality directly

determined meaningful religious work that reinforced his faith-based identity. Conversely, Mira's case demonstrates how spirituality anchors operate without organised religion, influencing meaning in work in New Zealand when she felt pressured to prove herself worthy (being oneself and to be more):

I believe that God has put things in my life to make me stronger. I come from a really rough childhood ... I had to be very strong if I wanted to keep staying alive. So, I learned how to fight and then just everything becomes easier, and you become tough.

Both these cases demonstrate how spiritual anchors, whether expressed through religious institutions or individual practice, guide work meanings (identity → work meaning). Research shows religion as integral to identity formation (e.g., Safak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2020; Shahimi et al., 2024), but these examples reveal spirituality anchors operating *across* the spectrum – from John's institutional religious work to Mira's personal spiritual resilience. Further, both John and Mira experienced the bidirectional reinforcement between spiritual identity and meaningful work engagement. John's identity as a Christian becomes strengthened through his work, and Mira finds added belief in God putting things her way to develop her strength (work meaning → identity). This bidirectional relationship evolves over time and continues to interact in active construction processes.

6.1.4 Refugeehood as an experiential construct

The bidirectional identity-work meaning relationship takes on strategic dimensions through refugeehood, where refugees actively mobilise or minimise this identity construct depending on work contexts. This strategic navigation extends the reciprocal dynamics beyond unconscious processes to include deliberate identity management in response to institutional and structural constraints. Refugeehood encompasses externally ascribed labels and is linked to experiences, imagination, and place. This inductively derived concept reveals how participants constructed meanings of labels, legal statuses, place, imaginations, and experiences across their migration journeys. Indeed, akin to Diedrich and Styhre's (2008) stance, refugeehood in my study is conceived as a fluid and permeable construct, whereby meanings of refugeehood evolve and transform across countries, institutions and time, and are shaped by the social actors involved in the identity construction processes in these contexts. Accordingly, refugeehood is a non-linear construct.

The economic, legal, political and social factors that shape refugee identity are crucial not merely as external impositions but as contextual parameters that create the lived experience of refugeehood – a dimension notably absent in much of refugee identity scholarship. While existing literature often approaches refugeehood through humanitarian paradigms (e.g., Carpi et al., 2021; Garnier, 2023), legalistic frameworks (e.g., Lister, 2013), or rights-based perspectives (e.g., Menezes, 2021), these approaches tend to overlook how these structural forces manifest in subjective experiences that constitute refugeehood. Mead's (1967) conceptualisation of identity emphasised experience not only in its passive form but also as an active interpretation and meaning-making process in social contexts.

For participants in my study, the dramatic materialisation of legality and illegality, the protest for aid, and the necessity 'to be refugees' at United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offices represent not just encounters with institutions but formative experiences that constitute refugeehood as a fluid identity construct. Akin to Zadhy and Erman's (2023) view that humanitarian organisations play a prominent role in the provision of food, aid and security, Bernard's (one of my participants) reflection that they needed "letters from UNHCR [to] allow us to be refugees" reveals how institutional recognition becomes internalised as experiential reality. This experiential dimension extends beyond the 'labelling' of refugees noted by FitzGerald and Arar (2018) and Zetter (2007) to encompass how refugees actively interpret, navigate and transform these experiences into coherent identity narratives. The precarity in displacement contexts, threats of imprisonment while working, and persistent non-settlement in resettlement collectively form an experiential continuum that shapes not only how refugeehood is understood but how it is lived and embodied across time and space. This experiential conceptualisation addresses a significant gap in refugee identity scholarship, which, as Kodeih et al. (2023) also noted, tends to focus on social categories rather than lived experience as constitutive of identity.

Conceptualising refugeehood as subjective experience is distinct from management scholarship that tends to perceive refugeehood through the lens or variations of the UNHCR definition (e.g., Pesch & Ipek, 2024). Banko et al. (2022, p. 2), in proposing the concept of refugeedom, state that "refugees, as individuals and groups, historically crafted their own spheres of being that can be obscured by an adherence to the categorical order imposed by modern states and the refugee regime." The current study extends Banko et al.'s (2022) proposal through the findings of refugee participants creating their own versions of self, as

presented in Chapter 4. The difference materialises in refugee participants actively working to negate or reject being obscured by institutional labels and legal statuses, a concept discussed in the insider-outsider continuum section. Moreover, refugeehood as conceptualised in my study rejects the refugee *label* as part of refugees' identity construct, akin to Vigil and Abidi's (2018) call for researchers to explore a new space that humanises refugees. The experiences of my refugee participants, and not the labels given to them, provide a humanising framework for understanding the complex experiences of refugeehood.

While the experiential nature of refugeehood has been established, existing literature offers valuable insights into specific dimensions of this experience. Feldman (2015) provides a critical perspective on camp-based refugee identity as inherently tied to daily struggle and precarious living conditions, reinforcing how physical environment shapes identity formation. The challenges in urban displacement contexts documented by scholars (e.g., Earle & Brown, 2024; Jacobsen, 2006; Knappert et al., 2018; Wake & Barbelet, 2020) validate my participants' experiences while situating them within broader social patterns of marginalisation. In resettlement contexts, the concept of feeling unsettled represents a distinctive contribution to understanding how refugeehood persists beyond legal resolution. This 'unsettlement' manifests in specific work-related challenges that numerous scholars have identified, including systemic barriers to employment (e.g., Champion, 2018; Cheung & Philmore, 2014; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Fleay et al., 2013; Pajic et al., 2018; Pietka-Nykaza, 2015) and struggles to establish belonging through work (e.g., Bishop & Purcell, 2013; Champion, 2018; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020). These scholarly perspectives collectively support the conceptualisation of refugeehood as an ongoing experiential process rather than a temporary legal status.

The bidirectional relationship between refugeehood and work meanings reveals a sophisticated interplay where refugeehood shapes work experiences while work simultaneously transforms refugeehood. This dynamic operates through three key dimensions – refugeehood as resource, constraint/motivation, and experiential. Resettlement work experiences fundamentally transformed how participants interpreted their refugeehood over time. Basma's experiences illustrate this transformation. Her employment as an outsider refugee evolved into work in refugee-serving organisations, repositioning her refugeehood from stigmatised label to valuable experiential knowledge and demonstrating how work contexts provide spaces for identity renegotiation through strategic mobilisation of refugeehood as a resource. Basma's refugee experiences provided insider knowledge for community work (identity → work

meaning), while these work roles transformed refugeehood from stigmatised label to valued expertise (work meaning → identity).

Refugeehood as a resource in work contexts adds a divergent perspective to refugee employment scholarship (e.g., Jackson & Bauder, 2014; Sebestyen et al., 2018) that tends to position ‘refugee jobs’ as lacking in meaning. The emotional valence associated with refugeehood shifted through work experiences. When participants encountered discrimination or underemployment, refugeehood carried heightened emotional burden, as noted by other scholars (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020; Mozetič, 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018). Conversely, when refugee experiences became valued in work settings, this same identity construct transformed into a source of pride and purpose, akin to how some refugee participants perceived themselves in Ortlieb et al.’s (2021) study.

Work roles directly influenced whether participants reclaimed or rejected aspects of refugeehood identity, demonstrating its function as both constraint and motivation. In some work contexts, several participants strategically minimised aspects of their refugeehood to emphasise skills and qualifications instead. Conversely, in advocacy or community-focused roles, many foregrounded their refugeehood as expertise and authenticity. These strategic adaptations demonstrate how the experiential nature of refugeehood – rather than its legal or categorical definition – enables its transformation through work contexts.

Conceptualising refugeehood as experiential reveals the mechanisms that enable its bidirectional relationship with work meanings. Because refugeehood operates as lived experience encompassing affect, agency, and strategic navigation – as a few scholars (e.g., Kodeih et al., 2023; Terzioglu, 2023) have also noted – it remains malleable enough to be transformed by work experiences while simultaneously serving as a resource for meaning construction. Unlike static categorical approaches, an experiential conception sheds light on how refugeehood can be simultaneously rejected and embraced, hidden and foregrounded, depending on work contexts. The experiential lens explains not just what the bidirectional relationship *is*, but *why* and *how* it operates through the fluid, subjective and agentic nature of refugeehood.

6.1.3 Place identity as a dynamic influencer

Unlike the relatively stable bidirectional dynamics observed with identity anchors, place identity reveals a more fluid manifestation of the identity-work meaning relationship. Here, the absence of place becomes as significant as its presence in shaping work meanings, creating unique patterns of influence not evident in other identity constructs. Place identity, interlaced with refugeehood, emerged as a more dynamic concept, operating as both connection and disconnection, presence and absence, throughout migration journeys. Place identity in my study was shown to continuously transform across contexts while significantly influencing identity formation and work meanings. In this thesis, place identity refers to the “part of individuals’ personalities related to places that are significant in the formation of their identities” (Peng et al., 2020, p. 14). Critically, my research extends this definition by demonstrating that these significant places include not only physical locations but also their absence, and the meanings associated with both presence and absence.

Place identity plays a crucial role for refugees who have lost physical connections to identity-forming locations. While the sociocultural heritage anchor included cultural practices interlinked with place, when these practices no longer exist in situ, place as an identity marker becomes prominent. It is precisely the loss of physical connections to identity-forming places that elevates place as an aspect of refugees’ self-concepts and refugeehood experiences.

The concept of ‘not homeland’ proved particularly influential in displacement contexts, where precarity and estrangement from familiar places motivated survival work and community-building efforts that participants would not have pursued in their COO. Luimpöck (2019) found that displacement activated refugeehood, and my findings extend this by demonstrating how the absence of homeland creates a distinct place identity that directly shapes work meanings.

Some participants experienced their COO as ‘not homeland’ even before physical displacement, aligning with Pearlman’s (2023, p. 170) observation that refugees might view their birth country as “a geographical homeland without the security or dignity of a home.” For these participants in my study, place identity emerged as significant precisely because it explained why displacement became necessary, particularly when identity anchors like spirituality were threatened in their COO. This was the first instance where place was found to

be intertwined with refugeehood as participants who experienced ‘not homeland’ in their COO saw themselves as refugees in that context.

In transit and temporary settlement locations, participants developed distinct relationships with place that were neither fully detached nor fully attached. These transitional place identities created unique work meanings focused on survival, temporality, and preparation for onwards movement. Karam’s statement, “I was a refugee over there”, referring to Thailand as a transit country, illustrates how place identity in displacement contexts becomes interconnected with refugeehood itself. This transitional place identity often motivated participants to engage in precarious work they would otherwise avoid, demonstrating how even temporary place connections influence work meanings. Place identity gains prominence when refugees identify their resettlement country as their new home because it provides opportunities to build a new life. Some participants chose to identify as Kiwis or New Zealanders, noting that refugeehood was in their past. This new place identity directly influenced work choices, with participants seeking employment that reinforced their sense of belonging in New Zealand. R. Sampson and Gifford (2010) have warned against trapping refugees’ identities in places past, and my research demonstrates how active formation of new place identity through work represents a positive adaptation to displacement.

Perhaps most distinctively, the present study reveals how refugees often maintain multiple place identities simultaneously, identifying with their COO, transit location(s), and resettlement country in complex, overlapping ways. This multiplicity allows refugees to strategically draw upon different place connections in various work contexts – emphasising cultural knowledge from homelands in some settings while foregrounding local knowledge in others. This finding extends Bradley’s (2014) observation that refugeehood entails regaining a place in the world that provides safety and physical security, indicating the need to be cognisant of the past but also looking forward, demonstrating how multiple place identities enable refugees to both honour past connections and build new meanings through work. The reciprocal relationship between place identity and work meaning represents one of the most dynamic aspects of refugees’ experiences. While place identity clearly influences work choice, as seen in how ‘not homeland’ contexts motivate survival work, work meanings equally reshape how place is understood and internalised. Fawaz’s entrepreneurial evolution provides an illustration of this bidirectionality.

Fawaz's meaning of work in the coming into being phase was tied to, in addition to interconnectedness, morality, and relationships, his COO. As an entrepreneur who redistributed profits to people within his supply chain, Fawaz noted: "And then from that time I was kind of really helpful for my people, for my country." The transformative aspect emerges in resettlement. Through establishing a local business in New Zealand designed to "stop sending money overseas and instead making it recycle inside the country, which will be helpful for the whole people of New Zealand", Fawaz's work not only reflected but actively reshaped his place identity to incorporate New Zealand as a place of belonging and to foster a new insider identity. This shift represents more than adaptation and highlights how place identity and work meaning exist in continuous dialogue, with work providing not just expression of place connections but also active reconstruction of where and how one belongs in the world throughout the migration journey. Fawaz's experience demonstrates both directions of the relationship – his initial place identity tied to his COO shaped his philanthropic meaning in his business (identity → work meaning), while his philanthropic New Zealand business actively reconstructed his place identity to include belonging in New Zealand (work meaning → identity). The ongoing evolution and interaction between identity and the meaning of work throughout the journey is also illustrated by Fawaz's case.

The mechanism through which refugees negotiate all identity constructs throughout their migration journeys is the insider-outsider continuum, which is discussed next.

6.1.5 The insider-outsider continuum

The insider-outsider continuum operates as the dynamic mechanism through which the bidirectional identity and meaning of work relationship functions across temporal complexities. Rather than viewing insider and outsider positions as fixed categories, the current study reveals how the continuum enables strategic positioning according to context, desired outcomes, and temporal orientations.

These negotiations represent complex, contextual, and dynamic processes that evolved throughout refugee participants' migration journeys. The concept of insider-outsider social positions is not new. For example, it has been utilised in understanding belonging of migrants (e.g., Ullah et al., 2021), organisational change (e.g., Nigam et al., 2022), and researcher positionality (e.g., Carling et al., 2014; Merriam et al., 2001). The continuum as conceptualised in my research extends existing identity frameworks while demonstrating the simultaneous,

paradoxical and strategic nature of social positions that refugees occupy. It also illuminates the role of M&Ms and PWPs in refugee-background individuals' negotiations of insider-outsider positions. The latter insight is discussed in the next section.

The insider-outsider continuum emerged as a primary site of identity construction in this study, necessitating analysis alongside established identity theories. Whetten (1989) emphasised that the role of theory is to challenge and expand existing knowledge. Research demonstrates that identity construction is a complex endeavour (e.g., Anthias, 2008; Burke & Stets, 2023; Foucault, 1995; Stets & Serpe, 2013), and my findings show the same. One of the most significant findings of this research is how refugees simultaneously occupy multiple, sometimes contradictory positions along the insider-outsider continuum. This reveals some strategic navigation strategies employed throughout migration journeys, highlighting the role of agency in position navigations. The theoretical extensions offered through this analysis are explored next. The relation to meanings of work resulting from these identity navigations has been addressed in preceding sections.

6.1.5.1 Foucault's identity conceptualisations

Foucault (1995) theorised identity as a dynamic process, contingent on power and how subjects of power (individuals) are constantly shaped through social interactions. According to Foucault (1995), individuals actively participate in subjection to power by internalising norms and expectations articulated by power structures, becoming both agents and objects of power.

My study extends Foucault's work in two key ways. First, while Foucault questions the existence of a true self beneath subject positions, my theory proposes that identity anchors function as stability-providing elements during turbulent migration journeys. While initially presented as stabilising elements, identity anchors function through the insider-outsider continuum as dynamic resources that refugees strategically mobilise according to context. This reveals anchors not merely as passive foundations but as active tools for navigating complex social positioning. These anchors, while transforming in meanings and emotional valence during the journey, create continuity amidst change. Caleb's experience illustrates this dynamic stability. When asked if he remained the same person between Myanmar (his COO) and New Zealand, he responded: "The biggest change for me is I can forgive others more than before, I can give time to others more than before, I think I can love others more than before." His statement shows how interconnectedness and relationship anchors maintain continuity while

evolving in intensity, supporting my proposition that refugees maintain aspects of their true self through the anchors even as they negotiate new contexts and subject positions throughout their migration journey. While anchors are simultaneously stable and dynamic, refugeehood and place identity are more fluid, as shown in earlier sections.

Second, my theory extends Foucault's (1995) position by highlighting how my refugee participants exercise agency in rejecting externally imposed refugee identities, while navigating the same power structures (institutional and societal discourses and interactions). Whereas refugeehood was earlier established as an experiential construct, its operation through the insider-outsider continuum reveals its strategic dimensions. Refugees do not merely experience refugeehood passively but actively navigate when to emphasise or minimise this identity aspect according to context and desired outcomes. Adrian, who continues to see himself as a refugee, exemplified this agentic redefinition: "The New Zealand public, they say those bloody illegals, they are here just for a better life; to take our job ... we are like a bag of shopping items dropped by UN and the NZ Government." He chooses refugeehood on his own terms, informed by outsider-ness from salient identity anchors (relationships, sociocultural heritage) and place identity: "You ask about identity, I am a refugee, I will remain a refugee till I die. Or until I go back home. This is not my land ... every single day I'm praying for home, for my mother, I want to go home."

These extensions help address power dynamics and the stability of identity anchors in refugees' experiences. Analysis now turns to the other identity theories to explore how refugees' identities operate beyond conventional theories.

6.1.5.2 Identity Theories and the Translocational Positionality Framework

To fully understand how the insider-outsider continuum operates, it is necessary to explore how this mechanism extends beyond conventional identity theories. Traditional frameworks, which were not conceptualised to be uniquely applicable to refugees' complex situations, can be insufficient for explaining the complex, paradoxical and simultaneous identity positions refugees occupy throughout their migration journeys.

Identity theory suggests that when identities clash, they resolve by moving towards middle ground, with less salient identities undergoing greater change (e.g., Burke & Stets, 2023; Stets & Serpe, 2013). My findings add insight to this resolution model by showing how paradoxes

can arise *within a single identity construct* – refugeehood. In displacement contexts, participants found work *because* of their refugeehood – their illegal status necessitated survival strategies prompting precarious work arrangements. While their anchors motivated these actions, the same refugeehood identity that enabled work simultaneously created safety risks through potential imprisonment for illegal employment. This internal paradox within refugeehood extends identity theory by demonstrating how a single identity construct can generate simultaneous insider-outsider positioning that directly shapes work meanings. Rather than resolving towards middle ground, these paradoxical positions coexist and require active navigation, highlighting refugees’ agency in identity construction.

This paradoxical positioning extends beyond identity theory’s resolution mechanisms to further inform self-categorisation theory’s fundamental assumptions. Self-categorisation theory presupposes relatively stable group settings with normative parameters (e.g., Turner, 1975, 1984), but for refugees, such normality rarely exists. Their experiences reveal social contexts characterised by continuous disruption, requiring simultaneous navigation of multiple, sometimes conflicting, identity versions across time and space. Refugees’ identities become fragmented during migration journeys, deviating from the single or discrete identity descriptions underscored by social categories. This fragmentation creates a unique relationship with work meanings, where different identity fragments can simultaneously influence how work is understood and experienced across contexts.

The dynamic nature of these identity navigations further transcends social identity theory’s emphasis on relatively static group membership (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The insider-outsider continuum reveals a more fluid process where, rather than adopting fixed in-group/out-group categorisations, refugees actively navigate positioning influenced by identity anchors, refugeehood, and place identity. This dynamic positioning constitutes a form of identity work – the process through which individuals create, adapt, maintain, reject and claim social, role and personal identities (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; A. D. Brown, 2017; Caza et al., 2018; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). However, unlike identity work in stable contexts, refugees engage in this process across disrupted migration contexts where no single parameters of insider or outsider exist. This contextual fluidity directly enables the bidirectional relationship between identity and work meanings, as positions materialise according to both identity construct salience and work-related needs.

While these traditional theories prove limited in explaining the fragmented, paradoxical identities of refugees, Anthias's (2002, 2008, 2009) concept of translocational positionality offers a more relevant framework for understanding how identity positioning influences work meanings for displaced individuals. The insider-outsider continuum builds on translocational positionality by demonstrating its specific operation in the identity-meaning of work nexus. While Anthias focuses on positioning across social class, ethnicity, and nationality, my study reveals how refugees simultaneously navigate these dimensions *plus* identity constructs to achieve desired work meanings. Ahlam exemplifies this extended complexity – her positioning shifted from refugee outsider (in early resettlement work) to community insider (through ethnic connections in non-profit work) while strategically mobilising both her refugeehood and sociocultural heritage anchor to enable different work meanings. Having established how the continuum builds upon translocational positionality, I next demonstrate how it transcends dramaturgical theory.

6.1.5.3 Liminality and Hybridity

Liminality is a brief situation of identity uncertainty, where an individual is caught 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969) and unfolds through three phases of separation - removal from former self, transition - evaluating the new state and reducing uncertainty about it, and reincorporation - creation of a new sense of self (Beech, 2011; Conroy & O'Leary-Kelley, 2014). The insider-outsider continuum enables simultaneity in identity positioning, in contrast to liminality's three phases. Liminality in refugee research has been utilised to show refugees' identity work as ambiguous (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022). My research shows, consistent with the findings of Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022), that refugee participants demonstrated identity clarity and intentionality in their identity positioning.

The concept of hybridity, originating from cultural amalgamation studies, has been utilised in identity studies and refers to the creation of a third, 'in-between' space (Anthias, 2001). Although not widely used in refugee research, it is worth noting the distinctiveness between hybridity and my study's conceptualisation of identity work through the insider-outsider continuum. Apart from identity simultaneity emphasised by the continuum, my research also shows that identities evolve within the three constructs where meanings and emotional valence change according to the contexts embedded in the migration journey. Despite this evolution, my theory foregrounds the anchors as stable elements in identity construction. They remain intact, while refugeehood and place are more fluid and dynamic. For example, those

participants whose spirituality is anchored in an organised religion remain anchored in that identity construct throughout their journey and in some cases, this construct gained salience in New Zealand. The concept of hybridity would suggest that these participants would form a new identity – one that amalgamates with New Zealand’s overall distance from organised religion or secularism. However, my research showed that anchors remained intact but evolved in meaning and emotional valence.

6.1.5.4 Dramaturgical Theory

Unlike studies that often portray refugees as passive recipients of outsider status (e.g., Tomlinson & Egan, 2002; Wehrle et al., 2018), my research explains their active role in position negotiations. Refugee participants mobilised agency and navigated insider positions with the label and institutionalised term ‘refugee’, as well as other identity constructs, to achieve desired outcomes. The institutionalised aspect of refugeehood is underscored by a narrative of victimhood (e.g., Espiritu, 2014; Ikanda, 2018; Mozetič, 2018) that requires performances to demonstrate or provide evidence of suffering. Proving or uttering suffering leads to ‘the right to have rights’ (Smets et al., 2019). Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory provides some explication of the phenomenon of performances. Using the metaphor of theatrical performance to describe social interaction, Goffman (1959) proposed that individuals present different aspects of themselves depending on the social context, much like actors playing various roles on stage. As revealed in the findings, performances were necessary for survival throughout the migration journey, and to gain access to resettlement. Similarly, other scholars, such as Dagg and Hauggard (2016), Mozetič (2018) and Smets et al. (2019), have also noted that the legal status of ‘refugee’ is relevant to the extent that it enables the process of seeking protection. However, in my study refugee participants held multiple versions of self, which distinguishes their identity construction processes from Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory, which tends to describe performing one version of self sequentially - the front stage/back stage distinction.

Recall in Chapter 4 that Bakhit at one point asked a friend to write a story addressed to the UNHCR, making a case to qualify him for the Lost Boys of Sudan programme administered by the United States (e.g., International Rescue Committee, 2014). In this example, Bakhit was holding multiple versions of his refugeehood – a seasoned camp dweller pretending to be a Lost Boy, which was necessary to his more salient identity anchor of relationships (family),

fuelling the desire to find them. He held multiple refugeehood versions simultaneously – the performed Lost Boy identity and his authentic camp refugee experience – alongside his core identity as a family man. This reveals complex navigations between conflicting refugeehood constructions while maintaining authentic self-understanding.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory typically analyses performance of roles that are, to some degree, chosen. In my research, performances arose in response to externally imposed refugeehood - an institutionally assigned identity that participants strategically navigated rather than fully internalised. Performances were enabled by insider-outsider dynamics for refugee participants to achieve desired outcomes, usually for survival, in contrast to Goffman's (1959) theory that suggests performances are aimed at impression management in social settings. Engaging in performances by refugee participants in the present study was an act of agency, a finding supported in studies by Dagg and Hauggard (2016), Ikanda (2018) and Oka (2014). Finally, while Goffman's (1959) framework does not provide a systematic mechanism for understanding movement between performances, the insider-outsider continuum in my study offers that mechanism - explaining how simultaneity operates, how strategic navigation happens, and how agency functions within imposed constraints.

The complex navigation exemplified by Bakhit's case extends to strategic mobilisation across all three identity constructs. In work contexts specifically, participants strategically emphasised different identity constructs depending on opportunities and meanings. Some emphasised identity anchors (community connections, spirituality) while de-emphasising refugeehood in the workplace, while others mobilised refugeehood as insider knowledge in community-serving organisations. Rather than simply positioning participants as outsiders, refugeehood provided strategic opportunities – from insider access to humanitarian services in displacement to refugee advocacy positioning in resettlement. Critically, participants exercised agency in defining their refugeehood relationships rather than passively accepting external definitions. Such agency was also present in their meaning of work constructions.

6.1.5.5 Meaning of Work

The meaning of work literature is still limited to how meaning can be created in work pursuits. Additionally, the concept is not well defined (Kashyap & Arora, 2022; Millner et al., 2022). As well as demonstrating how the continuum relates to meaning of work construction, another insight presented by my study is that the nature of the meaning of work is both affective *and*

cognitive. Much of the existing research has focused on the cognitive, as a psychological process. When integrated with the processes of identity construction, both affective and cognitive dimensions emerge. The identity lens brings the affective strands into sharper focus.

For example, Jamal worked as a machine operator in a factory while being trained in IT, illustrating how affect operates distinctly from cognitive assessment in meaning construction. Cognitively, Jamal recognised the misalignment between his factory role and his IT career aspirations, which would typically result in negative meaning attribution in purely cognitive frameworks. However, the affective dimensions generated through his identity constructs overrode this cognitive dissonance. His statement “I desperately miss my family” demonstrates how the emotional quality of the relationships identity anchor (the feelings of longing, separation, and familial love) creates an affective pathway to work meanings. Jamal’s continued identification as a refugee because of feeling not settled further demonstrates how affect, rather than cognitive categorisation, defines his experience of refugeehood, and how work meanings can arise from navigating multiple identity sources (refugeehood and the relationships anchor). The feelings of displacement and incompleteness that characterise his emotional state directly informed how he constructed meaning in his current work. These emotional responses are not secondary to cognitive processes but function as primary meaning-making mechanisms. Jamal viewing his factory work as “a way to bring my family to New Zealand” shows how the anticipatory emotions of hope, relief, and projected joy transform otherwise misaligned work into deeply meaningful activity. This affective transformation operates through emotional pathways that cognitive frameworks alone cannot adequately explain. The dual emotions of present sadness and future hope create an affective scaffold that supports meaning construction despite cognitive awareness of career-path mismatch.

In earlier sections, it was established that working for family and community was motivated by the emotional bonds inherent in these social relationships. The being oneself and to be more aspect involved activism to establish oneself as equal with other employees in the workplace. Refugeehood, which was established as an experiential construct above, also brings into focus the role of affect through experiences of precarity and non-settlement. Rosso et al. (2010) encouraged future research to explore the interactions between multiple sources of meaning. The present research has answered Rosso et al.’s (2010) call to an extent by revealing the dialectic between the various sources of meanings, as Jamal’s experience illustrates. The

insider-outsider continuum enables refugee participants to navigate multiple identity constructs to define themselves and find meanings in work.

The findings from my research may also help explain why refugee-background individuals chose to work in the roles that they do. Refugee at work scholarship has shown the existence of ‘refugee jobs’, such as interpreting/translation work or jobs that are precarious, undesirable, part-time or temporary jobs (e.g., Frykman, 2012; Jackson & Bauder, 2014). My findings help bring a new lens to this scholarship by showing that that refugee jobs are not always as they tend to be painted in refugee at work scholarship. While such work can become opportunities for exploitation in the absence of adequate and effective safeguards, in my research, most of my participants’ experiences suggest that they chose ‘refugee jobs’ because it aligned with one or more identity constructs. This nuanced perspective on refugee jobs may help bring a balanced perspective, one that considers the harmful aspects of refugee jobs (such as downward mobility, exploitation, harassment) as well as its agentic and positive properties, depicting choice of refugees, stepping stone work and meanings resulting from association with refugees’ identities.

My findings accentuate the role of affect in constructing work meanings. This affective dimension emerges directly from identity constructs and operates through the bidirectional relationship between identity and work meanings. As identity shapes the emotional pathways through which work gains meaning, these meaningful work experiences simultaneously reinforce and transform how individuals understand and embody their identities across contexts, creating a dynamic rather than static relationship between who they are and what their work means. The conceptual model introduced in the next section helps visualise these processes.

6.1.6 A conceptual model of the bidirectional identity-work meaning theory

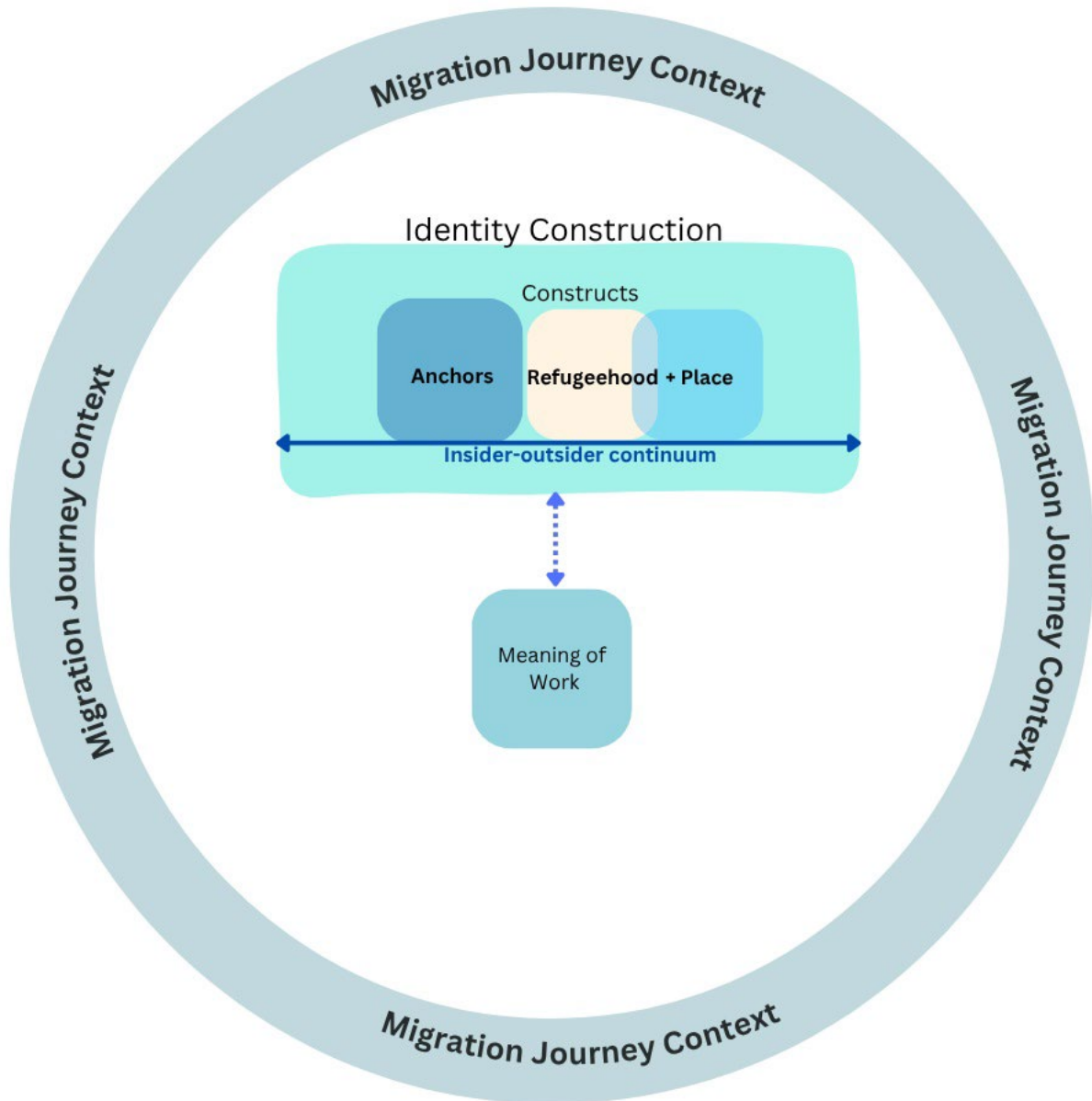
The conceptual model of refugees’ identity and the meaning of work constructions proposed by this research is visually depicted in Figure 6.1. The overarching migration journey context provides the boundary for the identity and meaning of work conceptualisation in Figure 6.1.

Geographic, political, social and structural factors embedded in the three phases of coming into being, displacement, and resettlement make up the migration context, as established earlier in

this study. Within the conceptual model, identity anchors occupy a larger conceptual space than the other two identity constructs, reflecting their primacy in refugees' self-concept.

Figure 6.1

Proposed conceptual model for the bidirectional identity-work meaning construction theory



However, this visual prominence obscures the complex interactions between all three elements, revealing emergent properties that only become apparent through their relational interactions. While refugeehood and place appear as a combined construct, their relationship reveals crucial interconnections that demonstrate the nested quality of displacement experiences within

broader geographic and social environments. The model illustrates a hierarchical yet fluid relationship between these identity constructs, all of which interact relationally through the insider-outsider continuum.

The migration journey was found to be an ongoing experience for refugee participants in my study. Several participants described prolonged feelings of non-settlement in New Zealand, echoing BenEzer and Zetter's (2014) assertion that resettlement is not an endpoint of the migration journey. Thus, it is represented in a circular shape and is the context within which the bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work transpires. The insider-outsider continuum spans across all identity constructs, visualising its function as an integrative mechanism that enables fluid identity construction while influencing work meanings. This spatial representation captures how the continuum creates bridges between otherwise disparate identity elements. In the theory and accompanying model, the identity constructs come first and subsequently influence how work is understood and experienced. However, as the migration journey unfolds, there is an increasing bidirectional relationship between the meaning of work and identity, demonstrated through the feedback loop in the blue dashed line in Figure 6.1. In effect, the meaning of work tends to reinforce identity constructs, according to the contexts and experiences embedded in the migration journey. The conceptual model demonstrates the way different elements – identity and the meaning of work – fit together while maintaining their distinct qualities.

An objective of this thesis was to explore how refugee participants' own conceptualisations of identities are negotiated with the varying notions of the refugee identity throughout the migration journey. The literature review revealed that existing studies with refugees typically apply established identity theories (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Morrice, 2011; Öztürk, 2023; Taghavi et al., 2024; Wehrle et al., 2018). However, there remains room to further explore how refugees themselves construct their sense of selfhood during displacement and resettlement – a journey that can be prolonged and entrenched in precarity – and how these experiences shape their work pursuits. The conceptual model grounded in the lived experiences of refugee participants in this study depicts the primacy of identity constructs and a gradual interweaving with work meanings. The dynamic nature of the bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work materialises when the migration journey is considered as the bounding context for the experiences of refugee participants and those of M&Ms and PWPs in resettlement.

Charmaz (2014a) and Sandberg and Alvesson (2021) offer criteria for what constitutes a theory. Charmaz (2014a) argues that theories developed from the CGT methodology can produce new insights to extend established theory. Meaning of work scholars (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010) have shown the relationship between the self and meaningful work. My theory extends the perspectives of these scholars to the context of refugee studies by showing how the self-concept is not only a way of finding meaning in work, but also a precursor to it.

I showed above how my research extends several identity theories and brings in the affective strand to meaning of work conceptualisation. The proposed theory meets Sandberg and Alvesson's (2021) relevance criterion and boundary conditions, being applicable to refugee-background individual populations navigating displacement and resettlement, with the migration journey providing the boundary conditions – the context within which the bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work transpires. Finally, consistent with the views of Charmaz (2014a), the proposed theory explains and also transforms understandings of the phenomenon being studied. By paying attention to the dynamism inherent in the insider-outsider continuum, and its flexibility in enabling temporal and spatial fluidity, refugees' identity constructions are revealed to be complex, involving holding multiple, divergent, and sometimes conflicting identities.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 6.1 captures the bidirectional relationship between identity constructs and work meanings, bounded by the migration journey context. However, this visual representation, while effective at illustrating spatial and conceptual relationships, cannot fully convey the dynamic temporal processes through which these elements interact and evolve. The model is therefore only a snapshot of relationships that are constantly in motion across time. While the feedback loop (represented by the blue dashed line) indicates bidirectional influence between identity and work meaning, the full temporal complexity of how refugees simultaneously navigate past, present, and future orientations across these constructs requires further inspection. The next section explores how temporal dynamics operate within this conceptual framework.

6.1.7 Temporal complexity in identity and meaning of work constructions

Previous analysis established that the bidirectional relationship between identity and work meaning operates across spatial and social contexts yet exploring this relationship through a temporal lens reveals additional complexity. This relationship operates not just across physical locations but across timeframes, connecting past identities, present work experiences, and anticipated futures into a coherent but evolving narrative. To avoid repetition, only those temporal complexities previously not discussed are analysed here.

6.1.7.1 *Identity constructs across temporal dimensions*

In refugee scholarship, the temporality of refugees' experiences is gaining increasing attention. Recent studies (e.g., Clayton & Vickers, 2019; Mozetič, 2022; Osso & van Houtum, 2025; Terzioglu, 2023), although focused on either displacement or resettlement, demonstrate how institutional structures systematically regulate refugees' temporal experiences through imposed waiting periods and procedural delays, yet refugees consistently exercise temporal agency by reappropriating time to resist control and develop autonomous narratives of coping. In earlier sections, the dynamism of refugees' identity anchors was established. The temporal dimension of identity anchors reveals an apparent paradox not evident in their spatial manifestations. The anchors simultaneously provide continuity across disrupted contexts while evolving in both meaning and emotional valence throughout the migration journey. This 'stable dynamism' enables refugees to maintain coherent self-narratives despite profound disruption. Similarly, place as a dynamic identity construct that is temporal, and fluid, was also discussed above. My study incorporates this temporal lens, which some scholars (e.g., Clayton & Vickers, 2019; Mozetič, 2022; Osso & van Houtum, 2025; Wehrle et al., 2024) advocate for in their respective studies. Furthermore, the temporal lens in my study extends beyond labour market integration, or navigation of immigration regulations, focusing on how identity construction for refugees is also underscored by temporal complexity.

The present research advances the earlier conceptualisation of the temporal dimension of refugeehood by revealing how this identity construct operates simultaneously across multiple timeframes. For some participants, refugeehood was a past experience influencing present work choices, while for others it remained a present identity, shaping ongoing work meanings or a transitional identity informing future aspirations. Akin to Pearlman's (2019) stance, refugeehood in my study is a process of becoming, embedded in temporality.

An objective of this research was to explore the delicate balance between agency and vulnerability as an active social process. Refugeehood is part of this social process, strategically activated and abandoned according to the person engaging in the process. The temporal dimension of refugeehood becomes evident as refugees move between activating this identity in contexts where it serves their agency and setting it aside when other identity constructs become more relevant. Consistent with Banko et al. (2022, p. 19), refugeehood encapsulates refugee-background individuals' voices and their agency in crafting their own history, considering "refugees' experiences, interactions and narratives without privileging certain definitions as to who counts as a refugee." As an identity construct, refugeehood entails being subjected to power imbalances and estrangement from places that provided meanings for self. For refugees, then, identity construction involves rupture and discontinuity through displacement, instigating the 'Who am I?' questions. The conceptualisation of refugeehood as an identity construct recognises both the institutional and structural influences *and* the subjective experiences of estrangement which impact identity anchors. The role of imagination in creating identity anchors, which is discussed next, represents a novel contribution because it allows individuals to derive meaning and construct identity from vicarious experiences – lives not personally lived but accessed through others' narratives, practices, and perspectives within their social context

6.1.7.2 Imagination as an identity construction mechanism

The most theoretically significant finding regarding temporality is the role of imagination in refugees' identity construction. Participants who were born in displacement or spent formative years in camps constructed robust identity anchors through imagined connections to places, cultures and histories they had never directly experienced. Imagination emerged as a key component of refugeehood for these participants who, having not lived in their parents' COO, identified strongly with the geographic place as well as identity anchors that parents and community members shared with them. Existing identity theories have not captured this nuanced understanding of identity construction. These refugee participants' imaginations developed through stories of the homeland, cultural practices among displaced communities, and visual repositories such as photographs. Refugee scholarship has highlighted imaginations of future, potential selves in a united Korean nation (e.g., Park, 2022) and in the context of work (e.g., Davey & Jones, 2020; Fedrigo et al., 2022; Wehrle et al., 2024). Elsewhere, identity and imagination have been explored in the context of learning and education (e.g., Hedges,

2021; Liu et al., 2024; M. E. M. Moore, 2005; Pishghadam et al., 2022). However, imaginations of unlived experiences shaping identity do not appear to have been explored before.

Keltner and Stamkou's (2025) theory of imagination helps explain how camp and urban displaced participants construct imaginations of worlds they never inhabited. The authors theorise imagination as a mental state that deviates from a sense of reality through embodiment of the imagination in affective states which, combined with embodiment of the imagination in social interaction, leads to a higher-order cognitive construct of shared representations. The imaginations in the present study, through shared representations, helped construct identity anchors of language, interconnectedness, relationships, sociocultural heritage and spirituality. Moreover, Fuist (2021) noted that imagination enables individuals and groups to construct identities, and deals with the unknowable, or yet to transpire. In displacement, participants imagined life in a future place that would be safe. Resettling in a third country constituted an imagined future, where refugeehood could be abandoned. Similarly, those in resettlement who continued to associate themselves with refugeehood imagined a future in which they can return to their COO or have family members join them in New Zealand. Effectively, imagination provides the temporal connection between past and future selves. This aligns with Hedges's (2021, p. 112) position that through imagination "multiple identities across time and context are ... possible".

I believe this finding represents a novel contribution to identity theories. While scholars have explored imagination in learning contexts (e.g., M. E. M. Moore, 2005; Pishghadam et al., 2022) and with regard to future selves (Park, 2022), my research reveals imagination constructing identity anchors for *unlived experiences*. Participants developed anchors through stories, photographs, and community practices that connected them to parental homelands they had never seen. Keltner and Stamkou's (2025) theory of imagination as mental deviation from reality through embodied affective states helps explain this phenomenon. Through shared community representations, participants embodied connections to unlived experiences, creating identity anchors that guided present and future work choices.

6.1.7.3 Temporal dimensions of work meaning constructions

The temporal complexity of all three identity constructs directly influences how work meanings form and evolve. In the findings chapters, the evolving nature of the meaning of work aspects of working for community, family and survival, and of being oneself to be more, were

identified and discussed in relation to the literature and identity constructs analysed in earlier sections of this chapter. ‘Provisional meaning’ formation and the ‘stepping-stone concept’ represent the emergent temporal dimensions of meanings of work. This sub-section analyses their temporal nature.

Following Mead’s (1932) foundational work, Blumer (1969) developed symbolic interactionism to posit that meanings emerge through interactions between the self and the object, and through the reflective self, suggesting meaning formation as primarily reactive. I extend Blumer’s theory by proposing that, for refugees, work meanings occur through anticipated interaction before the reflective self processes actual experience. This positions meaning as *preceding* the work role, or provisional meaning. Provisional meanings are then maintained or modified through reflection guided by identity constructs. Karam’s experience illustrates this process. He initially sought work in Thailand by activating his refugeehood identity and relationships anchor to provide for his pregnant wife who had no access to medical care due to their refugee status (provisional meaning). Through his reflective self during the work experience, his refugeehood identity was further activated when witnessing other refugees suffering from a lack of medical care. Simultaneously, his spirituality and interconnectedness anchors (which influenced his work meanings in his COO) became salient, creating new meaning in his work – helping fellow refugees through assisting in their medical care. Thus, provisional meaning evolved to relate to multiple identity anchors simultaneously, which in turn reinforced work meanings.

This temporal dimension of meaning-making – where meaning precedes, accompanies, and evolves through work experience – extends existing scholarship on the temporality of meaningful work. Bailey and Madden (2017), after observing that the use of a temporal lens in meaningful work literature was limited, revealed in their study of three occupational (non-refugee) groups – academics, refuse collectors, and stonemasons – that meaningfulness of work emerged episodically at specific moments and events like completion ceremonies, where these workers connected their present work actions to both their past and the future. The findings from my participants suggest that meaning-making is not just episodic and reflective but also proactive and identity-driven, especially for those navigating significant life transitions. Furthermore, meaning-making of work for my participants was found to be an evolving process, guided by identity constructs, meaning formation, and modification through provisional meaning.

The process of provisional meaning formation was illuminated through what emerged in the M&M and PWP data as the stepping-stone concept. This is further discussed in the next section on relational work integration.

6.1.7.4 Temporality in the continuum

The temporal dimension extends the insider-outsider continuum beyond spatial and social positioning to reveal its operation across multiple timeframes. Refugees navigate insider-outsider positions not only in relation to present contexts but also to past connections and future aspirations, creating a complex temporal negotiation that traditional identity theories cannot fully explain. Temporal complexity fundamentally underscores refugee participants' identity construction processes in my study. Some refugee scholars (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Terzioglu, 2023) have highlighted the concept of liminal selves of refugees in displacement contexts. My theory makes a distinct theoretical contribution by revealing the temporal complexity of insider-outsider positions *throughout* the migration journey. This temporal dimension operates across multiple timeframes and contexts, demonstrating how position negotiations are not just spatially but also temporally situated, revealing a fluid and evolving process. Basma's story, as related in Chapter 4, exemplifies this temporal complexity.

Growing up in a refugee camp, Basma constructed her identity anchors through imagination, looking to a past homeland, as narrated by her family and community, to give meaning to herself. In resettlement, Basma looked to an imagined future self whose social impact work transformed lives of displaced people around the world. Basma's present evolved between her imagined past and future. She constructed aspects of her identity through learning how to cook Somali food to connect to her sociocultural heritage. Her work as a language interpreter in her community also connected to her past work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in displacement, while providing skills, such as advocacy, to utilise towards a law degree for future work. Basma's example typifies the temporality embedded in the continuum and helps us to move beyond static understandings to illuminate how refugees navigate disrupted time while maintaining self-continuity despite profound uncertainty. When temporality intertwines with divergent social position navigations and the migration journey, identity construction emerges as the dynamic, fluid process that some scholars also propose (e.g., Bergquist et al., 2019; Vigil & Abidi, 2018). Temporality in the continuum goes beyond the concept of liminal selves or refugee trapped in single, fixed identity categories.

6.1.7.5 *The migration journey as ongoing temporal experience*

While the migration journey was established earlier as a contextual boundary for identity construction, its temporal dimensions reveal additional complexity. This temporal complexity fundamentally shapes how the bidirectional identity and meaning of work relationship operates across different contexts and timeframes. The three-phase conceptualisation also illuminates how these temporal phases can occur in parallel for some individuals.

Six participants grew up in refugee camps or urban displacement settings, with one participant born during displacement. Another experienced the coming into being phase in his COO, brief displacement to a transit country, and then resettlement. These divergent experiences emphasise the importance of considering formative years as part of the migration journey. Additionally, some participants who sought asylum upon arrival in New Zealand were simultaneously in both the displacement and early resettlement phases. This finding addresses a limitation identified by Pearlman (2023), who noted that refugee scholarship often restricts itself to temporal experiences since flight and spatial settlement contexts. The three phases identified in this study encapsulate not only physical transnational movements and the regulations governing these movements but also the embedded experiences within these movements.

Critically, my findings reveal that the migration journey continues as a temporal experience even after resettlement. Non-settlement emerged as a higher-order psychological construct encompassing experiences of ongoing discrimination, being perceived as the ‘other’, and the resulting sense of non-belonging. These experiences were relevant in both displacement and resettlement contexts and, combined with feelings of insecurity in the COO, often triggered flight. A key insight was the theme of being *reconciled* to living in New Zealand. Many participants expressed gratitude for their physical security in New Zealand while acknowledging that their lives lacked important aspects, such as culture, family members, and homeland. This aligns with Simich et al.’s (2010) findings, who showed that nostalgia and loss are common among migrants but more profound for refugees due to forced migration factors. Participants in my study also recognised that repatriation might not resolve feelings of non-settlement, leading to only a partial reconciliation with permanent life in New Zealand. This challenges conceptualisations of repatriation as the end of the migration journey (e.g., BenEzer & Zetter, 2014) and aligns with research showing continued non-settlement among repatriated

refugees (e.g., Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2021; Um, 2023). Collectively, these findings support the view of the migration journey as a psychological phenomenon that continues even after resettlement. Given this dynamic and temporal relation, the conceptual model proposed in this research resembles an evolving identity construction bounded within the migration journey.

This section has presented a novel theory and conceptual model describing the bidirectional relationship between identity and meaning of work for refugees. Through anchors, refugeehood, and place identity, refugees actively construct and reconstruct their sense of self throughout the migration journey, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by their work meanings. The insider-outsider continuum provides the dynamic mechanism through which this bidirectional relationship operates, allowing strategic navigation of social positions according to context and desired outcomes. The conceptual model presented in Figure 6.1 visually represents these relationships as a snapshot in time. Temporal complexity adds another dimension, revealing how refugees navigate past connections, present realities, and future aspirations simultaneously, with imagination serving as a powerful mechanism for constructing identity from unlived experiences. The bidirectional relationship theory and its model help advance our understanding beyond conventional theories by centring refugees' agency and subjectivity while acknowledging the structural constraints they navigate. The interaction between agency and the power structures that permeate refugees' migration journeys in the context of work forms part of the discussion in the next section. Work integration of refugee-background individuals in New Zealand is analysed next, integrating emergent concepts from the three participant groups in this study – refugees, M&Ms and PWPs.

6.2 Relational work integration – a site of identity and meaning of work construction

Having established the bidirectional relationship between identity and work meanings in Section 6.1, this section explores how work integration serves as a critical site where this relationship unfolds in practice. Work integration represents more than employment access – it becomes a space where refugee-background individuals actively negotiate insider-outsider positions while multiple stakeholders influence both identity and work meaning constructions. The findings reveal that sustainable work integration requires relational processes (i.e., relational work integration) involving refugee-background individuals' resourcefulness strategies interacting with the support strategies of M&Ms and PWPs. This relational approach directly influences the bidirectional identity and meaning of work nexus by creating contexts

where refugee-background individuals can strategically reposition themselves while maintaining identity authenticity.

In this section, findings from refugee participants, M&Ms and PWPs are synthesised to explore how relational work integration contributes to identity and meaning of work constructions. First, the relational work integration concept is introduced. Next, key aspects of relational work integration are analysed. The section concludes by presenting a relational work integration framework (Figure 6.2) that builds on the bidirectional relationship theory.

6.2.1 Understanding relational work integration

This sub-section explores how workplace integration for refugee-background individuals extends beyond traditional employment boundaries to encompass broader sites of work and integration. I demonstrate how integration strategies foster both belonging and uniqueness and expand existing conceptualisations of work integration.

Workplace integration, the process through which refugee-background individuals gain access to work and through work achieve integration in the host society (e.g., Bešić et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2020; Hirst et al., 2023; Loon & Vitale, 2021), builds upon Ager and Strang's (2008) identification of employment as a marker and means of integration. However, my research extends this understanding by demonstrating that various 'sites of work' beyond formal workplaces can serve as spaces where integration is fostered. Most workplace integration scholarship emphasises belonging (Guo et al., 2020), which enhances refugees' wellbeing (Chartered Institute of Professional Development Trust, 2025). In this study, strategies employed by M&Ms and PWPs worked together to foster belonging, influencing place identity construction so that New Zealand becomes a place where refugee-background individuals can belong. However, belonging alone is insufficient. As Shore et al. (2011) argue, inclusion requires consideration of both uniqueness and belongingness in diversity management. My research demonstrates this through 'changing the narratives' strategies that help refugee-background individuals maintain both their refugeehood identity and sense of self, while M&Ms and PWPs counter negative refugee stereotypes by promoting narratives of refugee-background individuals as skilled and tenacious humans.

Integration at work extends beyond physical and digital workplace boundaries, encompassing diverse work forms including unpaid activities, entrepreneurship, and volunteer work.

Examples include PWPs supporting women learning to sew without employment aspirations, and mentors assisting with entrepreneurial ventures. This aligns with other scholars' recognition of diverse work forms in refugee employment research (e.g., Diedrich & Omanović, 2023; Hirst et al., 2023; Knappert et al., 2020; Obschonka et al., 2018; Pietka-Nykaza, 2015). This broader lens reveals the often-invisible work roles refugee-background individuals perform and their resourcefulness, providing insights into meaningful work that can guide employers and service providers in creating sustainable employment that utilises refugees' full capabilities.

These findings highlight that work integration is not merely an individual achievement but emerges through complex interactions between refugee-background individuals, employers, mentors, and service providers, pointing to its fundamentally relational nature. This broader understanding of work integration is theoretically significant because it creates multiple sites where the bidirectional identity-work meaning relationship can unfold. When work integration extends beyond formal employment to include volunteering, entrepreneurship, and unpaid activities, it provides refugee-background individuals with more opportunities to align work meanings with identity constructs, while simultaneously allowing work experiences to reshape identity in affirming ways.

6.2.2 Aspects of the relational process

A key contribution of my research is identifying work integration as a relational process involving refugee-background individuals, M&Ms and PWPs working together. Refugee participants deploy resourcefulness tactics throughout their migration journey, while M&Ms and PWPs implement work integration strategies during resettlement. In this sub-section, aspects of the relational process, including humanising narratives, mutual learning and inclusion, and creating opportunities despite and within structural constraints are described, together with the insight that work integration of refugee-background individuals requires an ecosystem perspective.

Management scholarship recognises various resource theories, including conservation of resources (COR) theory (e.g., Halbesleben et al., 2014), job demands-resources theory (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2016; Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023), and workplace resources (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2017). All these theories emphasise how individuals utilise resources at work. Building on this foundation, I conceptualised refugee participants' resources

– affective, economic, personal, physical, psychological, and social – into four resourcefulness tactics – exercising agency, demonstrating self-efficacy, finding alternative pathways, and remaining undeterred. Meanwhile, M&Ms and PWPs employed five dimensions to support work integration – access to work, capabilities development, changing narratives, social and cultural integration, and the meaning of work.

Resettlement research (e.g., E. S. Lee et al., 2020; Nardon et al., 2021) has made important contributions by highlighting the support needs of refugee-background individuals during integration. Drawing on these insights, my research more fully examines the agency, choices and resources that refugee-background individuals possess (cf. Zagor, 2015), which can be useful throughout their journeys. Refugees’ resourcefulness and its impact on meaningful work pursuit remains nascent in resettlement scholarship. As Knappert et al. (2020, 2023) highlight, individual-level actions are essential for understanding refugee employment complexities, and macro-level policies can only be impacted through such granular analysis. Management scholarship advocates for dialectic approaches between macro-, meso- and micro-layers in resettlement contexts (e.g., Bešić et al., 2022; Hirst et al., 2023; Knappert et al., 2020; Knappert et al., 2023; E. S. Lee et al., 2020; Loon & Vitale, 2021; Szkudlarek et al., 2021). This systems perspective reveals how resourcefulness tactics and integration strategies interact and influence each other to effect work integration.

6.2.2.1 Humanising narratives

A positive discourse in this thesis involved recognising refugees as humans rather than viewing them through deficit labels. Scholars (e.g., Smets et al., 2019) have noted that refugees are often depicted in dehumanising ways. Most M&M participants articulated a shared humanity with their refugee-background employees and mentees. This aligns with studies (e.g., Atkinson, 2018; Ortlieb & Ressi, 2022) that have found workplace actors perceiving refugees as humans like themselves fosters empathy, trust, and genuine learning. Refugee participants in my study also expressed their desire to be seen as human beings. Having experienced stigmatisation in New Zealand, a refugee participant Mehar pleaded, “We are human too.”

Empathy emerged as a significant driver for M&M and PWP participants’ willingness to work with refugee-background individuals. Their personal experiences influenced their openness to support refugee integration. As Manager #4 commented, “We are exactly the same. There’s no difference ... we are the same as all the refugees. I know that we’re not refugees, but we do

work hard like them exactly like them.” Beyond empathy, M&M and PWP participants were motivated by various factors – adding economic value by getting refugee-background individuals into paid work, fulfilling job or organisational requirements, moral imperatives, personal fulfilment, and reducing welfare dependency. These motivations align with existing research identifying corporate social responsibility (e.g., Knappert et al., 2020; Knappert et al., 2023; E. S. Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021; Ortlieb & Knappert, 2023), economic value (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023; Koyama, 2024), moral or humanitarian imperatives (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023; Szkudlarek et al., 2021), and personal fulfilment (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023) as key drivers for M&Ms and PWPs to engage with refugee-background individuals.

6.2.2.2 Mutual learning and inclusion

Mutual learning remains underexplored in the refugee work literature, despite being examined in refugee trauma management (e.g., Im & Swan, 2022) and education (e.g., Butler, 2007). Im and Swan (2022) describe mutual learning as a social process where resettlement service providers and refugees develop cultural competencies by learning from each other. In my study, mentors found themselves challenged in their personal beliefs, cultural assumptions, and mentoring styles when working with refugee-background individuals. Both mentors described learning about diverse cultures through their mentoring relationships, which informed their other work activities. Although the sample size in my study is small (two mentors), these findings resonate with research showing that mentoring creates two-way learning (e.g., Atkinson, 2018) and that peer-led models centred on mutual knowledge exchange benefit both mentors and refugee clients through building trust, self-efficacy, empowerment and confidence (e.g., Gower et al., 2022). However, mentoring is not a quick mechanism for refugees to become part of the labour market (e.g., Jaschke et al., 2022; Månsson & Delander, 2017). As Diedrich and Omanović (2023) propose, M&Ms must recognise the transitional spaces refugee-background individuals occupy – between mentoring and gaining work access – and create positive boundaries between organisational insiders and outsiders through mutual exchange and inclusion.

Research has provided valuable insights into the cultural adaptation challenges that refugee-background individuals encounter in host societies (e.g., Atkinson, 2018; Nardon et al., 2021), with studies documenting how workplace socialisation processes help refugee-background individuals understand organisational behaviours and regulations (e.g., E. S. Lee et al., 2020; Ortlieb & Ressi, 2022). Building on this important foundation, my research highlights the

mutual learning opportunities that emerge when workplace socialisation is understood as a two-way process. Managers in my study demonstrated flexibility by allowing more time for refugee-background individual employees to become socialised, recognising that language limitations, different cultural practices, and unfamiliarity with the new country required longer socialisation processes. Jamal, a refugee participant, highlighted that his manager and co-workers provided task-related and health and safety training using gestures and pictures to overcome language barriers. This contrasts with traditional organisational socialisation scholarship. According to T. Bauer et al.'s (2025), meta-analysis of organisational socialisation scholarship, proactive newcomer behaviour is key to successful workplace integration. In my research it was the *managers* who engaged in proactive behaviours, such as daily check-ins, upfront (sometimes iterative) explanations of practices, and individualised approaches, to support refugee-background individual employees' socialisation. T. Bauer et al. (2025) note that organisational insiders may assist socialisation endeavours through individualised approaches, a strategy also found in my research.

Mutual learning characterised inclusive practices for refugee participants in my study, particularly in how managers approached workplace integration. Non-generalised organisational practices emerged as one way to include refugee-background individuals in the workplace. Some managers such as Manager #2 and Manager #7 encouraged avoiding cultural stereotyping, instead emphasising each individual's unique cultural requirements. A situation described by Mentor #1 exemplifies this approach. His mentee was put through a performance improvement process by his employer but remained undeterred and converted it into a positive work outcome. However, closer examination revealed that the organisation's practices had assumed non-performance was the problem when cultural incongruity was at the heart of the issue. This situation instigated a human resource management (HRM) review of diversity and inclusion policies to improve diverse cultural understandings.

This example demonstrates what Loon and Vitale (2021, p. 1090) describe as cultural intelligence: "the capability to observe, interpret, and act upon unfamiliar and ambiguous social and cultural cues". Thus, cultural intelligence is distinct from an organisation's diversity and inclusion climate, which provides the structural capacity for inclusion. Cultural intelligence represents the individual-level capability to navigate cultural differences. Both are necessary and complementary. Organisational climate creates the supportive environment, while cultural intelligence enables managers to respond appropriately to specific cultural situations. Mutual

learning that encourages cultural intelligence is thus essential when standard organisational practices fail to integrate refugee-background individuals effectively.

Trust- and relationship-building between managers and refugee-background employees receives limited attention in management literature. While Hirst et al. (2023) emphasise partnerships between employers and resettlement service providers, and E. S. Lee et al. (2020) highlight refugee community relationships, my study reveals that direct trust and relationships between managers and refugee-background employees are crucial for positive work outcomes and inclusive practices. Management scholarship (e.g., Hirst et al., 2023; E. S. Lee et al., 2020; E. S. Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021) has established the significance of HRM practices and policies in facilitating refugee-background individuals' inclusion. Given that formal diversity and inclusion practices with refugee employees have yielded mixed results (e.g., Ortlieb et al., 2020; Ponzoni et al., 2017), there is an opportunity to explore how workplace inclusion can be strengthened through complementary approaches beyond HRM structures. My research found that line managers had greater influence on including refugee-background individuals in the workplace through their own initiatives that engaged employees and built inclusive environments. Importantly, individual-level cultural intelligence – as demonstrated in the socialisation processes discussed above – works hand in hand with organisational-level HRM practices that management scholars (e.g., Hirst et al., 2023; E. S. Lee et al., 2020; E. S. Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021) advocate for. Just as socialisation requires both individual manager adaptation and organisational support structures, inclusion through trust-building similarly benefits from this dual approach. While HRM remains important for countering discriminatory practices at the organisational level (e.g., Loon & Vitale, 2021), the actions of individual managers proved more immediately impactful for day-to-day inclusion experiences. The most effective inclusion occurs when individual managers' cultural intelligence and relationship-building efforts are supported by robust organisational diversity and inclusion frameworks.

6.2.2.3 Creating opportunities despite and within structural constraints

Refugee participants in my study exercised agency, defined as “acts that seem appropriate to [refugees] in response to difficult or even hazardous times” (Renkens et al., 2022, p. 2), through adaptability and autonomy across their migration journeys. In displacement contexts, refugee participants demonstrated adaptability by creating opportunities despite restrictions. At least three participants had worked as language interpreters for the IOM or UNHCR in camps, while

two had developed self-enterprises to serve consumer needs within their camps, consistent with findings by scholars (e.g., Betts et al., 2019; Hasan et al., 2024; Ikanda, 2018).

In urban displacement contexts, some participants worked in the informal sector, despite institutional barriers, as demonstrated in other studies (e.g., Earle & Brown, 2024; Jacobsen, 2006; Wake & Barbelet, 2020). These findings demonstrate the dialectic between agency and structure, with refugees inhabiting an “in-between position [that] makes them more resourceful in thinking and acting outside the given structures” (Ghorashi et al., 2018, p. 385). In resettlement, refugee participants continued navigating barriers through creating work opportunities despite institutional and political inhibitors. This adaptability was evident in the stepping-stone concept identified by both M&Ms and PWPs, where refugee-background individuals seized immediate opportunities, such as volunteering and internships, that led to future possibilities. This agency represents both micro-emancipation and everyday practice (e.g., Kanal & Rottmann, 2021; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007), revealing that refugee-background individuals not only acted to emancipate themselves but also challenged generic conceptions of refugees as people without choice.

Refugee participants’ ability to find alternative pathways worked in conjunction with the access-to-work strategies employed by M&Ms and PWPs, which involved removing controllable barriers and identifying individual needs. However, discrepancies emerged between what refugee participants experienced and what stakeholders perceived as fair processes. Some managers recognising, as Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. (2018) note, that recruitment practices differed between COOs and resettlement societies, undertook familiarising employees with employment contracts and fair work practices. Nevertheless, one refugee participant described being recruited into roles well below his qualifications without clear communication from his employer. Most managers attempted to reduce barriers to entry, resonating with Pio et al.’s (2021) findings. Diedrich and Styrhe (2013) and Ortlieb and Knappert (2023) note that inaccurate assessment of migrants’ skills often leads to unsatisfactory employment outcomes. PWPs who spent more time with clients (12 weeks to 18 months) better understood individual needs and identified suitable pathways to work. This individualised focus was time-enabled or time-restricted, highlighting that while PWPs were not incentivised for job placements, funding limitations constrained ongoing support for those requiring longer preparation periods.

Refugee participants' self-efficacy, defined as the confidence in one's abilities to achieve goals (e.g., Loon & Vitale, 2021; Pajic et al., 2018), developed across displacement and resettlement contexts. In displacement, participants learned new skills or utilised existing skills in new roles, akin to the Syrian women transforming farming skills into business enterprises observed by Hasan et al. (2024). This self-efficacy materialised more fully in resettlement, leading to entrepreneurial actions, resonating with Ranabahu et al.'s (2024) findings. Refugee participants' self-efficacy intertwined with the capability development strategies of M&Ms and PWPs through autonomy-oriented assistance, which Echterhoff et al. (2022) define as a delicate empowerment process maintaining boundaries. Thus, refugee participants learned independence while receiving support. Managers in my study engaged in empowering practices focused on fostering achievement and rebuilding self-confidence. This was enabled by recognising their employees' existing capabilities and potential, consistent with the perspectives of Ortlieb and Knappert (2023) and Pesch et al. (2023). However, akin to Dykstra-DeVette and Canary's (2019) findings, some PWPs in my study did things for clients rather than teaching them skills. Resource constraints, coupled with a genuine desire to assist, motivated these non-empowerment practices. Most effective were approaches that recognised capabilities rather than apply a vulnerability lens, consistent with the findings of Khan-Gokkaya and Mosko (2020) and Pesch et al. (2023). At least 50% of my refugee participants had managers identify their potential and provide opportunities ranging from creating specific roles to offering scholarships and encouraging leadership development.

The tactic of remaining undeterred used by other refugee participants in this study worked in parallel with the attempts of M&Ms and PWPs to discard victimhood. In the present study, remaining undeterred was associated with risk-taking behaviour. Some refugee participants took risks not only in entrepreneurial endeavours but also while working in restrictive displacement contexts. Risk-taking behaviour among refugees in resettlement resulted in stronger associations with organisational insider-ness (e.g., Schaubroeck et al., 2022) and pursuit of entrepreneurship (e.g., Freiling & Harima, 2019). In a similar fashion, both mentors in the present study described their mentees overcoming obstacles either in their employment or business endeavours through determination. However, in line with the views of Hirst et al. (2023) and Wehrle et al. (2024), it is important to pay attention to contexts that influence refugees. Not all refugee participants reported the same level of risk-taking and self-regulatory behaviours as refugee participant Akram, who worked and studied fulltime for six years while also managing his household in New Zealand and providing support to others in his COO.

Refugee-background individuals' skills and experiences are not homogenous, and those assisting them in resettlement work contexts may need to be cognisant of each person's individual circumstances.

The integrated review of refugee participants' resourcefulness and strategies utilised by M&Ms and PWPs extends the applicability of the capability lens proposed by Guo et al. (2020) and Pesch et al. (2023) beyond management studies to resettlement services and policy scholarship. The findings from the present study reveal strategies that M&Ms and PWPs can utilise to implement the blended approach that is increasingly being called for. Knappert et al. (2023) highlighted that perseverance from refugees, employers, and support organisations was necessary to achieve refugee employment. In the same vein, the strategies outlined in this section can be unsuccessful if those involved did not persist in their endeavours. Managers in this study had worked with refugee-background individuals on average for 11 years and were still engaged in assisting refugees become integrated at work. Mentors had spent on average two years with refugee-background individuals, while PWPs averaged five years. Some of the strategies revealed by these cohorts could be attributed to the know-how that comes with experience, as well as perseverance, as noted by Knappert et al. (2023).

These insights about the importance of experience, perseverance, and collaborative strategies across all stakeholders point toward the need for a systematic approach to supporting refugee work integration. The following framework synthesises these findings to demonstrate how such collaborative approaches can be operationalised.

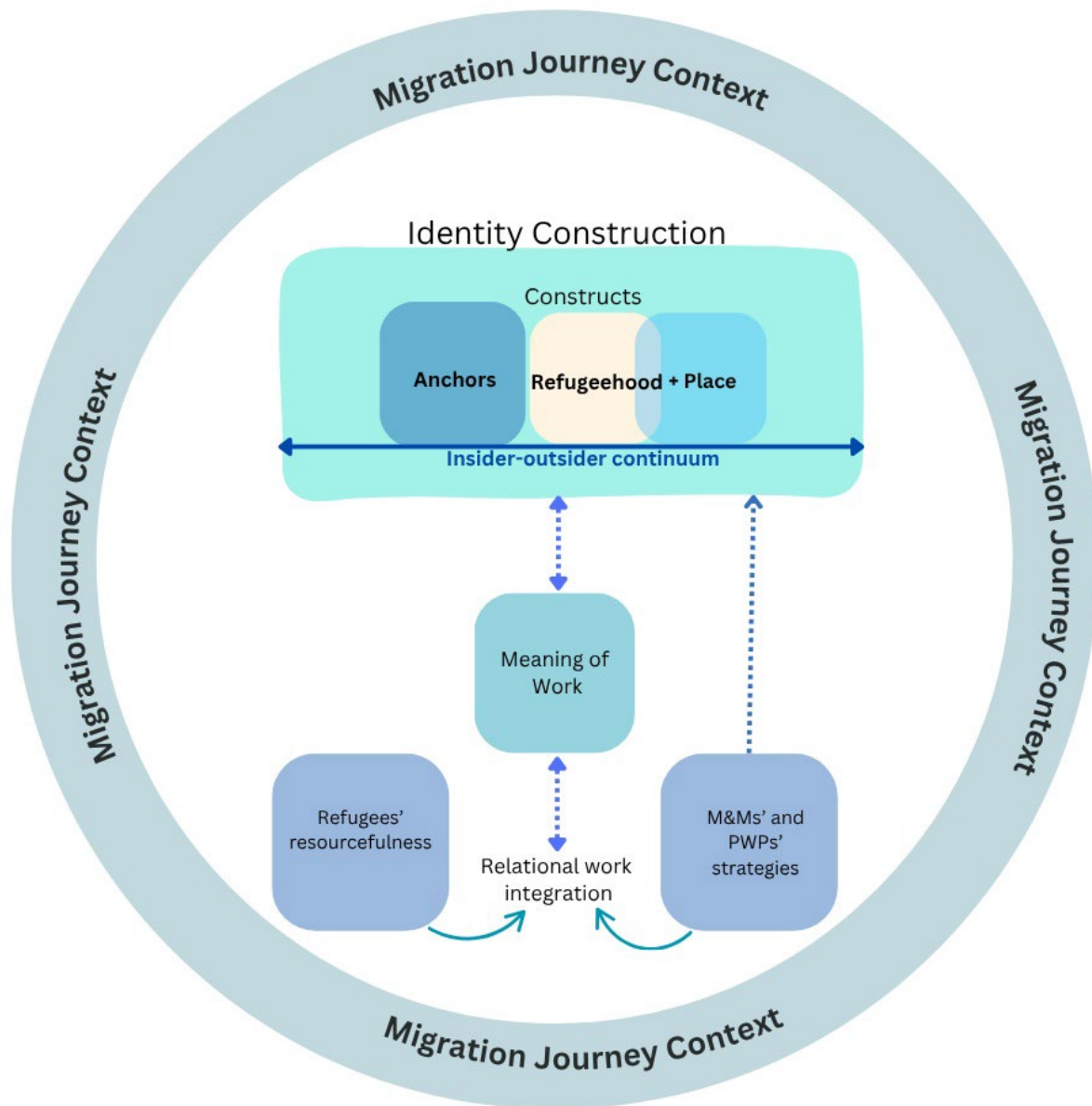
6.2.3 A framework for relational work integration

This section synthesises the key findings from my research to present a comprehensive framework for relational work integration (Figure 6.2). Building on the bidirectional nexus of identity and the meaning of work and its corresponding conceptual model (Figure 6.1), this section integrates refugees' resourcefulness and the strategies of M&Ms and PWPs identified earlier. The discussion extends to show how M&Ms and PWPs actively influence refugee-background individuals' identity navigation processes, while refugees themselves exercise temporal agency through resourcefulness strategies. Figure 6.2 demonstrates how relational work integration serves as the practical mechanism through which the bidirectional identity-work meaning relationship operates in resettlement contexts. While Figure 6.1 shows the theoretical relationship between identity constructs and work meanings (i.e., a model), Figure

6.2 reveals the stakeholder ecosystem required to support this relationship in practice (i.e., a framework).

Figure 6.2

Proposed framework for relational work integration



The framework shows how refugees' resourcefulness strategies interact dynamically with the support strategies of M&Ms and PWPs to create conditions where the bidirectional relationship can flourish. These interconnected processes create the relational conditions necessary for sustainable work integration that supports both identity development and meaningful employment. This framework matters theoretically because it reveals that the bidirectional

identity and meaning of work relationship cannot operate in isolation. Refugee-background individuals require relational support to navigate the insider-outsider continuum effectively. This shows that sustainable outcomes require ecosystem-level interventions that support both identity authenticity *and* work integration simultaneously.

These theoretical insights translate into practical implications for how the relational work integration could be approached. Work integration for refugees extends beyond mere employment access, functioning as a critical mechanism for meaning-making and identity construction. Szkudlarek et al. (2021, p. 473) state that “workplace integration and meaningful employment are key to the successful adjustment of all newcomers ... including refugees”. The bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work, as established earlier, is also evident in the relational work integration process. The framework demonstrates two key pathways that operationalise the ecosystem interventions. First, relational work integration influences meaning of work constructions through the stepping-stone concept, which produces provisional meaning. This pathway, represented by the blue dashed reciprocal arrow in Figure 6.2, shows how provisional meanings of work in turn further influence refugees’ work integration. Second, the strategic interventions of M&Ms and PWP’s influence identity construction through the changing narratives strategy. This pathway, depicted by the single directional arrow in Figure 6.2, reshapes dominant discourses and creates space for more authentic identity expression within work contexts.

The relational nature of work integration thus enables the bidirectional identity and meaning of work relationship by creating supportive contexts where refugee-background individuals can strategically navigate identity and work meaning constructions. Without stakeholder support, refugee-background individuals might remain trapped in outsider positions that constrain both identity expression and meaningful work access. The ecosystem approach transforms work integration from an individual struggle into a collective process that actively supports identity-work meaning bidirectionality. The framework operates through several interconnected mechanisms that support the bidirectional identity and meaning of work relationship. The first of these mechanisms involves understanding how relational work integration functions as a meaning-making process.

6.2.3.1 Relational work integration as meaning-making

Several scholars (e.g., Loon & Vitale, 2021; Nardon et al., 2021; Szkudlarek et al., 2021; Wehrle et al., 2024) have drawn attention to meaningful employment being relevant to the work integration of refugee-background individuals. My research reveals that meaning extends beyond formal employment to encompass refugees' broader constructions of purpose and identity through work. As refugee participants navigated the insider-outsider continuum, work became a vehicle for positioning themselves as valuable contributors to society not only in economic but also in social ways, such as community service. This repositioning was facilitated by M&Ms and PWPs who utilised strategies of transitory work, identifying growth potential and repurposing skills to create meaningful stepping stones for refugee-background individuals. Transitioning work is an insight only recently acknowledged in management scholarship (e.g., Nardon et al., 2021; Wehrle et al., 2024). Nardon et al. (2021) focused on sense-giving practices of resettlement service organisations and found refugees' identity work involved, *inter alia*, the recrafting of new identities and bracketing the present as a phase in transition. The strategies of identifying growth potential and repurposing work, as found in the present study, have remained unexplored in the refugee scholarship on work integration. M&Ms focused on assisting their refugee-background employees and mentees to get into the workplace, performing any work role, which provided a stepping stone either into work related to their past careers or new work roles. The stepping stone in my study was conceptualised as a reinvention and transitioning of the self, extending the work of Nardon et al. (2021) while also bringing in the lens of the meaning of work. This expanded understanding of work meaning operating through the stepping-stone concept bridges work integration and meaning of work through provisional meaning formation.

The stepping-stone concept enables provisional meaning formation by allowing refugee-background individuals to construct meanings in current work roles through their anticipated function as pathways to future opportunities. M&Ms and PWPs observed how refugee-background individuals often constructed meaning for their current work roles, not primarily through the work itself, but what these roles represented for their work trajectories. Manager #9's experience with a former lawyer who temporarily worked as a project manager before returning to legal practice exemplifies this temporal dimension – the alternative work held meaning primarily for what it represented in the journey towards reclaiming a salient identity in the future. The stepping-stone approach provides evidence for how meaning formation

occurs through anticipated interaction, with identity constructs guiding both the initial provisional meaning and its subsequent evolution through reflective experience. This dynamic process extends Blumer's (1969) view of meanings emerging through the reflective self by revealing how meaning-making for refugees involves anticipatory dimensions that precede actual interaction with the work context. Provisional meaning thus reveals the embedded temporality within work meaning construction (as earlier highlighted in sub-section 6.1.7.3), demonstrating the temporal complexity inherent in the bidirectional identity and meaning of work relationship. Wehrle et al. (2024) highlighted that the role of temporality in understanding meaning-making of work remains underexplored. In their study, Wehrle et al. (2024) established that refugees utilised temporality to envision their future selves at work. The phenomenon Wehrle et al. (2024) identified, which remains little examined in refugees at work studies, is what I term 'provisional meaning', materialising through the stepping-stone concept.

Beyond enabling provisional meaning formation, the stepping-stone concept influences identity construction by allowing refugee-background individuals to maintain connection to past identities while developing new ones through transitional work experiences. Refugee-background individuals use stepping-stone work to bridge past expertise with emerging possibilities, allowing multiple identity constructs to remain active simultaneously, as discussed in section 6.1. Fedrigo et al. (2022) found that some participants were interested in working in general rather than in a specific occupation. In contrast, Bishop and Purcell (2013) found horticulture work being meaningful as it was linked to refugees' pasts. My study's findings are consistent with both Bishop and Purcell (2013) and Fedrigo et al. (2022). This identity construction process through stepping-stone work does not occur in isolation but is significantly shaped by the stakeholders who facilitate these transitional experiences and influence how refugee-background individuals navigate their evolving identities in resettlement contexts.

6.2.3.2 Stakeholder influence on identity navigation

In resettlement contexts, M&Ms and PWPs employed interconnected strategies that simultaneously challenged negative narratives about refugeehood and built refugee-background individuals' self-belief. The cultural and political contexts of resettlement countries significantly influence perceptions of refugees. For example, Coen (2025) found differential treatment between Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in the United States. Against a backdrop of somewhat pejorative societal discourses in New Zealand, M&Ms and PWPs

implemented multifaceted approaches that addressed both external perceptions and refugee-background individuals' internal self-concepts. However, despite their efforts to effect change on pejorative narratives and perceptions, M&Ms and PWPs were limited by broader structural constraints and societal discourses that continue to 'other' refugee-background individuals, an insight also proffered by Knappert et al. (2023).

M&Ms primarily employed humanising approaches that deliberately countered the othering of refugees. First, M&Ms recognised refugee-background individuals' personhood beyond labels. Many M&Ms articulated that refugee-background individuals were just humans, employees or residents of New Zealand, deliberately rejecting the categorical othering documented in similar contexts (e.g., Koyama, 2024; Ortlieb et al., 2021). This approach validated identity anchors beyond refugeehood. As established earlier, recognising a shared humanity was an identity anchor for refugee participants in my study. Although the M&M participant cohort was not aware of this as an integral identity construct for refugee-background individuals, they inadvertently emphasised seeing their employees through a shared humanity lens.

Secondly, M&Ms engaged in creating bias-free environments. Some M&Ms reported employing refugee-background individuals with no prior knowledge of their refugeehood, creating what Knappert et al. (2023) term a bias-free workplace. By removing refugeehood as the primary lens for interaction, this approach allowed other identity constructs to take precedence in the workplace, such as relationships (through building trust, which was highlighted in Chapter 5). Other M&M participants encouraged refugee-background employees to move beyond their refugeehood in the workplace and tap into other skills and abilities for better employment opportunities. As de Jong (2019) highlights, refugees often face glass ceilings when pursuing work relevant to their refugeehood. Finally, M&Ms actively worked to remove controllable barriers to work for refugee-background individuals, addressing obstacles that positioned them as outsiders in professional contexts. These interventions included questioning the superiority of New Zealand standards to validate international qualifications and experiences, thereby directly challenging credential devaluation, which undermines professional identity.

PWPs focused more explicitly on interventions that challenged dependency narratives associated with refugeehood. First, PWPs attempted to transform refugeehood narratives. PWPs' practices largely pertained to discarding victimhood and dependency and becoming

self-sufficient, directly countering the welfare-dependency perceptions documented by numerous scholars (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; Bottura & Mancini, 2016; Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003). This approach addresses how refugeehood is conceptualised, transforming it from a passive status to an active identity construct. Second, PWPs positioned refugee-background clients as skilled and hardworking valuable workers to potential employers, in alignment with the findings in Koyama's (2024) study. However, my study also found contradictions within these approaches. PWPs' practices of enabling refugee-background clients to position themselves as workplace insiders (employable, locals, skilled) were perceived as unproductive endeavours by the PWPs themselves, which they attributed to potential employers being wary of and inexperienced in employing people from different cultures. Moreover, the imprint of negative societal discourses, which also prevented refugee-background individuals' access to work, was evident not only with employers that PWPs worked with, but in PWPs' own views of refugees as well. Four PWPs perceived refugee-background clients as victims and dependent on the welfare system, while one participant also assigned responsibility to New Zealand's welfare policy for creating such dependence.

These findings illuminate the complexity entrenched in refugeehood as a stigmatised identity from a national welfare policy perspective, an issue highlighted by Ghorashi (2005) and Ortlieb and Knappert (2023). The stigmatisation creates a paradox for work integration. Ortlieb and Knappert (2023, p. 12) recommend that workplace actors in resettlement countries "dissolve the refugee category" because its associated connotations tend to emphasise refugees' vulnerabilities. However, this categorisation also creates employment opportunities by positioning refugees as people deserving of support (Ortlieb & Knappert, 2023). This paradox manifests in workplace dynamics. Tomlinson and Egan (2002, p. 1041) found that the continued identification as a refugee creates a tension between being an "acceptable" employee and being seen as "different ... deserving, worthy". This dual positioning perpetuates the otherness of refugees in work contexts. The present study agrees with these scholars' observations but offers the insight that dissolving refugeehood would negatively impact refugee-background individuals' identities. As established earlier, refugeehood serves as a significant identity construct for participants in this study. The challenge therefore lies in honouring refugeehood as a meaningful identity component while preventing it from constraining work integration.

While stakeholder efforts to influence identity navigation provide crucial external support, refugees employ complementary strategies rooted in resourcefulness and temporal thinking that enable them to navigate identity and work meaning constructions.

6.2.3.3 Temporality of resourcefulness

Resourcefulness strategies of finding alternative pathways and remaining undeterred were intertwined with the concepts of hope and patience. In addition to being instrumental in developing agency, as noted by A. Brown et al. (2024) and Snyder (1996), hope also entails ‘pathways thinking’ – the cognitive process of finding ways to do something. Pathways thinking manifested among my refugee participants in two distinct but related ways. First, remaining undeterred represented a sustained commitment to achieving goals despite obstacles – participants maintained focus on their intended outcomes while persevering through challenges. Second, finding alternative pathways involved cognitive flexibility when original routes were blocked – participants identified new methods or routes to achieve the same objectives when initial approaches proved unsuccessful. Both manifestations share the core element of hope manifesting in pathways thinking – the belief that routes to goals exist and can be discovered or created, even when current circumstances present barriers.

In the present study, patience was evident as a form of self-regulation as well as a temporal practice, both of which enabled refugee participants to find alternative pathways to challenges encountered, and to remain undeterred in the pursuit of desired future outcomes. Patience has been understood as a form of self-regulation, resulting in perseverance (e.g., Sweeny, 2025), a hybrid personality construct related to religion and spirituality (e.g., Schnitker et al., 2017), and a temporal practice encompassing a commitment to anticipated future rewards alongside living with or reframing interpretations of the present circumstances (e.g., Hänsch, 2020; Sereke & Drzewiecka, 2025). Most refugee research tends to pay attention to resilience (e.g., Alkhaled, 2019; Loon & Vitale, 2021; Obschonka et al., 2018; Pajic et al., 2018), a construct that tends to position refugees as self-reliant people (Omata, 2023). Determination, on the other hand, as a future-oriented construct has been underexplored. Remaining undeterred, akin to Duckworth et al.’s (2021) concept of grit, presented itself among my refugee participants as a goal-focused and future-oriented construct, proactive in nature, underscored by the temporal aspect of patience. Remaining undeterred emerged in the context of power imbalances inherent in the migration journey in my study. Some refugee participants engaged in self-regulatory behaviours by doing what it took to achieve their desired goals, even if that meant subjecting

oneself to power imbalances. Refugee participants' agency manifested according to context, reflecting the temporal complexity of the insider-outsider continuum. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) also note the temporal elements of agency. This dynamic illustrates how the insider-outsider continuum functions as both constraint *and* opportunity – limiting available positions while simultaneously providing the mechanism through which refugees exercise agency in constructing identity and meaning through work.

The resourcefulness strategies employed by refugee-background individuals are most effective when combined with sustained stakeholder efforts in an integrated approach to work integration.

6.2.3.4 Systemic integration and sustained engagement

The convergence of stakeholder influence strategies and refugee resourcefulness creates a dynamic system where multiple actors work in concert to facilitate work integration. These integrated stakeholder strategies as employed by refugee participants, M&Ms and PWPs directly influence the bidirectional relationship by creating spaces where refugee-background individuals can strategically reposition themselves along the insider-outsider continuum. While stakeholder efforts remain constrained by broader structural factors, as Morrice (2011) noted, they nonetheless enable critical moments of agency within the bidirectional process. Knappert et al. (2023) highlighted that perseverance from refugees, employers, and support organisations was necessary to achieve refugee employment. In the same vein, the strategies outlined in this section will be unsuccessful if those involved do not persist in their endeavours. Managers in my study had worked with refugee-background individuals on average for 11 years and were still engaged in assisting refugees become integrated at work. Mentors had spent on average two years with refugee-background individuals, with PWPs averaging five years.

Refugee participants' resourcefulness combined with strategies utilised by M&Ms and PWPs extends the applicability of the capability lens proposed by Guo et al. (2020) and Pesch et al. (2023) beyond management studies to resettlement services and policy scholarship. The findings from my study reveal strategies that M&Ms and PWPs can utilise to implement the blended approach that is increasingly being called for. Mozetič (2022) noted that refugees' work integration represents an interplay of social structure and agency. Social structures that mould agency cannot remain rigid because agents can to a certain extent transform their surroundings (Mozetič, 2022). My study takes a similar view and demonstrates how M&Ms,

PWPs and refugee-background individuals can change social structures to an extent within the resettlement society to achieve work integration. The dialectic between the macro-, meso- and micro-layers in resettlement contexts to achieve work integration has been advocated in management scholarship pertaining to refugees at work (e.g., Bešić et al., 2022; Hirst et al., 2023; Knappert et al., 2020; Knappert et al., 2023; E. S. Lee et al., 2020; Loon & Vitale, 2021; Szkudlarek et al., 2021), making a systems perspective imperative for understanding stakeholder roles in moulding social structures.

Relational work integration for refugee-background individuals represents far more than economic participation – it is a complex process of meaning-making, identity negotiation, and agency expression within structural constraints. Relational work integration becomes one component of a broader belonging framework that influences identity construction, where resettlement contexts can become spaces where refugee-background individuals can belong and feel included. By recognising refugee-background individuals' resourcefulness while acknowledging the real barriers they face, my research offers a humanising perspective that can inform more effective and dignified approaches to supporting refugee-background individuals in their integration journeys.

6.3 Chapter conclusion

This thesis has explored the research question – *How are refugees' identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?* – by developing two interconnected theoretical contributions that capture the complexities of refugees' experiences.

The core theoretical contribution is a grounded theory describing the bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work constructions throughout refugees' migration journeys. Charmaz (2014a, p. 239) states that constructivist grounded theorists “study how – and sometimes why – participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations”. This theory demonstrates that identity constructs (anchors, refugeehood, place) actively shape work meanings while work meanings simultaneously reshape identity constructs through the dynamic insider-outsider continuum. This contribution builds upon and extends existing theoretical understanding by illuminating how this bidirectional relationship evolves across contexts and time, adding temporal and contextual dimensions to identity and meaning-of-work scholarship. Existing research has established important connections between work and identity among refugees, including how self-concepts are shaped through work (e.g., Davey &

Jones, 2020; Morrice, 2011; Wehrle et al., 2018; Willott & Stevenson, 2013) and how identity is linked to professional roles. The present study contributes additional theoretical insight by revealing the bidirectional nature of these relationships. The findings suggest that identity constructs are not merely influenced by work experiences but actively shape the meanings that work holds for refugees, creating a dynamic, evolving relationship that enriches understandings of both identity development and meaning-making processes in migration contexts.

This bidirectional relationship unfolds in practice through relational work integration – a process requiring ecosystem support from multiple stakeholders. Refugee participants' resourcefulness strategies (exercising agency, demonstrating self-efficacy, finding alternative pathways, remaining undeterred) complement the support strategies used by M&Ms and PWP. This relational approach directly influences the bidirectional identity and meaning of work nexus by creating contexts where refugee-background individuals can strategically navigate insider-outsider positions while maintaining identity authenticity. The temporal complexity identified throughout both the bidirectional relationship and relational work integration processes represents a contribution to identity and meaningful work literature, an area that is currently underdeveloped (Wehrle et al., 2024). Refugees simultaneously navigate past connections, present realities, and future aspirations, with imagination serving as a powerful mechanism for constructing identity from unlived experiences.

Together, these contributions advance theoretical understanding by challenging deficit-focused approaches. Instead, this research reveals refugees as active agents in identity and work meaning constructions, while acknowledging the crucial role of supportive stakeholder relationships. Zhang et al. (2023) call for an exploration of relational sources of the meaningfulness of work, and the perspectives of the M&Ms and PWP in this study help illuminate this under-researched area. The migration journey framework provides essential context for understanding how disrupted temporal and spatial conditions create unique circumstances where identity constructs become particularly salient as work-meaning drivers. The theory and framework together offer practical insights for managers, mentors, and service providers seeking to create more effective and dignified approaches to supporting refugee-background individuals in their integration journeys.

This research also reveals that individual actions by M&Ms and PWP contribute to what Knappert et al. (2023) call the ecosystem of refugee employment. While extant research

focuses on meso- and macro-level policy and changes, it often overlooks individuals at the micro-level who collectively contribute to meso- and macro-level systems, practices and policies. As Knappert et al. (2023) note, a micro-foundational perspective can generate theoretical insights useful for addressing macro-level challenges.

Having presented a theory, conceptual model, and relational work integration framework of refugees' identity and work meaning constructions, I now move on to the final chapter of this thesis, which explores this study's contributions to knowledge, limitations, and implications for practice and future research.

Chapter 7 Contributions, implications, limitations, and future research directions

7.0 Chapter overview

The current research sought to understand how refugees' identities are constructed throughout their migration journeys and in the context of work in New Zealand, their resettlement country. Chapters 4 to 6 have presented an analysis and critical discussion of refugee participants' experiences alongside perspectives from managers and mentors (M&Ms) and pathways-to-work providers (PWPs). This final chapter presents the study's contributions to research and theory, implications for practice, research limitations, and directions for future research.

7.1 Contributions to research and theory

This research makes several important theoretical contributions to current understandings of refugees' identity constructions and the meaning of work. Chapter 6 presented a novel conceptual model that explains the proposed theory of a bidirectional relationship, underscored by temporality, between refugee participants' identity and their meaning of work constructions throughout their migration journey. This theory holds that refugees actively construct versions of selves utilising an insider-outsider continuum, with identity anchors serving as stability-providing elements while emergent constructs of refugeehood and place identity provide added layers to their identities. Together, these constructs lead to a multifaceted identity-formation process which enables refugees to hold different and sometimes conflicting versions of themselves across time and space. The following sections discuss the specific contributions of this research to the fields of identity, management, and refugee studies.

7.1.1 Identity scholarship

A significant contribution to identity literature lies in the conceptualisation of six distinct identity anchors. As Shahimi et al. (2024) point out, cultural backgrounds and religions of refugee youth play an integral role in their identity constructions. This study reveals significant identity-contributing aspects such as interconnectedness, language, morality, relationships, and sociocultural heritage. These anchors provide an understanding of identity construction beyond traditional Western theoretical frameworks that emphasise individualism. This study contributes to a relatively small body of knowledge on non-Western identity constructs as articulated by Gaillard and Hughes (2014), Naude (2021) and Yin (2018). More specifically,

the findings show how identity constructs evolve over time, addressing a temporal dimension that has been identified as important in identity scholarship. Klimstra and Adams (2021) have posed these questions about temporal identity development in non-Western contexts, while Stets and Serpe (2013) have raised similar temporal questions within dominant Western identity scholarship. By demonstrating how refugees' identity constructs evolve across migration contexts and time, my study bridges these scholarly conversations. Refugee participants' identities pertaining to interconnectedness, relationships, sociocultural heritage, and spirituality provided stability to the participants throughout the migration journey while their salience and meaning varied according to context. These findings add insight to existing Western identity theories that assume identity transitions or transformations are necessary for adaptation to new environments (e.g., Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Beyond the dynamic stability provided by identity anchors, this research reveals important insights about agency in identity construction. Refugee participants actively rejected institutional labels rather than passively accepting them. Most participants created and maintained their own versions of self while recognising structural influences on their identification processes. The concept of ascribed identity, stemming from social identity theory, has been understood as a process through which societal evaluations are imposed on a person to be representative of their identity (e.g., Adeeko & Treanor, 2022; A. D. Brown, 2017). The present study demonstrates that these impositions were temporal and spatial – through the insider-outsider continuum. Refugee participants created their own meanings of the imposed identity of 'refugee', through subjective experiences of belonging and estrangement. Thus, the contribution here is that ascribed identity was not simply imposed but actively navigated through agency.

The insider-outsider continuum identified in this research serves as a critical mechanism for understanding identity construction processes throughout the migration journey and in workplace contexts. This continuum demonstrates how refugees actively negotiate rather than passively experience insider-outsider positions, challenging studies that portray refugees as passive recipients of outsider status (e.g., Tomlinson & Egan, 2002; Wehrle et al., 2018). The research reveals how refugees navigate paradoxes arising from identity constructs, highlighting the fluid, contextual nature of identity positions that extend beyond the social identity theory's in-and-out-group categorisations (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The temporal complexity of insider-outsider positions, which demonstrates how identity positions are both spatially and

temporally situated, extends existing identity frameworks by showing how refugees simultaneously occupy multiple identity positions along the insider-outsider continuum, influenced by identity constructs of anchors, refugeehood, and place. This conceptualisation contributes to answering Taghavi et al.'s (2024) call for refugee scholars to explore refugees' multiplicity of selves and their influence on work. While the identity work literature suggests identities undergo processes of constructing, restoring, preserving, improving or altering (e.g., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), and refugee research has explored concepts of identity crisis, reconstruction and resolution (e.g., Ertorer, 2014) or identity restructuring (e.g., Luimpöck, 2019), this research contributes the insight that refugees' identities can be fluid and held across time *and* space, not reduced to episodic identity processes that require reconstruction or resolution.

A novel contribution is the finding that imagination plays a crucial role in identity construction for individuals born in or spending formative years in displacement. These individuals create connections to unlived experiences through shared representations. This finding brings together the body of knowledge on imagination (e.g., Keltner & Stamkou, 2025) and identity constructions of refugees in the displacement context (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022), an intersection which, to the best of my knowledge, has thus far been unexplored. This contribution emphasises the need for interdisciplinary approaches within studies pertaining to refugee populations, which will be discussed shortly.

These conceptualisations of identity construction processes not only advance identity theory but also have profound implications for management scholarship, particularly regarding how refugees find meaning in work throughout their migration journeys.

7.1.2 Management scholarship

This research makes several significant contributions to management scholarship, particularly regarding the meaning of work. A key theoretical contribution is the theory of the meaning of work for refugee populations, which reveals a bidirectional relationship between identity and the meaning of work constructions. The proposed theory provides depth to current understandings by centring individuals' identity construction processes. This approach recognises refugees' voice and agency, revealing how they actively engage in work that is meaningful and aligned with their evolving identities. This individual-centered perspective

represents an emerging area in management studies. Recent research such as Wehrle et al. (2024) has begun to explore similar approaches.

This research offers a theoretical framework specifically tailored to refugees' unique experiences, contributing to addressing a significant gap in existing literature. Several refugee scholars have utilised existing meaning of work frameworks (e.g., Fedrigo et al., 2023; Wehrle et al., 2024) to understand refugee-background individuals' resettlement work experiences. The current thesis presents a theory and model attentive to the unique characteristics and experiences of refugee-background individuals, which existing meaning of work frameworks cannot fully capture due to their development being based on non-refugee populations. Additionally, this research contributes to the meaning of work scholarship by highlighting refugee-background individuals' transnational experiences across multiple countries. Very few meaning of work studies (e.g., Harpaz et al., 2002) have explored the transnational perspective. This research also demonstrates the evolution of work meaning over time, which represents a relatively new insight.

This study's identity lens conceptualises meaning of work as both cognitive and affective, responding to Rosso et al.'s (2010) call for affective strands of the meaning of work to be explored. The research identifies five interconnected themes of the meaning of work – being oneself and to be more, community service and social impact, family, survival, and the stepping stone. These themes demonstrate how work meanings evolve throughout the migration journey and connect intimately to identity constructs. The psychological resources refugee participants utilise add to cognitive conceptualisations, while the identity lens – demonstrated by being oneself and to be more, community service and social impact, and family categories – brings affective dimensions into focus. Additionally, the migration journey with its multitude of challenges related to identity, survival and resettlement adds depth to both affective and cognitive components of work meanings.

This research also extends existing scholarship by incorporating diverse types of work. First, it illuminates how meaning is constructed in informal and precarious work settings during displacement. As Hirst et al. (2023) note, research and theory development are needed to understand work meaning constructions among refugees engaged in transient, precarious and informal work. The present study responds to this call. Secondly, the conceptualisation of work in this thesis also highlights the need to extend boundaries on what constitutes work. This

insight adds to work conceptualisations of Stebelton (2012) and Taylor (2004), in addition to recent practitioner literature (e.g., Beierschoder, 2024; Hagel & Wooll, 2019). Consequently, the meaning of work scholarship is enriched through a study that has explored the concept through a holistic perspective on work.

Current refugees-at-work scholarship focuses predominantly on the labour market integration of refugees (e.g., Bešić et al., 2022; Nardon et al., 2021), with work integration recognised as fostering belonging (Guo et al., 2022). The current research reveals how M&Ms assist in creating work integration and offers strategies useful for managers of refugee-background individuals in work integration efforts. The contribution extends beyond work integration to reveal the identity and meaning of work nexus. While some recent studies have explored how employers may imprint dominant resettlement society narratives about refugees in workplaces (e.g., Ortlieb et al. 2020; Ponzoni et al., 2017), few have examined how managers can counter such perceptions and engage in practices enabling the meaning of work construction. A key insight was that workplace managers can enable identity constructions for refugee-background individuals through narrative-changing strategies, showing the active role managers can play in transforming pejorative or harmful narratives.

This study adds to meaningful work scholarship by highlighting the active role individuals play in creating the meaning of work. Refugees' resourcefulness facilitated the meaning of work constructions throughout their journeys. The emphasis has hitherto been on how organisations and managers can create meaningful work for their employees (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017), but the present study shows that individual actors can also instigate this process, sometimes constructing work meanings without assistance from employers and organisations. This contribution in turn extends the pragmatist management perspective introduced by Pesch and Ipek (2024). Paying attention to refugees' resourcefulness is instrumental in work integration, enabling the removal of the vulnerability lens that has been noted (e.g., Pesch & Ipek, 2024) to permeate managerial behaviours in refugees-at-work scholarship.

Furthermore, my study adds the lens of temporality that is useful in studying refugees' work experiences, filling a lacuna in meaningful work literature also highlighted by Tommasi et al. (2020) and Wehrle et al. (2024). Several scholars (e.g., Clayton & Vickers, 2019; Mozetič, 2022; Terzioglu, 2023) have highlighted the need for exploring refugee-background individuals' experiences through a temporal framework. Szkudlarek et al. (2024) note that

temporal aspects, a perspective that is currently missing in human resource management (HRM) scholarship, characterises not only refugees' journeys but also those of migrants', creating the need for HRM scholars to consider the temporality that underscores the experiences of these populations. My study demonstrates that temporality is not merely relevant but fundamentally embedded in every aspect of refugee-background individuals' journeys, including their resourcefulness. For refugee participants, temporality materialised, *inter alia*, as provisional meaning in the meaning of work construction and imagination in identity formation. By revealing how past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations continuously shape refugee-background individuals' work experiences, my research extends beyond existing calls for temporal consideration to provide empirical evidence of its centrality, thereby offering management scholarship insights on how time-based dynamics can illuminate complex migration-work relationships. Furthermore, the relational work integration framework captures some of this temporal complexity through the resourcefulness strategies that refugee participants undertook throughout their migration journey.

Finally, akin to Knappert et al. (2023), this research has revealed that individual actions from M&Ms contribute to an ecosystem of refugee-background individuals' employment. The relational work integration framework presented in Figure 6.2 provides this ecosystem perspective. Taking this further, the thesis provides insight into resources available to, or harnessed by, both refugee-background individuals and managers in resettlement work contexts to find pathways to meaningful work, leading to sustained work outcomes and continued sense of self for refugee-background individuals. Rather than expecting refugees to conform to societal expectations about appropriate work, this research demonstrates that focus should instead be on what work refugees themselves wish to pursue. This study examines the meaningfulness of jobs, even when work roles might not be perceived as 'quality' work (e.g., Ortlieb & Weiss, 2020) from a resettlement stakeholder's perspective. This contributes to management scholarship by reframing current understandings of what constitutes meaningful work to the perspectives of refugee-background individuals themselves.

In summary, this research expands management scholarship by reframing how we understand meaningful work through the experiences of refugee participants, highlighting the interplay between identity construction and work meaning throughout the migration journey. While the management perspective illuminates how individuals actively create meaning in diverse work

contexts and how managers can facilitate this process, these insights also have significant implications beyond management studies. The following section extends this discussion by examining how the proposed theory enriches refugee scholarship more broadly.

7.1.3 Refugee scholarship

The proposed theory significantly enhances refugee scholarship by offering a holistic perspective on the migration journey that integrates and extends the migration journey insights from previous studies. Building upon existing research on refugees' identities (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Bergquist et al., 2019; Dagg & Hauggard, 2016; Terzioglu, 2023; Tomlison & Egan, 2002), which has provided important understandings on the single phases of the migration journey, this research brings together multiple elements of the migration journey. This study synthesises the formative years in the country of origin (COO) or displaced/resettled settings, displacement experiences, and resettlement as an ongoing process into a comprehensive framework. Understanding these complex identity dynamics is crucial for developing effective support systems and interventions to promote refugee-background individuals' wellbeing during resettlement (Bergquist et al., 2019). By demonstrating how past, present, and future identity construction processes interconnect, this study advances refugee scholarship through a holistic understanding where temporal elements work together to shape identity development.

A second contribution is the insight that the experiences of coming into being, displacement, and resettlement can transpire in parallel, which is missing in current conceptualisations of the migration journey (e.g., BenEzer & Zetter, 2014; Milner & Khawaja, 2010; Slonim-Nevo & Lavie-Ajayi, 2017). While acknowledging that this body of scholarship is still at the embryonic stage, the journey has traditionally been understood to begin from the time of flight or the time that elapses while contemplating flight decisions (e.g., BenEzer & Zetter, 2014). The present study reveals that individuals born in displacement contexts such as refugee camps or transit countries find themselves embedded in the migration journeys initiated by their parents and family members. These individuals did not personally undertake the act of fleeing their homeland, yet they inherit the refugee status, legal precarity, and cultural dislocations associated with forced migration. Thus, even if they did not actively 'migrate' in the conventional sense – understood as the process of relocation from one place to another (e.g., Szkudlarek et al., 2021) – they nevertheless experience the consequences of the migration process that began before their birth. Their lives unfold within the continued trajectory of

displacement that their families initiated. This finding expands the conceptual boundaries of what constitutes refugee migration by highlighting that for some, migration is not a discrete event but rather an inherited circumstance that shapes their life course from birth.

This research also advances current understanding of refugeehood by conceptualising it as an intricate, fluid construct encompassing refugee-background individuals' agentic responses to externally ascribed labels, lived experiences within displacement and resettlement spaces, and imaginations of both past and future. Recently, scholars (e.g., Banko et al., 2022; Sajjad, 2018; Taghavi et al., 2024; Vigil & Abadi, 2018) have drawn attention to what constitutes refugeehood and its impacts on social and work integration in host societies. The conceptualisation of refugeehood in this study moves beyond humanitarian or legal conceptualisations to reveal the experiences embedded in the construct. By understanding refugeehood as proposed here, new spaces emerge for constructing a refugee identity discourse that acknowledges human agency, capabilities, and vulnerabilities, as also highlighted by Vigil and Abadi (2018). Combined with refugee participants' identity anchor of interconnectedness, this research contributes a shared humanity discourse, which emphasises the common experiences, needs, traits and values that unite all human beings, regardless of differences in ethnicity, nationality, religion, or other social categories – a discourse that enriches refugee resettlement scholarship.

While the conceptualisation of refugeehood addresses individual identity construction, this research also contributes important insights about the collective dimensions of refugees' experiences. It adds to existing refugee displacement scholarship (e.g., Alfadhil & Drury, 2018; Carpi et al., 2021) by recognising the significance of community bonds formed during displacement and how these become a means of mutual support. Refugee participants' identity anchors of interconnectedness and relationships in my research help explain why community is important to this population from their formative years and why they may find meaning in community-focused work during resettlement. Additionally, this research contributes to resettlement scholarship through exploring the subtleties of experienced (non-)settlement. Beyond focusing on livelihoods, settlement can be conceptualised as a higher-order psychological construct involving feeling *reconciled* to living in the resettlement country, despite being integrated in the host society. This reconciliatory state emerges from the profound realisation that one's uprootedness, due to forced migration, may persist throughout one's lifetime, even if one returned to one's COO. This distinct psychological dimension is often

missing in existing scholarship, which tends to position integration as the endpoint of resettlement, without acknowledging how individuals can be functionally integrated yet psychologically unsettled.

This study reveals that individuals engaged in meaningful work often demonstrate self-reliance beyond the narrow definitions espoused by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2011) and resettlement country policies (e.g., Garnier, 2023), which focus on the economic and social ability of individuals to meet basic needs with reduced long-term reliance on humanitarian or external assistance. A way to achieve self-reliance is for refugees to be trained to access local job markets and earn an income (Carpi et al., 2021). While refugees' work may not align with policy definitions of self-reliance, this research adds insights as to how individuals frequently demonstrate self-sufficiency through caring for family members and surviving without solely relying on humanitarian organisations or resettlement society institutions. This research thus contributes the insight that concepts of self-sufficiency can be more broadly defined to encompass diverse types of livelihoods where refugees demonstrate independence.

Another important contribution to refugee scholarship lies in challenging deficit narratives that position refugees as people with limited resources perpetually in need of help. While acknowledging that support is necessary in both displacement and resettlement contexts, this research highlights that many refugees possess significant resources utilised during their migration journeys to seek work, survive, and feel settled. As C. Bauer et al. (2021) note, refugees gain resources *because* of their migration journeys. This study advocates for a nuanced approach to resettlement that recognises diversity among refugee populations in terms of resourcefulness. Rather than viewing refugees through a deficit lens, attention should be contextualised to individuals and their available resources. Wehrle et al. (2019, p. 107) similarly observed that, despite impediments, “individuals can direct and actively shape their careers to re-build their work trajectories after the resettlement.”

The refugee resettlement literature is enriched through the present study through the strategies utilised by PWPs in integrating refugee-background individuals at work. The concept of the stepping stone is an important contribution, which entailed assisting refugee-background individuals to transition or reinvent themselves into work that was meaningful. Finally, this research highlights the applicability of the conservation of resources (COR) theory (e.g.,

Halbesleben et al., 2014) in refugee research, representing an interdisciplinary approach within refugee scholarship. The study extends COR theory by revealing how multiple resources can be mobilised in forced migration contexts and how different types of resources interact. A key process in COR theory is the ‘gain spiral’, whereby resources accumulate (Hobfoll, 2002; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). In highly restrictive contexts where immigration policies severely constrain access to work, and sometimes residency rights, when participants experienced loss spirals – which Hobfoll (2002) describes as resource depletion resulting in stress and further resource loss – many mobilised their agency to instigate gain spirals, which is a distinct contribution to COR theory made by this study. Finally, refugees at work scholarship in the resettlement context is enhanced by a new perspective on ‘refugee jobs’. This research shows a pathway for this scholarship to reframe negative connotations associated with refugee jobs to one that acknowledges refugees’ deliberate choice to pursue such work.

While these insights significantly enhance understandings of refugee experiences, this research also demonstrates the need for approaches that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, pointing towards the broader interdisciplinary contributions of this research.

7.1.4 Interdisciplinary contributions and methodological innovation

The contributions from this research form a coherent theoretical package that bridges identity scholarship, management literature, and refugee studies, creating connections that strengthen all three fields. Earlier, the interdisciplinary nature of this research was noted. Kanal and Rottmann (2021) advocate for an interdisciplinary approach to refugees’ experiences of migration and the contributions discussed thus far demonstrate why such an approach is not only relevant but necessary for comprehending the refugee experience. The application of psychological theories (like COR) to refugee contexts further demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches. This study adds to the growing management scholarship (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023; E. S. Lee et al., 2020) calling for interdisciplinary perspectives to achieve better work outcomes for refugee-background individuals. As E. S. Lee et al. (2020, p. 194) observe:

[R]efugee research is fragmented ... [which] poses significant hurdles for management scholars in conducting informed research that builds on existing knowledge ... interrelated findings across various disciplines point towards the need to review and systematise the

multidisciplinary insights on refugee employment in order to propose insightful research designs and provide relevant solutions.

A significant methodological contribution emerges from this research's innovative analytical approach. By combining Anthias's (2008) translocational positionality framework as an analytical tool within Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology, this study offers unique analytical capabilities. Translocational positionality, with its focus on intersecting social locations and contextual factors, complements CGT's emphasis on co-constructing meaning through data. Together, these approaches enabled a fine-grained analysis of both structure and agency in refugees' identity-formation processes. This combination enabled thorough explorations of how refugees navigate multiple social positions across different contexts (translocational positionality) while building theoretical explanations directly from participants' experiences (CGT). The methodological approach accommodated the complexity of refugee participants' experiences by allowing analysis that was simultaneously attentive to individual meaning-making processes, power dynamics and structural forces, and spatial and temporal dimensions across the migration journey. Integrating translocational positionality with CGT in this study helped create a methodological framework that enhanced the data analysis while honouring the spatial and positional complexities unique to refugees' experiences. This synergistic approach leveraged the theoretical depth of translocational positionality and the analytical rigour of CGT to generate nuanced and comprehensive insights pertinent to refugees' identity constructions. This thesis therefore presents, to the best of my knowledge, a novel methodological approach.

In conclusion, this research makes contributions across multiple disciplines. By developing a comprehensive theory of identity and the meaning of work constructions throughout the migration journey, this study advances understandings of refugees' experiences and offers pathways for more effective support and integration approaches that recognise agency, capability, and the multifaceted identity processes at work in refugees' lives. The following section presents the practical implications of this research for improving work outcomes for refugee-background individuals.

7.2 Implications for practice

The present study has revealed that understanding refugees' identity constructions enables a better understanding of what work they tend to pursue and why such pursuit is meaningful to

them. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) state that CGT research must have practical implications and be useful for the intended audience. In this section, implications pertinent to work(place) integration are discussed. The implications presented in this section tends to focus on employment and workplaces because these can be translated into workplace settings. Furthermore, some of the implications present a glimpse of how integration in the workplace can result in supporting refugee-background individuals into other forms of work that this thesis has explored. The implications for workplaces, M&Ms, PWPs, refugee-background individuals, and multi-stakeholders are discussed individually below.

7.2.1 Implications for refugee-background individuals

This research has revealed how refugee-background individuals strategically leverage their identity constructs when selecting work roles and pursuing meaningful employment opportunities. Their multilingual abilities, cross-cultural competencies, and transnational work experiences constituted valuable resources that informed their career decisions. As D'Angelo (2021, p. 496) demonstrates, refugees “exercise their agency by activating, re-shaping and re-building connections through time and space”. Utilising transnational networks as credible employment references can help overcome skill-validation barriers, as evidenced by one participant in my study who successfully secured employment in New Zealand from such a referral.

The concept of mutual learning (e.g., Im & Swan, 2022) extends to positioning refugee-background individuals as mentors rather than mentees. Through workplace mentoring or collaboration with resettlement organisations and employers, refugee-background individuals can contribute to developing effective work integration strategies. This collaborative approach benefits both future jobseekers and refugee-background individuals who assume mentoring roles, reinforcing their interconnectedness anchor while engaging in socially meaningful work. Refugees can intentionally pursue work guided by their identity constructs, demonstrate their agency, and advocate for the types of work they choose within their workplaces, when working with resettlement services providers in pursuing work opportunities and in work settings outside of the formal workplace. Furthermore, refugees can engage in challenging discriminatory practices through the subtle strategy of tempered radicals (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2023) identified in this research as well as more overt strategies of challenging policies and practices within their pathways to work that tend to situate them as passive agents.

Building on Knappert et al.'s (2023) multistakeholder framework, refugee-background individuals can maintain agency over how their identity constructs engage with work meanings, recognising integration as relational work requiring active participation and perseverance. Understanding the identity-work meaning nexus empowers refugee-background individuals to reframe success beyond economic participation, encompassing belonging, cultural wellbeing, and identity recognition. This comprehensive approach enables authentic meaning-making throughout the migration journey and allows participants to construct identities representing their authentic selves. As other scholars (e.g., Mozetič, 2018; Smets et al., 2019; Vigil & Abidi, 2018) note, refugeehood can be instrumental in identity construction without imposing limitations. Ultimately, refugee-background individuals can position themselves as valuable contributors within their employment ecosystem and broader resettlement outcomes.

7.2.2 Implications for workplaces

For organisations that currently employ refugee-background individuals or may do so in the future, the findings of this study suggest the need to recognise and value the complex identity constructs that inform refugee-background individuals' work choices and meanings, while also addressing practical barriers to their inclusion. Rather than viewing refugee-background individuals primarily through the lens of their legal status or assumed deficits, organisations should acknowledge the rich identity anchors that guide refugee-background individuals' decisions and actions. One implication for employing organisations is the need for cultural competencies training that incorporates understanding of identity anchors. Developing comprehensive cultural competency training is essential for organisations seeking to integrate refugee-background individuals effectively. Szkudlarek (2009) highlights that in business settings, there is a need for intercultural trainers to develop a new set of values through a dialogical process that incorporates divergent worldviews. Such an approach, if applied to understandings of refugee-background individuals' identity anchors, would help workplaces not only to improve their diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) policy and practices, but also integrate refugee-background individuals into work that is meaningful to them. Furthermore, DEI policy and practices could extend to recruitment and onboarding processes, where organisations can reduce controllable barriers by implementing practical accommodations, such as providing interview questions in advance, critically evaluating when language fluency is genuinely necessary for job performance and developing assessment methods that prioritise relevant skills over language proficiency.

While many workplace mentoring programmes already strive to address mentee needs, there remains room to further enhance these initiatives by more explicitly incorporating identity considerations, particularly for refugee-background individuals. Diedrich and Omanović (2023, p. 539) found in their Swedish study that internships and mentoring programmes for refugees often “created a one-dimensional picture of ... what it means to be employable in the Swedish workplace”; these requirements were notably not imposed on labour migrants and expatriates. Building upon existing mentoring practices, workplaces could further enhance their programmes by specifically acknowledging and supporting identity-based work choices. Management practitioners (e.g., Collins, 2024; Gross, 2023) highlight the emergence but underutilisation of mentoring programmes where mentors undergo cultural competency training and spend time with mentees to gain a deeper understanding of their unique backgrounds and experiences to foster empathy prior to the mentoring process. Such approaches would complement traditional employability frameworks by recognising the complex identity negotiations that refugees navigate in the migration and work contexts. Given that mentorship programmes for refugee-background individuals remain an under-researched area (Diedrich & Omanović, 2023), developing and evaluating identity-informed mentoring approaches represents a valuable direction for both practice and research. Organisations could implement policies that recognise and value diverse forms of work experience, including informal and community-based contributions. Such policies would facilitate assessments of competencies gained from such work, which could enable the transfer of skills into work opportunities. The concept of the stepping stone in the present research represented this practice, which could be adopted into workplaces.

7.2.3 Implications for managers and mentors

The present study has demonstrated that individual actions at manager and mentor level were integral to facilitating work integration for refugee-background individuals. For M&Ms, the research highlights the importance of supporting refugee-background individuals by respecting their agency and identity anchors. This can be achieved by recognising that the meanings of their work may differ from conventional Western perspectives, such as prioritising stability over career advancement, or work meanings being grounded in affective outcomes rather than the pursuit of material wealth. Understanding the concept of refugeehood is crucial for managers to create inclusive workplace environments. E. S. Lee et al. (2020), Mizzi and Rocco (2013), and Ortlieb et al. (2021) all observe that managers need to be cognisant of the value of globalisation discourses that now permeate workplaces. The conceptualisation of refugeehood

in this research can inform managers' interactions with refugee-background employees. Experiences of non-settlement and 'not homeland' embedded in refugeehood can assist managers to create a work environment where employees find belonging. Ortlieb and Weiss (2020) and Szkudlarek et al. (2021) propose that employers could help achieve social change and acceptance of refugees if they develop effective workplace integration strategies. This thesis adds to these scholars' proposal by revealing the concept of 'changing the narratives', specifically the tactics of valuing refugees' human capital, questioning superiority of the host society standards, and creating an identity beyond refugeehood.

Managers play a critical role in creating inclusive workplace cultures that embrace diverse identity expressions. Through their daily interactions with refugee-background employees, managers can develop nuanced understandings of cultural differences and expectations, which can be fed into overall DEI policies and practices. Furthermore, managers can enable refugee-background employees to have input into the formulation of DEI policies through everyday experiences where standard organisational practices fall short in meeting individual needs. Some managers in this study identified and built upon the existing capabilities and resourcefulness of refugee-background employees. By paying attention to skills and attributes of their employees and clients, M&Ms were able to build their capabilities. Paying attention to individual resourcefulness is integral to this implication. Managers can identify existing capabilities and build on these to create sustainable work integration for refugee-background individuals.

Empathy-based approaches should be central to management and mentorship practices when working with refugee-background individuals. One of the two mentors utilised a human-centred design in his mentoring endeavours, and empathy was a pillar embedded in his mentoring programme. Mentoring was enabled by understanding the human at the centre of a complex web of social structures and processes. This finding presents the implication that empathy can be cultivated in management and mentorship practices.

Successful work integration requires both perseverance and accountability from managers and organisational leaders. Knappert et al. (2023) found perseverance as a resource mobilised by individual actors towards refugee-background individuals' employment. Additionally, accountability is needed to ensure perseverance. Tilbury and Colic-Peisker (2006) showed that services agencies and employers utilised deflection strategies and held the other party (and

sometimes the local market or the potential employee) responsible for discriminatory practices against refugees. The present study's findings reinforce and extend these scholarly insights. In terms of perseverance, managers in the present study had demonstrated long-term commitment, working with refugee-background individuals for an average of 10 years. Perseverance can also manifest through consistent management practices specifically designed for integrating refugee-background individuals at work. Accountability, equally significant, could manifest through managers taking direct responsibility for reducing barriers to work access for refugee-background individuals. Rather than delegating work integration efforts solely to resettlement services providers, managers can actively create work opportunities and take ownership of refugee-background individuals' work integration.

Notably, M&Ms in the present study reported being driven by personal fulfilment, which strengthened their sense of accountability for achieving positive work integration outcomes. Managers should also pay attention to the individual they work with, as there can be a tendency to group migrants and refugees into a collective 'other' (e.g., Ponzoni et al., 2017). By paying attention to the individual, managers are able to build relationships, as this thesis has demonstrated, which facilitates their understanding of the specific individual needs of refugee-background employees.

7.2.4 Implications for pathways-to-work providers

The findings of this study identify the importance of PWPs moving beyond simple job placement to develop a nuanced understanding of how identity anchors influence refugee-background individuals' work choices and meaning. Without this foundational element in crafting pathways to work, what can result is the fruitless practice of attempting to fit square pegs into round holes. Scholarship has revealed that resettlement services often tend to overlook the specific and contextual needs in job placement endeavours (e.g., Darrow, 2015; Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Senthanaar et al., 2020). Delivering individualised support that recognises the unique circumstances of each refugee-background individual is essential, despite resource constraints. In the present study, some PWPs were able to provide individualised attention, which was reportedly influential in successful work integration outcomes. Individualised attention being resource-constrained is further elaborated in subsection 7.2.5.

Work integration programmes should systematically identify and build upon the existing skills and community connections that refugee-background individuals bring with them. Identifying skills and abilities refugee-background individuals developed in work roles outside of paid employment in their COO is one way for PWPs to determine suitable work for their clients. Another is to pay attention to work performed in displacement settings, which the present study has revealed to be performed largely in informal settings, and often unpaid. Recognising and articulating ‘hidden’ competencies developed during displacement can significantly improve employment prospects for refugee-background individuals. Such attention would reduce the often-noted barrier of a break in career found in resettlement work literature (e.g., Nardon et al., 2021). Assessments and articulations of these ‘hidden’ competencies and experiences can be influential in demonstrating to potential employers not only the skills gained in displacement, but also refugee-background individuals’ resourcefulness in obtaining and pursuing work in highly constrained settings. Such assessments would be integral in producing skill sets that are then leveraged to pursue work that will be meaningful to refugee-background individuals.

Support systems must acknowledge both practical considerations and identity-related aspects of meaningful work integration. Work performed within refugee-background individuals’ own communities, often in the resettlement sector, is often negatively perceived (e.g., de Jong, 2019). Spending time understanding why such work is important to their refugee-background clients may assist PWPs to support them in finding paid or unpaid work roles in other host community settings. Such job placements would not only provide the sense of community work that this research found to be meaningful for refugee-background individuals but would also assist them to transfer their skills into broader societal impact work, contributing to the process of integration in host society communities.

7.2.5 Multistakeholder implications

Finally, this study demonstrates that an ecosystem approach combining multiple stakeholders and mutual learning is essential for effective refugee employment integration. Such an approach was also highlighted by Knappert et al. (2023). Diedrich and Omanović (2023) observed an important reversal in the traditional mentoring dynamic – when working with refugee-background individuals, mentors found their conventional mentoring approaches were inadequate or inappropriate and required adaptation of their established methods in response to refugee mentees actively challenging the efficacy of standard mentoring practices. Im and

Swan (2022) found that mutual learning for all resettlement stakeholder groups enabled a better understanding of the needs of refugee communities and ways to meet these needs. The concept of mutual learning therefore works hand in hand with the ecosystem approach, facilitating learnings across all stakeholder groups. Such a practice would help contextualise not only refugee communities' needs, but also the country- and culture-specific norms in resettlement societies that refugee-background individuals are being integrated into. Mutual learning can materialise through action-based research, initiated by the resettlement policy-makers, where refugee-background individuals seek assistance from resettlement services providers and get placed into work. Over a period of time, the work experiences can be assessed, as well as the effectiveness of the placement programmes, to develop context-specific learnings from all stakeholders involved.

Collaboration between M&Ms and PWP's can create more accessible work opportunities through coordinated work integration strategies. Reducing controllable barriers to entry to work such as prioritising skills over language, lessening the burden of language in interviews through sending interview questions ahead of time, and keeping an open mind about refugee-background individuals' qualifications and experiences instead of perceiving them as inferior to host country standards are some of the practices managers could utilise. These go hand in hand with PWP's positioning refugee-background clients as valuable human capital to potential employers and assisting clients in understanding resettlement country employment norms and practices. Mutual learning can transpire in spaces where all three stakeholder groups – refugee-background individuals, M&Ms and PWP's – come together to understand each cohort's needs and perspectives and develop pathways where everyone can work together to address specific challenges. Furthermore, other stakeholders in the resettlement context, such as chambers of commerce, industry associations, professional bodies (e.g., doctors, engineers, media, trade unions), and local, regional, and national government bodies could encourage employers to recruit refugee-background individuals.

Resource constraints in individual services highlight the critical importance of coordinated approaches across individual, organisational, and policy levels. Resource limitations in pathways-to-work services further highlight the value of an ecosystem perspective where both resettlement country policy-makers, such as government departments, at the macro-level and employers at the meso-level could work together to enable needs assessments that are specific to refugee-background individuals' unique circumstances. At the individual level, involving

refugee-background individuals in articulating their needs and work aspirations would enhance the ecosystem perspective. Direct involvement of refugee-background individuals in policy formulation is crucial for creating more responsive and effective resettlement frameworks. For example, the New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel (NZRAP) was established in 2022 to include refugee-background individuals' voices in the development of resettlement policies and strategies (University of Auckland, n.d.). Refugee-background individuals having an input in policy formulation is a crucial step in creating more responsive and effective resettlement policies, a limitation identified in current global refugee-related policies articulated by the UNHCR (e.g., Garnier, 2023). In New Zealand, the Refresh programme (e.g., MBIE, n.d.) took a step in the direction of including refugee-background individuals in determining resettlement outcomes. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the outcomes still appear to be focused on self-reliance narratives that are intrinsic in the UNHCR policies pertaining to refugees (e.g., Garnier, 2023). In contrast to these prescribed self-reliance narratives, resettlement countries could adopt a 'blank sheet' approach where refugee-background individuals themselves identify and pursue outcomes that are meaningful to their specific circumstances and aspirations. Having refugee-background individuals directly involved in policy formulation acknowledges them as agents of their own resettlement journey. Their lived experiences throughout the migration journey gives them unique insights that policymakers simply cannot have. Refugee-background individuals, utilising a knowledge-holder position, could also identify practical barriers and challenges that might not be obvious to policymakers. Involvement in policymaking could help address power imbalances in the resettlement process. However, for this to work effectively, the consultation process would need to be genuinely inclusive. This would mean ensuring diverse representation across different refugee communities, creating safe spaces where refugee-background individuals feel comfortable sharing critical feedback, and having clear mechanisms for how their input will be incorporated into policy decisions.

Cultural biases and Western-centric perspectives present significant barriers to implementing truly inclusive consultation processes. The main challenge in implementing such a consultative approach appears to be a lack of empathy, particularly in Western resettlement countries where individualism and cultural hegemony can create blind spots in understanding different ways of being and belonging. The 'normalisation' of refugee-background individuals into Western society often manifests as an assumption that Western approaches are inherently more advanced or desirable (e.g., Szkudlarek, 2009). This can lead to a dismissal of communal

values, multilingual abilities, and the diverse cultural practices that refugees bring with them – seeing these as barriers to integration rather than assets to society.

Some explicit recommendations for policy reform that emerge from this study include the recognition of refugee-background individuals' transnational work experiences and work connections and their effective translation as valuable competencies in resettlement contexts. This would consequently require resettlement countries to recognise work experiences and qualifications gained in other countries. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (Council of Europe, n.d.) is one example of a system that assesses the experiences, qualifications and skills of refugee-background individuals. Secondly, measuring integration purely through economic metrics while ignoring social and cultural wellbeing is problematic. Research has revealed the vital importance of community support structures for refugees (e.g., Carpi et al., 2021; Nardon et al., 2021). This cultural disconnect can lead to policies that inadvertently undermine the very support systems that help refugees thrive. Global resettlement policies could measure integration success beyond narrow economic indicators such as identity recognition, belonging, and meaningful work as defined by refugee-background individuals themselves. Thus, finally, truly participative policy development in resettlement countries would help achieve better outcomes for refugee-background individuals. Policy-makers in resettlement countries should develop formal mechanisms for including refugee-background individuals in resettlement policy-creation processes. Findings from this study pertaining to identity anchors and the meaning of work could frame more effective policies if they incorporated these lived experiences. This could involve creating refugee advisory boards, such as the NZRAP noted earlier, that have meaningful input into employment and integration policies at the local, regional and national levels. These boards could also work with employer and resettlement services organisations to help develop solutions for common challenges faced by the refugee communities.

The relational work integration framework in this thesis suggests that integration policies should address not just economic participation but identity recognition and social belonging, while acknowledging that the migration journey can be ongoing in resettlement. Employment programmes for refugees should consider how work can support positive identity construction. Refugee services organisations need to be attentive to the multifaceted interplay between identity, place, and work meaning. Employers could benefit from understanding how refugee-background employees navigate insider-outsider dynamics in workplace settings and truly

engage in intercultural learning, where taken-for-granted assumptions are deconstructed and cultural competence is rebuilt, as Szkudlarek (2009, p. 983) put it, on an “upward mobility correcting inequalities”. Finally, refugee-background individuals could engage in exploring how their salient identity anchors influence work choices and play their part in utilising the bidirectional relationship between identity and work meanings to achieve better work integration outcomes.

7.3 Limitations and future research

This research makes valuable contributions to understanding refugees’ identity construction and meaning of work, yet several limitations warrant acknowledgement and point to promising directions for future research.

7.3.1 Methodological considerations

The study’s qualitative approach using Charmaz’s (2006) CGT methodology brings specific limitations. Theories produced through CGT cannot be generalised but remain interpretive and specific to a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). The research relied primarily on narrative interviews from 41 participants which, while providing rich data, may be subject to recall bias. Caine et al. (2013) emphasise that narratives occur at specific moments in time, with experience recollections influenced by temporal distance and contextual factors. Despite conceptualising the migration journey as integral to refugees’ identity construction, the research captured perspectives at a single point in time, with participants reflecting retrospectively on their experiences within work and identity contexts. Furthermore, bias stemming from social desirability could have contributed to refugee as well as M&M participants narrating experiences that were largely optimistic in tone. According to Bergen and Labonté (2020), social desirability biases emerge in research topics that participants find sensitive or controversial. As my study was focused on refugees’ migration journeys, identity, and work, these participants may have unconsciously engaged in presenting their stories in a manner they thought to be socially desirable. The rigour of the CGT methodology can assist in managing and being attuned to participants’ biases (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), but these biases are nonetheless possible. Future longitudinal studies could explore how identity anchors evolve over extended periods throughout the migration journey and in resettlement. Researchers could also draw on theories from anthropology, organisational studies, psychology, and sociology and for a more holistic understanding of refugees’ identity

construction in work contexts. Future research could also utilise strategies evidenced by Bergen and Labonté (2020) in managing socially desirable biases.

The emergence of the insider-outsider continuum dynamic may result from the analytical lens of translocational positionality, which emphasises varying social locations and identity multiplicity (e.g., Anthias, 2008). Future studies could employ mixed-methods approaches to strengthen these findings and explore how identity anchors evolve longitudinally throughout migration journeys and resettlement. Applying multiple theoretical frameworks beyond translocational positionality could determine whether the insider-outsider continuum emerges independently of the analytical lens used.

7.3.2 Sampling limitations

The participant sampling strategy presents a notable limitation to this study. Refugees who volunteered to participate may have been inherently predisposed to resourcefulness and agency, potentially introducing self-selection bias. As data collection relied partly on third-party recruitment, theoretical sampling was constrained, as discussed in Chapter 3. Additionally, the study's sample, while diverse in COOs, included only individuals physically and mentally able to work. Noticeably, the voices of those struggling to find employment in the traditional sense of paid employment and those in specialist occupations who face many regulatory barriers, as documented in resettlement literature (e.g., Baranik et al., 2018; Campion, 2018), were not included in this study. Robinson (2014) acknowledges that self-selection bias is inevitable in qualitative interview-based studies. Other research approaches that resolve self-selection bias could complement the current study's findings as well as focus on those seeking paid employment and those in highly regulated professions.

7.3.3 Cultural representation constraints

The conceptualisation of non-Western identity frameworks is also limited in this study. While participant diversity included individuals from Africa (11), Middle East (1), South America (1), South Asia (6), and South East Asia (3), the high representation of African participants may have influenced the identity anchors identified. Though diversity exists within the African continent, concepts of *ubuntu* and connectedness permeate most African cultures (Naude, 2021). African refugees tend to pursue work that benefits family and community (Fedrigo et al., 2023; Stebleton, 2012), potentially shaping the work meaning themes identified. However, this influence is somewhat mitigated by participants from other regions also prioritising family

and community-motivated work. Homogenising refugees is problematic (Knappert et al., 2023) and having more diverse samples would benefit future research. Studies could also focus on the intersection of gender, identity anchors, and work meanings. There were only five women participants among the 22 refugee participants, limiting a thorough exploration of the impacts of gender in identity constructions. That said, the two women who transited through other countries did highlight their carer work roles that transpired alongside paid work roles, indicating additional responsibilities that women may encounter during their migration journeys. Future research could also explore how single mothers navigate the journey, and identity and meaningful work constructions. Furthermore, future research could investigate intergenerational differences in identity construction and work meanings. Studies could explicitly incorporate the diverse range of both Western and non-Western methodologies to counter the Western-centric knowledge production highlighted by Szkudlarek (2009).

7.3.4 Contextual limitations

This research's focus on refugee-background individuals in New Zealand introduces potential contextual limitations. While the findings may have broader applicability, cultural and institutional factors specific to New Zealand may constrain transferability. The study captured diverse stakeholder perspectives but notably excluded organisational policy perspectives from employers and resettlement policy-makers, whose influence on refugee-background individuals' identity and belonging navigation is significant (Koyama & Chang, 2018). Future research could therefore explore how policy frameworks shape identity construction and work integration across different refugee groups, host countries, and policy contexts to distinguish context-specific elements of identity construction. Gathering data from employers, colleagues, and community members could provide a more holistic view of the identity construction process. New Zealand is geographically isolated, and refugees and asylum seekers arriving in boats, as seen in most of Europe and the United Kingdom, does not occur here. Public perception of refugees can be informed by both local and international media. This study did not explicitly explore the impact of negative media portrayals of refugees as threats, burdens, or helpless victims (e.g., Greenbank, 2024; Sabharwal, 2024) and the saviour-victim dynamic identified in seemingly sympathetic media coverage (e.g., Bonnett, 2025; Croad, 2024), which represents a significant limitation in terms of how such discourses shaped participants' perceptions. Participants from all stakeholder groups may have been unconsciously influenced by these pervasive societal framings, potentially affecting how refugee participants conceptualised their agency and how M&Ms and PWPs approached integration support. Future

research incorporating explicit exploration of how media discourse shapes stakeholder perceptions would provide more comprehensive understanding of the discursive environment refugees navigate while constructing meaningful work identities.

7.3.5 Limited multistakeholder connectivity

This study revealed that refugee-background individuals' work integration requires collaboration across three participant groups –refugees, M&Ms, and PWPs. However, the current study was limited in its ability to follow individual refugees' complete work integration journeys – from initial engagement with resettlement providers through job placement processes to the subsequent employer-employee workplace relationships and dynamics. While some coincidental employee-manager participant pairs emerged, participant confidentiality precluded comprehensive exploration of how these interconnected processes unfolded for specific individuals across all three stakeholder perspectives. Therefore, a future study utilising deliberate three-way stakeholder representation – tracking the same refugees through their entire work integration pathway with input from their specific resettlement providers and employers – would enhance understanding of refugee-background individuals' identity construction, its relationship with work meaning, and the collaborative intricacies of the work integration processes. In their narratives, refugee participants spoke mainly about their work experiences and referred to their managers or co-workers and PWPs if they happened to be part of the narrative. Specific questions pertaining to support from M&Ms and PWPs were not thoroughly explored in the interviews, making this an area that could be explored in future studies.

7.3.6 Managerial perspective limitations

Most M&Ms were migrants themselves, whose personal migration experiences were crucial to the empathy motive that emerged regarding openness to working with refugees. While this migrant-to-local manager ratio may be limiting, the finding of empathy as a motivational factor merits further exploration in management studies. Future research could investigate whether non-migrant managers demonstrate similar empathy and, if not, what potential personal connections might foster the openness observed in this study. Human-centred design may promote empathy in work with refugee-background individuals, as noted by one mentor participant. Future research could explore additional tools that facilitate empathy in such contexts. Furthermore, there is room for management scholarship to explore the roles of trust and relationships in refugee-background individuals' work integration research. Strang and

Quinn (2019) highlighted that trust plays a key role in refugee integration in resettlement contexts. Butler (2007, p. 242) argues that “socially excluded groups often have a well-founded suspicion of ‘helpers’ because of previous poor experiences”. The present research revealed that managers recognised the need to build trust with their refugee-background employees as a foundation for inclusive workplace relationships and sustained support.

7.3.7 Additional research opportunities

Several additional research avenues emerge from this study’s limitations. Despite broadening work conceptualisation and its influence on meaning, this research did not thoroughly explore transnational work experiences, which D’Angelo (2021) identifies as common among migrants and refugees. Only two participants in the resettlement context maintained work roles across countries, suggesting potential for research into transnational work and digital technologies’ role in shaping work meanings and identity construction. Refugee-background individuals’ psychological capital presents another promising research direction. In the present study, some elements of psychological capital as conceptualised by Luthans and Youssef (2004) were found, such as hope, self-efficacy and resilience. Future studies could focus on other elements of this psychological construct and explore how these influence work choices and meanings throughout the migration journey.

Management scholarship still lacks understanding of how refugee-background individuals themselves can facilitate social and cultural workplace integration. While this study found evidence of tempered radicals (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2023), other forms of social and cultural integration within workplaces can be explored. Furthermore, a broader understanding of what constitutes work may be a useful approach in future studies to understand work experiences of refugee-background individuals in seemingly invisible spaces, such as care and domestic work roles, and volunteering. Finally, the current research found that repatriation may not be viable for refugee-background individuals with extended residence outside their COO, aligning with Um’s (2023) observation that repatriation may exacerbate belonging challenges inherent in resettlement contexts. Future research could investigate repatriation decisions and experiences of long-term resettled refugee-background individuals.

7.4 Conclusion

This final section concludes the thesis by synthesising the comprehensive exploration undertaken throughout this study. The research began with an inquiry into how refugees’

identities are constructed throughout their migration journey within the context of work, a question that has remained largely underexplored in existing scholarship. Through careful methodological design and theoretical integration, this research has illuminated the complex, dynamic processes through which refugees navigate their evolving identities across space and time, specifically in relation to their work experiences and meanings.

7.4.1 Research foundations and methodological approach

The study was initially framed in Chapter 1 through its central research question – *How are refugees' identities constructed throughout their migration journey in the context of work?* This question emerged from identified gaps in current understandings of the lived experiences of refugees beyond simplistic categorisations. The literature review in Chapter 2 analytically integrated diverse scholarly fields, including migration journey studies, identity theories, refugee identity research, and explorations of work and its meanings. This interdisciplinary approach revealed significant knowledge gaps, particularly regarding the human dimensions behind the refugee label, the historical and sociocultural contexts of refugees' lives, and the transformative impact of migration journeys on self-perceptions and identity. It highlighted that research has shown that seemingly supportive societal policies and narratives tend to create marginalised identities (e.g., Diedrich & Omanović, 2023; Nardon et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002), and reinforce the otherness, of refugee-background individuals, which tends to be problematic for the individuals navigating resettlement.

Methodologically, the research was framed by a social constructionist epistemology, employing Charmaz's (2006) CGT methodology to explore the research question with appropriate depth and complexity. Anthias's (2008) concept of translocational positionality provided a supplementary analytical framework that proved invaluable for understanding the elaborate processes of identity construction among refugee participants. The data collection strategy was comprehensive and multifaceted, utilising photo elicitation and narrative interviews with refugee participants (who constituted the largest participant cohort), complemented by narrative interviews with M&Ms and PWPs. All data were rigorously analysed according to the principles of Charmaz's (2006) CGT methodology, ensuring theoretical sensitivity and interpretive depth. The epistemological stance, methodological frameworks, and data collection and analysis processes were described in Chapter 3.

7.4.2 Key findings

The answer to the research question was found to be that that refugees' identities are constructed through the interplay of three constructs of anchors, refugeehood and place identity within the context of the migration journey, through the insider-outsider continuum as an identity navigation site, which allows refugees to hold simultaneous identity positions at any one time, positions that can change as the journey unfolds. This identity construction process influences how meanings of work are constructed, leading to a bidirectional relationship between meaning of work and identity across time and space.

A central finding of this research was the identity anchors that provide refugee participants with stability and continuity of self throughout their migration journey. These anchors significantly influenced work choices, and the meanings associated with work activities across different contexts and timeframes. The research distinguished three distinct phases of the migration journey, each characterised by unique challenges and opportunities for identity construction. Additionally, the study uncovered the intricate meanings that refugees associate with refugeehood itself, highlighting how these understandings evolve and shift throughout their journeys. The influence of place emerged as a critical factor in identity construction processes, demonstrating how geographical, social and cultural contexts shape how refugees perceive themselves and are perceived by others. To navigate these complex dynamics, refugee participants developed sophisticated mechanisms for managing multiple versions of self across time and space, conceptualised in this research as the insider-outsider continuum. This continuum represents a fluid spectrum of belonging and non-belonging that refugee participants traversed in different contexts, rather than a rigid binary categorisation. The meanings that refugee participants attributed to work were found to be shaped by the identity constructs identified in this research – anchors, refugeehood, and place identity. Work integration emerged as a collective endeavour involving multiple stakeholders –refugees themselves, M&Ms, and PWPs. The interactions among these groups significantly influenced how refugee participants constructed the meanings of work in the resettlement context. A particularly significant finding was the resourcefulness demonstrated refugee participants, which complements the strategies employed by M&Ms and PWPs in facilitating work integration in resettlement contexts. These findings were presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

7.4.3 Theoretical contributions

These empirical findings led to substantial theoretical contributions that advance understandings of refugees' experiences, as demonstrated in Chapter 6. Guided by Charmaz's (2006) CGT methodology and Sandberg and Alvesson's (2021) enacting theory typology, the research illuminated a bidirectional relationship between identity construction and the meaning of work throughout the migration journey. This theory transcends static conceptions of refugees' experiences to capture the dynamic, evolving nature of identity construction across diverse contexts and temporal dimensions. The insider-outsider continuum developed in this research represents a particularly valuable analytical lens that captures the fluid positionality experienced by refugees. This theoretical construct acknowledges that refugees simultaneously inhabit multiple positions that shift depending on context and time. This more accurately reflects the nuanced lived experiences documented throughout the research. The identification of four distinct resourcefulness tactics employed by refugee participants – exercising agency, demonstrating self-efficacy, finding alternative pathways, and remaining undeterred – provides a powerful counternarrative to deficit-focused perspectives that dominate much of the existing literature on refugee experiences. This theoretical contribution effectively demonstrates how refugees actively construct meaningful work experiences rather than passively accepting circumstances.

7.4.4 Multilevel analysis and broader implications

A significant strength of the relational work integration framework developed in this research is its integration of micro-, meso-, and some macro-levels of analysis. By exploring how individual agency interacts with broader societal structures, this multilevel approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of refugee work integration than approaches that focus exclusively on a single analytical level. The conceptualisation of relational work integration as extending beyond conventional physical workplaces represents another important theoretical contribution, acknowledging the diverse contexts in which meaningful work occurs for refugee-background individuals, including unpaid and often invisible forms of labour. The roles of meso-level resettlement stakeholders in refugee-background individuals' work integration add valuable insights to emerging perspectives on multistakeholder efforts in this domain. This aligns with recent scholarship (e.g., Knappert et al., 2023; Nardon et al., 2021) emphasising the necessity of collaborative approaches to create sustainable work outcomes for refugee-background individuals. A particularly noteworthy aspect of this level of analysis was

the identification of these stakeholders' roles in shaping refugee-background individuals' identity constructions at work, which involved finding a delicate balance between acknowledging the profound experiences embedded in the migration journey and refugeehood while crafting pathways forward that humanise the individuals being integrated into (new) work and resettlement environments.

This thesis has made significant contributions to three primary bodies of scholarship – refugee research, identity theory, and management studies, as detailed in Section 7.1. It has also established a compelling agenda for more interdisciplinary approaches to help achieve better work outcomes for refugee-background individuals, echoing calls from several contemporary scholars (e.g., Kanal & Rottmann, 2021; Knappert et al., 2023; E. S. Lee et al., 2020). While acknowledging the limitations of the present study, these constraints have illuminated several promising avenues for future research. The intersections between refugees' multifaceted experiences, the migration journey, identity constructions, and work contexts represent fertile ground for further scholarly investigation.

7.4.5 Final reflections

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated insightful interrelationships between identity, the migration journey, and work in the lives of refugees. By moving beyond simplified categorisations, the study has revealed the agency and resourcefulness that characterise refugees' navigation of complex identity transitions throughout their migration journeys. The findings of this research collectively advance management, identity, and refugee scholarship through several interconnected contributions. First, by illuminating how refugees actively construct identities and meanings of work across their migration journeys, this research addresses Bailey et al.'s (2019) call for exploring work meanings across diverse contexts. Second, it responds to Kanal and Rottmann's (2021) identification of the need for interdisciplinary approaches that bridge traditionally separate fields. Third, the research contributes to addressing Szkudlarek et al.'s (2021) recommendation for comprehensive frameworks that incorporate macro-level contextual factors influencing refugees' work experiences. Importantly, this research also challenges deficit-focused narratives and offers a more humanising framework that recognises both agency and structural constraints. The theory and corresponding model developed through this research offer valuable analytical tools for understanding the complex processes of identity and meaning of work constructions. The relational work integration framework is intended to inform more pragmatic approaches for the

ecosystem that engages with refugees at work. As global displacement continues to affect millions of lives worldwide, such humanising and comprehensive understandings of refugees' experiences become increasingly vital, both for scholarly knowledge and for developing more effective support mechanisms for those rebuilding their lives and identities in new contexts.

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Appendix A Ethics approval



AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH)

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1 November 2021

Edwina Pio
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Edwina

Re Ethics Application: **21/212 Refugees at work: Narratives of Identity construction**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 1 November 2024.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. In the Information Sheet remove the sentence that begins 'The University Policy...' and replace with 'In the unlikely event that illegal practices/activities are revealed as part of the interview the researcher may be required to report this to the appropriate authorities.'

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTECH before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTECH Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: jpx1863@autunf.ac.nz; Roy Smollan

Appendix I - Photo Elicitation Protocol for Refugee Participants

This protocol is intended as a guide for participants to follow for photos in the research project of Refugees at Work. The guidelines outlined below have also been discussed during a training session with the researcher – Vikashni Moore.

Before taking photos

1. Think about what stories you wish to tell in relation to work and your identity.
2. If you wish to do so, discuss your ideas with family and friends to seek their input.
3. Write down your story ideas and think about how best to capture photos that will help you tell stories about your work and identity.
4. The photos you take can be either from New Zealand (NZ) or images you may have from your home country.

What photos to take

Photos can be of an object that fits in your story about your work and identity. The objects may be symbols of the work you do/did here in NZ or in your home country. You may take photos of buildings, scenery, animals, flowers, but not of people.

Examples include a hand-woven carpet or garment, a teapot, a computer, a phone, a flower or a garden of flowers or vegetables, a tractor or plough, a fishing line, a boat, books, clothes, shoes, luggage, furniture items, food items, drink items, a construction site, a museum, a supermarket, dairy shop, a place of worship such as church, temple, or mosque, a library, a school, a bookshop, a teashop or café, a restaurant, horses, cows, sheep, poultry, or household pets such as dogs, cats, rabbits, mountains, ocean, coastland, beaches, river, farmlands, empty streets, parks, long stretch of road or highway, forest.



Participant Information Sheet

Refugee participants

Date Information Sheet Produced:

12 January 2021

Project Title

Refugees at work: Narratives of identity construction

An Invitation

Kia Ora. This is an invitation to participate in research about refugees at work. I am Vikashni Moore, a PhD candidate at Auckland University of Technology. My interest in this research came through interactions I had with the families I met during a resettlement programme with the NZ Red Cross. Through this research, I aim to attain a doctorate degree, following which I hope to contribute to the refugee resettlement field.

What is the purpose of this research?

Recent research has found that refugees often face challenges when they move to a resettlement country. One of these challenges is questioning themselves – “Who am I?”, which is called identity. The identity question is also asked in relation to work, which is called work-related identity. Much of the research has focused on problems faced by refugees when they are unable to find similar jobs they had in countries of origin. My research will explore through stories of 20 refugees whether they did have problems finding or keeping work in New Zealand, and if yes, how these problems were overcome.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

This research relies on a process where through word of mouth, news of the research project spreads within a community and those interested get in touch with the researcher. You and other participants are identified through this process. The right to not participate lies with you. If there are more interested participants, the first participants to volunteer will be interviewed, provided they meet the inclusion criteria below.

First, participants will be from four locations within New Zealand - Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, and Dunedin. Within these locations, participants from source countries of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Colombia, Myanmar, Palestine, and Syria will be considered. Third, participants will have lived in NZ for at least one year and up to five years and will be of legal working age in NZ. Fourth, they will have worked for at least one year in both country of origin and NZ. ‘Work’ includes paid employment, volunteering, internship, apprenticeship, business ownership (such as restaurant, etc.), farming, fishing, etc. Differences in types of work, gender, age, religion, qualifications, etc. will also be sought. Participants who are not fluent in the English language are welcome to participate.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate, please contact me directly by email or phone. I will then send you a Consent Form, which indicates your willingness to participate in this research. I will bring a hardcopy of the Consent Form to our first face to face meeting. The Consent Form also shows that you have understood how your photos will be used (see the next section on what will happen with this research, for more details), and that you permit your stories to be recorded. Please note that your participation in this research is your choice and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, then you can choose between having any information that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your information may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

For this research, photos will be used to collect stories about your work-related identity and experiences. The photos will be taken by you and remain your property. Some of the key steps in this research are:

1. To participate, written consent must be given by you. I will provide a Consent Form. On this form, you will also indicate whether you wish to use your own (phone) or camera or whether you would prefer to use a disposable camera provided by me.

2. Training will be held (30 minutes maximum) to talk about photo-taking. Photos will be taken at your home, workplace, or community of, for example, objects, buildings, animals, and scenery (no people including yourself) in New Zealand, or you can use photos from your home country. I will show you some examples during the training and provide you with a written guideline with these examples. You will decide what photos to take.
3. If you wish to use disposable cameras, I will provide these to you either at the end of the training session or via courier after the training session.
4. 5 photos would be ideal. There will be 2 copies of all photos – 1 for you and 1 for me.
5. Photos may be taken between 2 to 4 weeks. When you are ready with the photos we will agree on a suitable time and venue to meet. We can meet either at your home, or at a nearby community centre.
6. At the meeting venue, you will share your stories with me. The photos that mean something to you will be used in telling your stories. I will ask some questions. Your stories will be recorded from which I will produce notes.

A translator can assist in this research. You are free to work with a translator that you know, or I can provide one. Please indicate your preference on the Consent Form.

The photos from this research will be used in my research thesis, conference papers/presentations, and academic journals. I also plan to organise a photo exhibition in consultation with you and with one of the resettlement services agencies, at a later stage. At the exhibition, your stories, along other participants' stories, can be told through your photos. It is your decision on what photos can be used outside of my research thesis. Other participants will not see your photos nor hear your stories until at the end of the research when they will be given a report on research findings. A similar report will be sent to you. Your name will not be revealed to anyone.

What are the discomforts and risks?

In the unlikely event that illegal practices/activities are revealed as part of the interview, I, the researcher, may be required to report this to the appropriate authorities. Therefore, participants are strongly discouraged to discuss such practices/activities with me. The use of your photos in a public setting such as an exhibition, conference, academic journal publication may pose some risks to you.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Discomfort regarding taking photos can be reduced by refraining from taking photos of people, including yourself. If you feel discomfort when recalling stories from your past and wish to discontinue the storytelling, you have the right to stop at any time that you desire. The storytelling can be resumed at a time when you feel comfortable. You may also withdraw from the research at this point. If you feel that you may need professional help to deal with issues that may arise from recollections of your experiences, you may access the AUT counselling services if you are in Auckland. If you live outside of Auckland, the researcher will put you in touch with a counsellor through Lifeline.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9998.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

What are the benefits?

This project can lead to a photo exhibition, which may help the greater community in NZ, including employers, to learn about your experiences. This could contribute towards work and employment pathways for yourself, as well as other refugees.

How will my privacy be protected?

In the research reports, a name that is not yours will be used to identify you. Where you currently live, where you are from, age group (such as between 20-30 years, etc.) and a brief description of your work (such as volunteer, etc.) will be stated. Where disclosure of such information poses a threat to your confidentiality, details will be withheld in the report on the findings from the research. I will do my best to protect your identity by not using your name and by being careful about using quotes and sentences that may reveal your identity. Therefore, it is possible to offer a limited confidentiality only.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no monetary cost to you. I will bear the photos and translation costs. A maximum of 6 hours may be required from you. The training will be up to 30 minutes. The photo-taking and story-telling each may range between one to two hours. Reading the research findings report (should you request it) may take a couple of hours.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I request a response from you within four weeks of receiving this information sheet.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

At the end of the research project, I will send you a report on research findings. There may be an opportunity to participate in a photo exhibition, where you may receive feedback from the exhibition participants.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Professor Edwina Pio*, edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz; (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 5130.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Vikashni Moore, vikashni.moore@aut.ac.nz; (+64) 02108197441.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Edwina Pio, edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz; (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 5130.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *01 November 2021*, AUTECH Reference number *21/212*.



Participant Information Sheet

Employer participants

Date Information Sheet Produced:

12 January 2021

Project Title

Refugees at work: Narratives of identity construction

An Invitation

Kia Ora. This is an invitation to participate in research about refugees at work. I am Vikashni Moore, a PhD candidate at Auckland University of Technology. My interest in this research came through interactions with the families I met during the resettlement programme with the NZ Red Cross. I am passionate about the resettlement experiences of refugees. Through this research, I aim to attain a doctorate degree, following which I hope to contribute to the refugee resettlement field.

What is the purpose of this research?

Recent research has found that refugees often face challenges when they move to a resettlement country. One of these challenges is questioning themselves – “Who am I?”, which is called identity. The identity question is also asked in relation to work, which is called work-related identity. Recent research has focused on problems faced by refugees when they are unable to find the same types of jobs they had prior to resettlement. My research will explore how these problems were overcome, through stories of 10 employers.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

There are several inclusion criteria. First, participants will be from four locations within New Zealand - Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, and Dunedin. Secondly, your organisation was involved in the NZ Red Cross pathways to employment programme; or has employed refugees as full or part-time workers, volunteers, interns/apprentices; or has supported refugees in setting up their own businesses; or assisted with non-urban work schemes (e.g., farming, fishing, etc.). A diverse representation of work experiences will be sought. If there are more than 10 interested participants, organisations that assisted/employed refugees for at least one year will be considered.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate, please contact me directly by email or phone. I will then send you a Consent Form, which indicates your willingness to participate in this research. I will also bring a hardcopy of the Consent Form to our first face to face meeting. The Consent Form also shows that you have understood that your stories will be recorded and transcribed. Please note that your participation in this research is your choice and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, then you can choose between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

Participants will tell their stories, focusing on their experiences with refugees at work. Also, participants are encouraged to reflect on specific behaviours and attributes of refugees that influenced their work experiences. Some of the key steps in this research are:

1. To participate, written consent must be given by you. I will provide a Consent Form.
2. We will arrange a time and venue to meet. The venue could be your office, somewhere within your office building or at a community centre.
3. At the meeting venue, you will share your stories with me. It is up to you to choose the stories you wish to tell. I will ask some questions. Your stories will be recorded from which I will produce notes.

The stories gathered will be used in my research thesis, conference papers and presentations, and academic journal publications. Other participants will not hear your stories until at the end of the research when they will be given a report on the research findings. A similar report will be sent to you. Your identity will not be revealed to anyone.

What are the discomforts and risks?

In the unlikely event that illegal practices/activities are revealed as part of the interview, I, the researcher, may be required to report this to the appropriate authorities. Therefore, participants are strongly discouraged to discuss such practices/activities with me. Some discomfort may be experienced when recalling a disturbing experience.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you feel discomfort when recalling experiences and wish to discontinue the story-telling, you have the right to stop at any time that you desire. The story-telling can be resumed at a time when you feel comfortable. You may also withdraw from the research at this point. If you feel that you may need professional help to deal with issues that may arise from recollections of your experiences, you can access the AUT counselling services if you are in Auckland. If you live outside of Auckland, the researcher will put you in touch with a counsellor through Lifeline.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9998.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

What are the benefits?

There may be implications for other employers to consider for resettling refugees looking for work.

How will my privacy be protected?

In the research reports, made-up names will be used to identify you and your organisation. The type of organisation you represent (such as horticulture), the organisation's location, length of time spent assisting refugees (e.g., 2-5 years, etc.) and a brief description of your role (e.g., an administration supervisor) will be stated. Where disclosure of such information poses a threat to your confidentiality, details will be withheld in the report on the findings from the research. I will do my best to protect your identity by being careful about quotes and sentences that may reveal your identity. Therefore, it is possible to offer a limited confidentiality only.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no monetary cost to you. A maximum of 4 hours may be required. The story-telling may last up to two hours. Reading the research findings report (should you request it) may take a couple of hours.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I request a response from you within four weeks of receiving this information sheet.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

At the end of the project, I will send you a report on the research findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Edwina Pio, edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz; (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 5130.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Vikashni Moore, vikashni.moore@aut.ac.nz; (+64) 02108197441.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Edwina Pio, edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz; (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 5130.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 01 November 2021, AUTEK Reference number 21/212.



Participant Information Sheet

Resettlement services participants

Date Information Sheet Produced:

12 January 2021

Project Title

Refugees at work: Narratives of identity construction

An Invitation

Kia Ora. This is an invitation to participate in research about refugees at work. I am Vikashni Moore, a PhD candidate at Auckland University of Technology. My interest in this research came through interactions I had with the families I met during a resettlement programme with the NZ Red Cross. Through this research, I aim to attain a doctorate degree, following which I hope to contribute to the refugee resettlement field.

What is the purpose of this research?

Recent research has found that refugees often face challenges when they move to a resettlement country. One of these challenges is questioning themselves – “Who am I?”, which is called identity. The identity question is also asked in relation to work, which is called work-related identity. Much of the research has focused on problems faced by refugees when they are unable to find similar jobs they had in countries of origin. My research will explore through stories of 10 resettlement services representatives whether refugees did have problems finding or keeping work in New Zealand, and if yes, how these problems were overcome.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

There are several inclusion criteria. First, participants will be from four locations within New Zealand - Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, and Dunedin. Second, your organisation will have worked closely with refugees in their pursuit of work, including volunteer work, internship, apprenticeship, business ownership (e.g., restaurant, etc.), and non-urban work (e.g., farming, fishing, etc.). A diverse representation of refugees' work experiences will be sought. Finally, a mixture of the type of resettlement service (e.g., national, local, faith-based organisation) will be preferable. If there are more than 10 interested participants, organisations that assisted refugees for at least one year will be considered.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate, please contact me directly by email or phone. I will then send you a Consent Form, which indicates your willingness to participate in this research. I will also bring a hardcopy of the Consent Form to our first face to face meeting. The Consent Form also shows that you have understood that your stories will be recorded and transcribed. Please note that your participation in this research is your choice and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, then you can choose between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your information may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

Participants will tell their stories, focusing on their experiences with refugees at work. Also, participants are encouraged to reflect on specific behaviours and attributes of refugees that influenced their work experiences. Some of the key steps in this research are:

1. To participate, written consent must be given by you. I will provide a Consent Form.
2. We will arrange a time and venue to meet. The venue could be your office, somewhere within your office building or at a community centre.
3. At the meeting venue, you will share your stories with me. It is up to you to choose the stories you wish to tell. I will ask some questions. Your stories will be recorded from which I will produce notes.

The stories gathered will be used in my research thesis, conference papers and presentations, and academic journal publications. Other participants will not hear your stories until at the end of the research when they will be given a report on the research findings. A similar report will be sent to you. Your name will not be revealed to anyone.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The University policy is that the researcher must report illegal work practices to the authorities. As unlikely as this scenario is, participants are strongly discouraged to discuss such practices with me, the researcher. Some discomfort may be experienced when recalling a disturbing experience.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you feel discomfort when recalling your experiences and wish to discontinue with story-telling, you have the right to stop at any time that you desire. The story-telling can be resumed at a time when you feel comfortable. You may also withdraw from the research at this point. If you feel that you may need professional help to deal with issues that may arise from recollections of your experiences, you can access the AUT counselling services if you are in Auckland. If you live outside of Auckland, the researcher will put you in touch with a counsellor through Lifeline.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9998.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

What are the benefits?

There may be implications for other resettlement agencies to consider for resettling refugees looking for work.

How will my privacy be protected?

In the research reports, a name that is not yours will be used to identify you and your organisation. The type of organisation represented (e.g., national resettlement service), the organisation's location, length of time spent assisting refugees (e.g., 2-5 years, etc.) and a brief description of your role (e.g., an advisor) will be stated. Where disclosure of such information poses a threat to your confidentiality, details will be withheld in the report on the findings from the research. I will do my best to protect your identity by being careful about quotes and sentences that may reveal your identity. Therefore, it is possible to offer a limited confidentiality only.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no monetary cost to you. A maximum of 4 hours may be required. The story-telling may last up to two hours. Reading the research findings summary (should you request it) may take a couple of hours.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I request a response from you within four weeks of receiving this information sheet.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

At the end of the research project, I will send you a report on the research findings..

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Edwina Pio, edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz; (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 5130.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Vikashni Moore, vikashni.moore@aut.ac.nz; (+64) 02108197441.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Edwina Pio, edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz; (+64 9) 921 9999 ext 5130.

Appendix C4 Consent form refugee participants



Consent and Release Form

Project title: **Refugees and work: Narratives of identity construction**

Project Supervisor: **Professor Edwina Pio**

Researcher: **Vikashni Moore**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12 January 2020.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any information that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my information may not be possible.
- I permit the researcher to take copies of my photographs and use the photographs that are part of this project and/or any drawings from them and any other reproductions or adaptations from them, either complete or in part, alone or together with any wording and/or drawings solely and exclusively for (a) the researcher's portfolio; and (b) educational exhibition and examination purposes and related design works; and (c) all academic journal publication purposes as stated on the Information Sheet.
- Where applicable - I agree to use my own (phone) camera for this research.
- I understand that the photographs will not be published or used in any forum outside of this project without my written permission.
- I understand that all photographs that I take for this project are deemed to be owned by me.
- I agree and give consent that a translator (please cross out the irrelevant phrase) I chose OR provided by the researcher will help me understand and respond to all communications pertaining to this research.
- I agree to attend the initial training.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the storytelling session and that my stories will also be recorded to produce notes from.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of findings from the research (please tick one): Yes No

Where applicable:

- I agree that the contents of this form have been thoroughly explained to me in my preferred language by a (please cross out the irrelevant phrase) translator I chose OR provided by the researcher. I understand the contents of this form and consent to participate in this research.

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 01 November 2021 AUTEC Reference number 21/212

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.



Consent Form

Project title: **Refugees and work: Narratives of identity construction**

Project Supervisor: **Professor Edwina Pio**

Researcher: **Vikashni Moore**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12 January 2021.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the storytelling session and that my stories will also be recorded to produce notes from.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of findings from the research (please tick one): Yes No

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 01 November 2021 AUTEK Reference number 21/212

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.



REFUGEES AT WORK RESEARCH

Kia Ora. Research is being carried out on the topic of Refugees at Work. The researcher is a doctoral candidate from the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) – Vikashni Moore. In this research participants will take photos, for example, of objects, buildings, and animals but not people. The photos will relate to their work. Using these photos, participants will tell their stories to the researcher about “who I am” (their identity) and their work experiences in New Zealand.

Participants considered for the research will:

- Be currently living in one of the locations of Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, and Dunedin; and
- Have lived in NZ for 1 year, up to 5 years; and
- Have worked in country of origin and in NZ for at least 1 year.

If you meet these criteria, or know someone who does -

- please contact Vikashni:
02108197441 or
vikashni.moore@aut.ac.nz





AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

REFUGEES AT WORK RESEARCH



Photo credits from top left: thespinnoff.co.nz, restore-uk.org; infomigrants.net, nbodvf.com

Kia Ora. Research is being carried out on the topic of Refugees at Work. The researcher is a doctoral candidate from the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) – Vikashni Moore. Participants will tell their stories to the researcher. These stories will be about participants' experiences in assisting refugees find work and employment.

Contact: vikashni.moore@aut.ac.nz

or 02108197441

If someone in your organization has, for a year or more, -

1. worked with refugees or employed refugees (as paid full or part-time workers, volunteers, interns or apprentices);
2. or assisted refugees in finding volunteer or intern or apprenticeship roles;
3. or and helped refugees set up their own business;
4. or assisted refugees in non-urban work schemes;

- please pass on this information flyer to them.

VIKASHNI MOORE



Appendix C8 Recruitment flyer resettlement services



FORMER REFUGEES AT WORK RESEARCH



Photo credits from top left: thespinoff.co.nz; restore-uk.org; infamigrants.net; nbahref.com

Kia Ora. Research is being carried out on the topic of Former Refugees at Work. The researcher is a doctoral candidate from the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) – Vikashni Moore. Participants will tell their stories to the researcher about their experiences in assisting refugees find work or set up their own business.

If you meet the below criteria or know anyone in your organisation who does, please contact the researcher.

Criteria for participants:

- You have worked with former refugees to help them find work either as a volunteer, an apprentice, an intern, or a part-time/full-time employee.
- Or assisted former refugees in setting up their own businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand.

vikashni.moore@aut.ac.nz
or 02108197441



Appendix D1 Indicative questions refugee participants

At any point during the interview, you can use a photo (or more) of your choice, which you think relates to your story based on the following guideline. Please note that the guideline are merely conversation starters to your story.

Journey to NZ

Let's talk about your background – country of origin, what you did there for work, etc.

If you sought refuge in a second country, let's talk about that. What was it like, how did you get there?

Processes of registering for resettlement either from overseas (country of refuge, country of origin) or in NZ.

What was significant to you?

Resettlement in NZ

Highlights, challenges, barriers.

What was significant to you?

Work/Entrepreneurship in NZ

Relations with employers, co-workers, people within resettled community.

Places/types of support.

Barriers and how they were overcome.

What was significant to you?

Identity

Your sense of self – the 'who am I' question:

 during the journey to NZ

 at work/being an entrepreneur

 during resettlement

Appendix D2 Indicative questions manager/mentor participants

Demographic information

1. Reiteration of inclusion criteria, specifically, years involved with assisting refugees with current organisation
2. Type(s) of work refugees were assisted in
3. Participant organisation sector/industry, participant's role in the organisation, and years of service in refugee assistance

Their role in work experiences and agency of refugees

1. Describe the role(s) you played in assisting with refugees at work.
2. How did you find this experience?
3. What influence do you think you had in their experiences at/of work?
4. What were their experiences at/of work from your viewpoint? Any specific events that stuck with you till today?
5. In what (other) ways do you think you influenced their experiences at/of work?

Work-related identity in country of origin and in NZ

6. Did the refugees you worked with describe their past work lives – from their home countries? What did you think of those experiences?
7. How would you compare the descriptions of their past work lives to what you experienced while working with them?
8. Were the descriptions consistent with the person you knew at the time in terms of work (e.g., skills, abilities, etc.)?

Work-related identity process

9. In what ways did they change, if any, in their work, work attitudes, confidence, job competence, skills, and attributes etc. from when you first knew them to the time you last interacted with them?
10. Who was responsible for initiating these changes or why did these changes happen?

Appendix D3 Indicative questions pathways to work participants

Demographic information

1. Reiteration of inclusion criteria, specifically, years involved with assisting refugees with current organisation
2. Type(s) of work refugees were assisted in
3. Type of participant organisation resettlement service, participant's role in the organisation, and years of service in refugee assistance

Their role in work experiences and agency of refugees

1. Describe the role(s) you played in assisting with refugees at work.
2. How did you find this experience?
3. What influence do you think you had in their experiences at/of work?
4. What were their experiences at/of work from your viewpoint? Any specific events that stuck with you till today?
5. In what (other) ways do you think you influenced their experiences at/of work?

Work-related identity in country of origin and in NZ

6. Did the refugees you worked with describe their past work lives – from their home countries? What did you think of those experiences?
7. How did their past work descriptions compare with the types of work you assisted them in obtaining in NZ?
8. What would you say about the types of work the refugees obtained in NZ and how did these types of work influence their identity?

Work-related identity process

9. How easy or difficult was the transition for refugees from their past work lives to the ones they experienced in NZ?
10. What factors led/contributed to the easiness/difficulties?
11. How would you describe the person you first met to the person they became at the end of your time with them?

Appendix E Example of a theoretical memo

September 23, 2024

Theoretical memo 4: Interlacing relations between identity, how it is constructed, and work meanings

A key process in CGT is to integrate memos and discovering explicit theoretical links between categories (see Charmaz 2014b). The key categories thus far pertain to identity anchors, refugeehood and place as concepts that define refugee-background individuals' selves. There is the insider-outsider continuum which has emerged as a navigation site for the multiple identity constructs. Evolving meanings of work (diagrammatically depicted here) appears to be linked to some, or more, identity constructs. Diagramming captures 'a concrete image of our ideas' – Charmaz 2014b. In this memo, the emergent categories are analysed to draw explicit links.

How is identity constructed?

A reflective memo written on *August 13, 2024*, about why the fundamental elements of social identity theory do not describe/explain what is happening in the data:

Social identity theories analyse the role of society in identity construction, through the concepts of role identity, group and belongingness, optimal distinctiveness, etc. The other half of the looking glass – the 'I', is equally important in identity development. Franks and Gecas (1992) make the point that Cooley's (1922) position was for identity construction to be seen as a balanced process between perceived influence of others and the individual's autonomy in deciding and selecting what influence can be exerted on the self-construction.

The problem with the looking glass self is that the reflections, or perceived reflections, may be incorrect, or create within the person a false sense of reality. For example, one participant mentions that after years of experiencing discrimination, he assumed that any White person who refused to talk to him was being discriminatory. Later in life, he experienced that this perception (of being discriminated against by every White person) he discovers the fallacy of the blanket reflection. That is not to say that the reflection is not true for most of his experiences, but the point is that the underlying assumption of the societal reflection needs to be more nuanced – not everything that gets reflected in the looking glass is real, and the individual has the autonomy to decide for self what aspects of the reflection are to be part of

his self-concept. Present time - here is the link to refugee resourcefulness memo – one aspect, nonetheless, useful in understanding identity construction process.

The looking-glass theory also assumes that communications between the individual and those whose opinions/actions are reflected in the glass are barrier free. This assumption is contentious for refugee-background individuals. Apart from verbal communication/interaction, where language can be a problem, there are non-verbal cues such as underlying cultural assumptions that punctuate interactions. This phenomenon comes to light when one explores the meanings attributed to refugee-ness. Noting that in this thesis I do not refer to the refugee identity, because the data has revealed that the 'refugee identity' is objectively constructed and exists out there. The social construction pertaining to refugee-ness emerges from the meanings participants associate with the externally constructed 'refugee'.

Following on from the social construction of 'refugee-ness', now evolved into refugeehood as a term used in this thesis, I reflect on the memo about refugeehood (a year ago) - *September 18, 2023*:

As I am re-reading the refugee interviews (trying to understand situations of dependency and victimhood), I am struck by the denial of some rights, such as access to education and medicine, and freedom to engage in paid work, that resulted from being a refugee. These rights denials took place in countries of asylum. For now, I am calling this memo 'refugee labelling', as the thought pertains to negative/unfavourable experiences in displacement, when the participants were in effect 'refugees'. It is that identity which simultaneously ensured protection, to some extent, from violence and armed conflict which instigated the displacement, and enabled exclusion from the greater society in displacement areas and prohibited engagement in spheres of life that are pertinent to 'normal living', such as working, seeking education, having access to medical care. In the resettlement context, the label carries various negative connotations, but it is imperative to understand what association with the term meant prior to resettlement.

Conceptualising refugeehood beyond labels and legal status

The concept of refugeehood extends far beyond its legal definition or institutional categorisation. Through data analysis, it becomes evident that refugeehood represents a complex interplay between externally imposed labels, relationships to place, and lived experiences characterised by precarity and affirmation or denial of basic human rights.

Refugeehood emerges not only through displacement – this is the variation in the data, a hallmark of CGT. Two distinct events showed that refugeehood can transpire in countries of

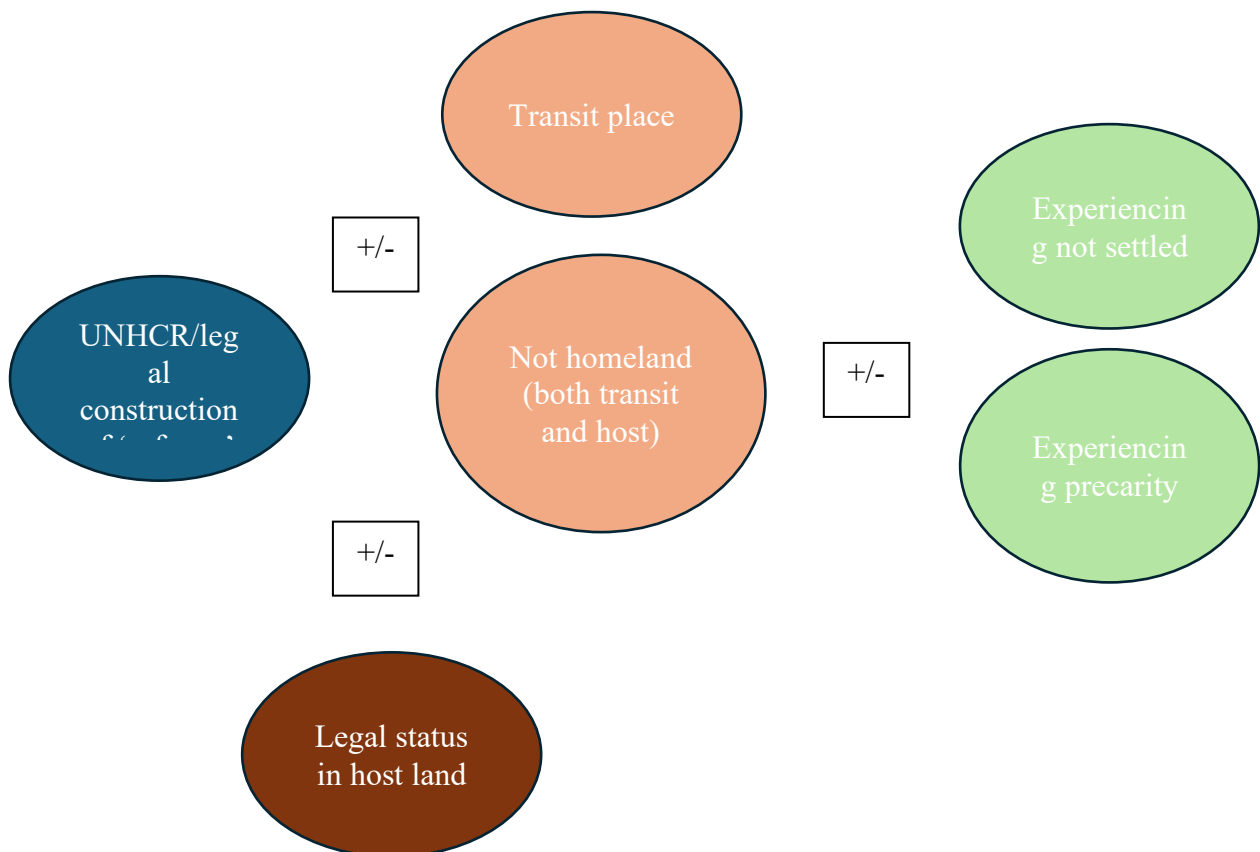
origin). In transit, participants experienced a paradoxical status: while the refugee label provided some protection from the violence they fled, it simultaneously enabled their exclusion from broader society and denied them access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This contradiction forms the core tension within refugeehood—a status that both protects and marginalises, or in the case of the variation, while in a place that is supposed to provide protection, marginalisation occurs. Thus, despite the ‘place’ where marginalisation occurs, refugeehood occurs.

Significantly, most participants actively distance themselves from the refugee identity. They view it not as an inherent part of their personhood but as a transitory status, a means to an end for gaining protection, aid, and potential resettlement, facilitated by self-positioning themselves as insiders or outsiders of that identity. During displacement, the label becomes associated with precarity and rights affirmations/denials. As one participant noted, they do not identify as refugees but see it as ‘part of their journey’. This distinction is crucial: refugeehood becomes something one experiences rather than something one is, but it remains embedded in the journey and carries on being a defining element of personhood, although not a self-defining element (imposed/ascribed by others).

The relationship between refugeehood and place identity proves particularly illuminating. The concept materialises in relation to emotions about ‘place’ - both homeland and host country. In transit locations, feelings of non-attachment contribute to experiences of precarity and unsettledness that characterise refugeehood. After resettlement, divergent paths emerge. Some participants maintain aspects of refugeehood despite legal resettlement, particularly when they continue to feel strong connections to their homeland or when they experience ongoing ‘othering’ in their new society. Conversely, others discard the refugee identity, primarily due to newfound legal status and diminished precarity, even while acknowledging that their host country is not their homeland. Those born in displacement contexts do not identify with the place they are in but the place they have never been to – COO of family/parents. Those who were born in COO identify with COO even in resettlement and also as a New Zealander, holding citizenship in this place, but do not perceive NZ as their place/land. This remains true for all participants, those who continue with refugeehood identity and those who discard it. Interestingly, it is the place identity that adds meaning to refugeehood in host-resettlement. Precisely because participants (two) do not perceive NZ to be their ‘place’. It is in their

circumstance where identity and experience blur into one prolonged human condition of being uprooted from the place called home and being reconciled to be unable to be rooted again.

Visually:



Perhaps most revealing is how community connections form among refugees—not through shared identity but through shared experiences. The displacement, unsettledness, and precarious experiences create a form of insider-ness that transcends the refugee label itself. This suggests that refugeehood operates as a social construct that individuals negotiate according to context, time, and place, rather than a fixed category they either accept or reject entirely. Here is the link to the continuum.

Identity markers

A placeholder term - identity *markers* - provide stability during the journey in all aspects of living, not just work. Does the identity change? The thesis sought answers to how identity is constructed. It would be naïve to say that all identity markers remained constant throughout the journey. Again, insider-outsider continuum is relevant. If all identity markers were plotted on that continuum, change would be visible dependent on the contexts. How then are the

identity markers a stabilising force? It is because identity markers are what participants hold on to and why they cannot fully internalise the refugeehood identity. To what extent do participants reflect on the concept of identity? It is my position as an identity researcher that is adding this lens to the data (co-construction). I am interpreting their responses through the lens of identity as I know it but also in their words and actions.

In the growing up phase, it appears that it is the interaction of the social and the individual that brings meanings of identity to life. However, it is more than the concept of social identity. The concepts of identity articulated by participants transcend beyond in and out groups. The identity markers entail the person in the interconnected web of the natural, social, and spiritual worlds around them. It goes beyond the human race to an extent. Relationships spanning multiple countries reveals that it's often networked across various places of significance: COO, countries of displacement experience, and places where family or community members have resettled. The connections aren't just nostalgic ties; they're active, meaningful relationships that shape daily life and decision-making; participants remain in touch with people on a global scale and even provide aid and support from their limited resources in NZ. This relationship-centeredness also forms the foundations for meaning of work. The self is entangled with global connections.

For those in displaced growing up context, it is their connection with the rest of the in-camp community and their parent's COO as their identity markers. This is the individual constructing their own identity in interaction with a) the social world that surrounds them (in the form of people, language, cultural practices, religious practices) and b) imaginations of a place, its customs, traditions, way of life, described by parents/family (through stories, photos). In this manner, for all displaced participants, identity markers are interlaced with refugeehood and place. Participants' concept of self being tied to lives left behind is integral to identity construction. It suggests that policies focusing solely on forward integration might be missing something fundamental about refugee wellbeing - the need to maintain continuity with past selves and relationships while building new lives. Navigating the continuum becomes prominent in this process. There is the past that remains embedded in the present and creates the platform for future selves, intertwined with refugeehood and place that are resultant from marginalisation/lack of protection in places traversed/lived in before.

Mead's temporality concept is useful in understanding this dynamic process. Some participants see themselves in the future (here is the lens on and the link to the work meanings memo) – as

a social impact worker. And this work has meaning because it corresponds with participants' identity marker of a shared humanity. Some see themselves in the part, as to what was, what has been lost and remain in the temporal spaces of place and refugeehood. Others inhabit all spaces – the past, present, future, moving fluidly (in terms of self-definitions) between time and space. This is why the continuum as a key category links to all three identity constructs of markers, place, refugeehood. The continuum is the site where identity construction takes place, dynamically, and depending on context. In the context of work, the link between identity becomes more obvious.

Meaning of work

This hand-drawn diagram captures the nexus between identity and work meanings. In terms of relation with work motives, the findings are nuanced. The journey appears to have made interconnectedness more salient in host-resettlement, for example. However, because identity is a stabilising force in an otherwise turbulent life during displacement, work pursued is driven by one or more identity markers (e.g., Alkhaled & Sasaki 2022 found that women created craft to maintain cultural ties to COO). So, while employment scholarship may state that such jobs are informal, low-paid, not proper work, for the person performing the work, it is meaningful because the returns from the work are not measured in economic or social status terms. Meaning comes from the person's identity marker. And performing such work is a way to remain connected to the past/COO.

Meaning in the data resonates with Blumer's clarification of meaning – that meaning emerges in the interactions between the self and the object (the object in this thesis being work). Key theoretical leap here – most of MoW literature suggests that meaning is found in the work being performed, it tends to be positioned as a reactive process. Now, not all MoW literature positions meaning. There is some research that shows people choose work because they feel called to (e.g., spiritual workers). But extant literature, and particularly those with refugees, suggest that meaning is found when the work role gets performed.

Meaning precedes the work performed – as the data suggests, and then it is an ongoing process during the work engagement. How does this happen?



This process begins with pre-work meanings that are influenced by identity constructs. Pre-work meanings are influenced by identity constructs, which are socially constructed as theorised thus far. Most participants found work meanings from ethnolinguistic, relationship-centered and sociocultural heritage markers, materialised as working for displaced community members, for family, and with/for co-nationals in the diagram. This is where insider-outsider continuum comes into play. Participants choose which identity marker is salient, even if it means subjecting oneself to the refugeehood identity. Motive for work when refugeehood is salient is primarily survival, with exceptions, where refugeehood enables access to much needed resources to step into work associated with other salient identity markers.

Then there is the interplay between anticipated interaction (from pre-work meanings) and the reflective self – is this work providing the meaning anticipated and is it true to my being? A critique of Blumer’s perspective on meaning-making is that due to social life being routine, meaning-making does not invoke a constant conversation with self to determine action. I argue, based on the data, that in the case of refugees, the social life is not routine. The very fabric of life is disrupted and perhaps can never be routine or normal. Thus, meaning making as per Blumer’s view is relevant in the theory of identity and work meanings being related. However,

the evolving theory suggests that meaning of work preceding the work role engagement is significant beyond what Blumer suggests. Work choices are based on pre-work meanings because of the relation with identity constructs. While Blumer suggests that the reflective self brings meaning when work is performed, the theory from my thesis reveals that the conversation with self transpires both before and after work engagement.

Meaning of work precedes the work role, in some instances making it a provisional meaning. And then is maintained or changed in relation to the conversation with self, which is guided by the identity constructs. This evolves the provisional meaning into full meaning. Meanings can be modified resulting from the interplay of anticipated interaction and reflective self. Thus, meaning of work, like identity construction, becomes a dynamic, evolving concept, as depicted in my diagram. And so, while identity is constantly transforming, so are the meanings attached to work.

Refugee experience is a form of existence that transcends the simple linear narrative of leaving one place for another that often dominates resettlement policy thinking. The idea behind refugee migration journeys being distinct is the concept of the past being deeply intertwined in the present. It suggests that refugees don't simply move on from their previous lives - those experiences, relationships, and identities remain active parts of who they are and what they continue to hold on to in the present (resettlement context). This challenges the common host society expectation that refugees should focus primarily on building new lives and connections in their resettlement country, including performing work that is not community-based. Interconnectedness is crucial here, because in resettlement, most participants' work evolves from community based to local and global communities.

It starts with one's community, and almost all participants remain intertwined in some way in working with their community, but they also extend their gaze to the interconnectedness of everyone – mainly in resettlement country but also people in other parts of the world who are not 'community' members. Community members therefore are part of interconnectedness as well as relationship centered. Understanding refugees' constructions of meanings of work requires what anthropologists sometimes call thick understanding - grasping not just what is being said, but the whole web of meaning, experience, and context that makes those words significant. For example, when a refugee speaks about wanting to work with their community, they're not just talking about a preference for their community over and above the host's - they

might be speaking from experiences of isolation in camps, the crucial role of community support in survival, or the deep psychological comfort of being understood without explanation.

How does this happen? Through a dynamic process where meaning of work precedes the work role.